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**[CS - Adding dvar torah just received:**

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**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**

**When Minhag and Din Clash**

The Rambam describes that the korban Pesach must be broiled in order to remove the blood which is found in the animal's capillaries. Additionally, the larger arteries and veins must be removed before the korban is broiled, to avoid the blood they contain being absorbed into the flesh and rendering it treif. After the korban is broiled, the gid hanosheh, which may not be eaten, is removed. The Raavad, in his satirical style, writes, "if I would be in the Beis Hamikdash when this man (the Rambam) brought his korban, I would throw it on the floor and tell him that he is not permitted to eat it because the gid hanosheh makes all of the flesh of the korban treif." Rav Yosef Caro (in his commentary Kesef Mishneh) comes to the defense of the Rambam and explains his position, as follows: the accepted view in the Gemorah (Chulin 99) is that the gid hanosheh does not have enough taste to make the rest of the korban treif. Normally we would certainly recommend removing the gid hanosheh before cooking or broiling meat with it; but in the case of the korban Pesach there is a special din that one is supposed to broil the entire animal intact and slice it up after the broiling. Since b'dieved the gid ha'nosheh does not make other food treif, we leave it in when we broil the korban Pesach in order to fulfill the mitzvah of broiling the korban when the entire animal intact. Regarding the veins and the arteries, however, we have no choice but to remove them, since having them in place when the korban is broiled would render the entire korban treif.

Rav Yosef Caro raises an objection to this defense. The gemorah tells us that although the fat which is on top of the gid hanosheh is biblically permitted, "the holy Jewish people have the practice of not eating it". As such, one cannot say that the fats on top of the gid hanosheh don't have any flavor, and therefore if one broils the entire korban Pesach when it is all intact the flavor of these fats will spread into the flesh and everything will become treif. Rav Yosef Caro himself responds that from the gemorah it would appear the even the fat on top of the gid hanosheh is permissible not only biblically but even m'dirabbonon, and the practice of not eating this fat is only a minhag. In this halacha the Rambam is teaching us that whenever there is a conflict between a real din and a minhag, we must observe the real din. Therefore, once a year on seder night, all the Jews in Jerusalem would be violating the minhag of not eating the shuman ha'gid because removing this fat would be a violation of the din of broiling the korban Pesach when it is all intact.

Rav Yisroel Gustman was a great goan who survived the Nazi Holocaust. At the end of his sefer on Kiddushin, which is full of chiddushim on the gemorah, he included a teshuva halacha l'maaseh on a contemporary issue, the thrust of which is that, as Rav Yosef Caro pointed out, whenever a minhag is in conflict with the real halacha, the halacha certainly takes precedence.]

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

to: ravfrand@torah.org

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**Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**Parshas Bo**

**Parents & Grandparents Brought Back to Witness the Results of Even Their Intentions**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1322 Chodesh Issues: Women and Kiddush Levana; Getting Married in Last Half of Chodesh? Good Shabbos!

At the beginning of Parshas Bo, Moshe and Aharon tell Pharaoh "...For if you refuse to send forth My people, behold, tomorrow I shall bring arbeh (a locust swarm) into your border. It will cover the eye of the land so that he will not be able to see the land; and it will consume the remaining residue that was left to you by the hail, and it will consume all the trees that grow for you from the field. They will fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all Egypt, such as your fathers and your grandfathers have not seen from the day they came onto the earth until this day." (Shemos 10:4-6).

The Sefas Emes derives an inference from this last pasuk: The pasuk says that the parents and grandparents of the Egyptians never saw such a plague of locust until this day. The Sefas Emes says that the Ribono shel Olam brought back their parents and grandparents who already died, in order that they should be able to witness the plague of arbeh. They never saw such a locust plague until this day, but today they did see such a plague!

We thus have an instance of techiyas hameisim (resurrection of the dead), not for tzadikim (righteous people), but for resha'im (wicked people), in order that they witness this terrible plague that befell their children and grandchildren. The Sefas Emes further references an oft-quoted passage from the Zohar in Parshas Pinchas which states that when a person makes a simcha (e.g. – a chassanah, a bar mitzvah, etc.), the neshamos (souls) of the parents and grandparents who are no longer in this world, come, in some sense, to the simcha to witness and 'participate in' the joyous family occasion.

The Sefas Emes makes the interesting observation: The Ribono shel Olam takes the neshamos of the parents and grandparents of Yiden from Gan Eden and brings them to the simcha so that they should be able to witness the joyous event of their descendants. On the other hand, the Ribono shel Olam took the resha'im – the parents and grandparents of the Egyptians, who also made Klal Yisrael suffer so much, not in order that they should see and enjoy the simcha of their children and grandchildren, but so that they should see and 'participate in' the suffering of their children and grandchildren.

The Sefas Emes explains "how this works": Regarding Klal Yisrael, the Almighty is "metzaref machshava tova l'maaseh." (Hashem links our good intentions with actions.) He considers a good thought as having been consummated, even though in reality, it was never accomplished. However, with the goyim, Hashem is "metzaref" their "machshava ra'ah l'maaseh". He holds them responsible for having acted wickedly, even for their evil plans that were never executed.

The Sefas Emes says: When a person makes a chassanah and he takes his children down to the chuppah k'das Moshe v'Yisroel (according to Jewish law and custom) and the parents are good and the children are good – part of the credit is due to the 'machshavos tovos' (good thoughts) that the parents and the grandparents invested into their children. The Ribono shel Olam says "They have a part in this chassanah. The reason this next generation is able to bring their dear children down to the chuppah is because of all of the 'machshavos tovos' that the parents and grandparents implanted in their children. Even if those thoughts and aspirations were not all fully fulfilled, the "machshava tova" was there, HaKadosh Baruch Hu joins a "machshava tova" to action even if the action was never fully consummated.

The reverse is true regarding the goyim. The Egyptians and their ancestors were all part of this evil plot to destroy Klal Yisrael. Their "machshava ra'ah" (evil thought) was a cause of this suffering. The Ribono shel Olam says: You caused this to happen? You implanted these wicked tendencies in your children? You are going to see the "nachas" of them suffering from the arbeh.

**File This Away For Your Next Seder**

I saw the following thought in Rav Avraham Buxbaum's sefer. This is a beautiful insight and something to remember for the Pesach Seder. In describing the instructions given to Bnei Yisrael to be carried out during their last night in Mitzrayim, the pasuk says: "You shall take a bundle of hyssop and dip it into the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel

and the two doorposts with some of the blood that is in the basin, and as for you, you shall not leave the entrance of the house until morning.” (Shemos 12:22). No one was allowed to leave their house the entire night, not until the next morning.

Our Seder is basically a reenactment of Yetzias Mitzrayim. We try to do everything like they did the night before they left Mitzrayim. However, there is one anomaly. We do one thing at our Seder that was not done at that first Seder! When we say the paragraph “Sh’foch chamoscha...” (Pour out your wrath upon the nations who did not know you), we open the door.

Why do we open the door if we are trying to re-enact the first Pesach Seder? We should say “Don’t open the door! Keep that door closed. Nobody leaves here until morning!”

Rav Buxbaum says that we know from many different sources that Klal Yisrael was not worthy of leaving Mitzraim based on their own zechus (merit). “These people worship Avodah Zarah and these people worship Avodah Zarah!” The reason the Ribono shel Olam brought about Yetzias Mitzrayim was in the zechus of the Avos and in the zechus of Moshe and Aharon – but not in the zechus of the Jewish masses.

The Zohar writes that when Lot and his family were saved from the city of S’dom, they were warned: “Don’t look back!” The reason they were not permitted to look back is because when the midas hadin (attribute of judgement) is rampant, only people who are righteous and are therefore “zoche ba’din” (merit salvation based on judgment) are saved. However, even though Lot was the best of the people of S’dom, Chazal say that he was guilty of many of the same moral shortcomings as the other inhabitants of S’dom. The Angels warned him not to look back because if he would look back, he would be caught up in the decree of judgment along with everyone else. In fact, the Zohar lists three times in Chumash when people were not supposed to look because they were not zoche ba’din: (1) Noach in the teivah was told to not look out; (2) Lot could not look back at the destruction of S’dom, and (3) the Jews in Mitzrayim could not go out during the night of Makas Bechoros (the Plague of the First-Born Sons). Klal Yisrael were not permitted to go out that night because they too lacked the personal zechus to escape that decree. The midas hadin ruled in Mitzrayim that night and undeserving Jewish firstborns could have been killed as well had they “looked.”

A person who is not worthy of a miracle or salvation should not look. The reason why we open the door during our Seder is in the hope that, G-d Willing, we will be zoche to salvation ba’din during the future geulah (redemption)! Therefore, when we conduct our Seder, we anticipate being zoche to personally witness the Divine wrath poured out upon the goyim. The Sefas Emes in fact says that in the pasuk “And you shall not go out from the doorway of your homes ad boker” (until morning), the term ad boker is an allusion to the future redemption, when we will hopefully be fully zoche to witness that salvation.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com  
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD [dhoffman@torah.org](mailto:dhoffman@torah.org) This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail [tapes@yadyechiel.org](mailto:tapes@yadyechiel.org) or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/learn@torah.org> (410) 602-1350]

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## Home Weekly Parsha BO

### Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog

The great moment of freedom and redemption has finally arrived. The faith of the people of Israel in Moshe and Aharon has been vindicated. The Lord’s plagues have finally brought down the arrogance and stubbornness of Pharaoh. If this was an old-fashioned movie script, we would write “and then they lived happily after.”

But we are all aware that this parsha only represents the beginning of a long and arduous story plot that has yet to reach its eventual happy

conclusion. The new situation of freedom from actual physical slavery, as heady and triumphant as it is, presents only new challenges.

Life itself resembles a series of doors. Upon successfully opening one door, it is discovered that there are now different doors – even a series of doors - behind the original one. The challenges of being a free person are, to a great extent, even more challenging than those of being locked into servitude.

We are witness to the Torah’s recording of forty years in the desert until there arises a generation of Jews that is able to meet the challenge of establishing itself as a functioning national entity in its promised land of Israel. The word “bo” which serves as the headline of this week’s parsha indicates “coming” – a beginning - not a sense of finality and end.

The Torah wishes to indicate to us that “the arrows are always yet ahead of us” to find and deal with. And there are many miracles involved in being freed from slavery but the road from there to true independence and accomplishment requires hard work, human persistence and unflagging spirit and high morale. In our world of changing eras and bewildering uncertainties we can only reflect upon the enormous challenges facing us. The Diaspora, as Jewry knew it to be for many centuries on end, is no longer. The tremendous accomplishment of the creation of the State of Israel and its sustenance is behind us.

This process was fraught with many plagues and concurrent miracles. The faith of Israel has sustained us through these times of ordeal and difficulties. But now there are new and perhaps even more difficult challenges that face us. The task of nation-building is a long and arduous one, not given to easy solutions and pat sloganeering. It is measured not in years but in decades - if not even in centuries. It requires faith and tenacity and a long view of things. That is what God meant when he told Moshe at the beginning of the redemption process that Israel would accept the Torah at Sinai and that He would eventually bring them to the land that he promised to their forefathers. Why bother Moshe with those promises when the people are under the lash of slavery?

But God informs Moshe that freedom from slavery is only the beginning of the story, not its culmination. Our modern story of Israel does not end in 1948 or 1967. The realization of this stark truth can fire us to greater understanding and firmer belief and behavior in the justice of our cause and its eventual triumph.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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## The Necessity of Asking Questions

### Bo

#### Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

It is no accident that Parshat Bo, the section that deals with the culminating plagues and the Exodus, should turn three times to the subject of children and the duty of parents to educate them.

As Jews we believe that to defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilisation you need education. Freedom is lost when it is taken for granted. Unless parents hand on their memories and ideals to the next generation – the story of how they won their freedom and the battles they had to fight along the way – the long journey falters and we lose our way.

What is fascinating, though, is the way the Torah emphasises the fact that children must ask questions. Two of the three passages in our Parsha speak of this:

And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians.’

Ex. 12:26-27

In days to come, when your child asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’

Ex. 13:14

There is another passage later in the Torah that also speaks of a question asked by a child:

In the future, when your child asks you, “What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?” tell him: “We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Deut. 6:20-21

The other passage in today’s Parsha, the only one that does not mention a question, is:

On that day tell your child, ‘I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’

Ex. 13:8

These four passages have become famous because of their appearance in the Haggadah on Pesach. They are the four children: one wise, one wicked or rebellious, one simple and “one who does not know how to ask.” Reading them together, the Sages came to the conclusion that [1] children should ask questions, [2] the Pesach narrative must be constructed in response to, and begin with, questions asked by a child, [3] it is the duty of a parent to encourage his or her children to ask questions, and the child who does not yet know how to ask should be taught to ask.

There is nothing natural about this at all. To the contrary, it goes dramatically against the grain of history. Most traditional cultures see it as the task of a parent or teacher to instruct, guide or command. The task of the child is to obey. “Children should be seen, not heard,” goes the old English proverb. “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord,” says a famous Christian text. Socrates, who spent his life teaching people to ask questions, was condemned by the citizens of Athens for corrupting the young. In Judaism, the opposite is the case. It is a religious duty to teach our children to ask questions. That is how they grow.

Judaism is the rarest of phenomena: a faith based on asking questions, sometimes deep and difficult ones that seem to shake the very foundations of faith itself. “Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?” asked Abraham. “Why, Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people?” asked Moses. “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?” asked Jeremiah. The book of Job is largely constructed out of questions, and God’s answer consists of four chapters of yet deeper questions: “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? ... Can you catch Leviathan with a hook? ... Will it make an agreement with you and let you take it as your slave for life?”

In yeshiva, the highest accolade is to ask a good question: Du fregst a gutte kashe. Rabbi Abraham Twersky, a deeply religious psychiatrist, tells of how when he was young, his teacher would relish challenges to his arguments. In his broken English, he would say, “You right! You 100 Prozent right! Now I show you where you wrong.”

Isadore Rabi, winner of a Nobel Prize in physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied, “My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, ‘What did you learn today?’ But my mother used to ask: ‘Izzy, did you ask a good question today?’ That made the difference. Asking good questions made me a scientist.”

Judaism is not a religion of blind obedience. Indeed, astonishingly in a religion of 613 commandments, there is no Hebrew word that means “to obey”. When Hebrew was revived as a living language in the nineteenth century, and there was need for a verb meaning “to obey,” it had to be borrowed from the Aramaic: le-tsayet. Instead of a word meaning “to obey,” the Torah uses the verb shema, untranslatable into English because it means [1] to listen, [2] to hear, [3] to understand, [4] to internalise, and [5] to respond. Written into the very structure of Hebraic consciousness is the idea that our highest duty is to seek to understand the will of God, not just to obey blindly.

Tennyson’s verse, “Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do or die,” is as far from a Jewish mindset as it is possible to be. Why? Because we believe that intelligence is God’s greatest gift to humanity. Rashi understands the phrase that God made man “in His image, after His likeness,” to mean that God gave us the ability “to understand and discern.” The very first of our requests in the weekday Amidah is for

“knowledge, understanding, and discernment.” One of the most breathtakingly bold of the rabbis’ institutions was to coin a blessing to be said on seeing a great non-Jewish scholar. Not only did they see wisdom in cultures other than their own, they thanked God for it. How far this is from the narrow-mindedness that has so often demeaned and diminished religions, past and present.

The historian Paul Johnson once wrote that rabbinic Judaism was “an ancient and highly efficient social machine for the production of intellectuals.” Much of that had, and still has, to do with the absolute priority Jews have always placed on education, schools, the Beit Midrash, religious study as an act even higher than prayer, learning as a life-long engagement, and teaching as the highest vocation of the religious life.

But much, too, has to do with how one studies and how we teach our children. The Torah indicates this at the most powerful and poignant juncture in Jewish history: just as the Israelites are about to leave Egypt and begin their life as a free people under the sovereignty of God. Hand on the memory of this moment to your children, says Moses. But do not do so in an authoritarian way. Encourage your children to ask, question, probe, investigate, analyse, explore. Liberty means freedom of the mind, not just of the body. Those who are confident of their faith need fear no question. It is only those who lack confidence, who have secret and suppressed doubts, who are afraid.

The one essential, though, is to know and to teach this to our children, that not every question has an answer we can immediately understand. There are ideas we will only fully comprehend through age and experience, others that take great intellectual preparation, yet others that may be beyond our collective comprehension at this stage of the human quest. Darwin never knew what a gene was. Even the great Newton, founder of modern science, understood how little he understood, and put it beautifully: “I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”

In teaching its children to ask and keep asking, Judaism honoured what Maimonides called the “active intellect” and saw it as the gift of God. No faith has honoured human intelligence more.

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### **Parshat Bo: The Message of the Moon**

#### **Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone**

“God said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt: This month shall be unto you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year to you.” (Exodus 12:1–2)

The sanctification of the new moon, the first commandment which the Jews receive as a people, should not be seen as a commandment which just happens to be the first. Nothing in the Torah just happens to be. The firstborn commandment of God’s firstborn people inevitably reveals basic truths about the Jewish psyche. The more we examine the nature of this commandment, the more we understand who the Jews are as a people.

According to the Midrash, this commandment is so important that God himself guides Moses’ gaze across the sky to familiarize him with the different phases of the moon so that he can recognize exactly what the moon should look like when it is to be sanctified.

Halakhically, we can see the significance of this commandment because, prior to Hillel the Elder’s fixing of the calendar for all subsequent generations in the third century of the Common Era, the new moon was established on the basis of witnesses’ testimony in court. The halakha even allowed these witnesses to desecrate Shabbat if necessary in order to get to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem without wasting one minute. When their testimony was finally accepted after rigorous examination, the Sanhedrin declared: “The month is sanctified, the month is sanctified.”

Even today, when first-hand testimony of the sighting of the moon has not been required for many centuries, the Sabbath before a new month takes on a special character and is known as Shabbat Mevarkhim, the

Sabbath of the blessing of the new moon. A special prayer requesting a month of life, peace and sundry blessings (composed by the first-generation Amora Rav and found in Berakhot 16b) is chanted by a respected member of the congregation, and the time of the moon's exact appearance to a fraction of a second is announced.

The day before the new moon appears, when the sky is pitch black, is called "Yom Kippur Katan," and is maintained by the very pious as a fast day. The first day of the month (or the last day of the previous month and the first day of the new month, if the previous month has thirty days) is a minor festival called Rosh Chodesh. On this day (or these days), half of Hallel is chanted during the morning service and the special prayer Ya'ale VeYavo is added during the Amida and in the Grace after Meals. There is an additional scriptural reading, just as on any festival, and we recite the additional Musaf prayer, a reminder of the extra sacrifice in the Temple. General custom dictates that women are freed from certain domestic tasks, and fasting and eulogizing are forbidden.

During the first half of the new month, generally on Saturday night after Shabbat, and preferably between the third and eleventh day of the month, the congregation leaves the synagogue, stands outside gazing up at the new moon, and recites the Kiddush Levana (the prayer for the sanctification of the moon). If the clouds are thick, the special prayers to be recited are delayed until the first clear night on the closest Saturday night. One New York-based Hassidic group (Bobov) rents a helicopter for the Rebbe and his most respected aides to make sure that they will actually see the moon and recite the appropriate prayers. In most cities in the Diaspora, neighbors and passers-by are mystified by these Jews gathered together in prayer, singing and dancing as they look up at the moon.

Why this fascination with the moon?

In the portion of Bo, as in a number of adjacent portions, the Jews find themselves in Egypt, a land where the calendar followed the sun. The Maharal of Prague points out that when the Jews were given this first commandment, they were actually given more than just a law telling them to start counting months according to lunar cycles; they were given a whole new way of life that would stand in sharp contrast to that of the Egyptians.

The sun is symbolic of constancy and power – the very image of Egypt. Discounting dark clouds (not too many in Egypt), every day the sun's warmth and light reaches someone in the world – 365 days a year we trust the sun to rise and set. "There is nothing new under the sun," writes the author of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes), because the sun is a symbol of constancy. The sun sees and oversees everything in an unchanging fashion. Under the moon there is something new at least twelve times a year. The moon is forever changing, going through its phases, getting smaller and smaller and then, when it seems to have disappeared completely, there is a sudden turnaround and rebirth in the heavens. To the ancient imagination, the permutation of the moon in its twenty-eight-day journey was a constant source of speculation, wonder and mystery – and a ray of optimistic faith that from the depths of darkness and disappearance will re-emerge light and rebirth.

The Zohar compares the Jewish people to the moon because both the moon and the people of Israel go through phases, disappearing little by little until it seems that it is the end, but nevertheless, stubbornly insisting upon being born again. After each Temple destruction, even after a centuries-long exile climaxing in Europe's death factories – a new moon is suddenly sighted and the messengers run to Jerusalem.

The repetition of a monthly cycle – this law of change and rebirth – firmly established within the Jewish psyche the constant quest for renewal. Our sanctity as a nation is tied to our potential for national renewal. Our history attests to the phenomenon that when a Jewish civilization in one part of the world finds itself facing destruction, almost simultaneously a new culture emerges to replace it. The year 1492, for example, signaled the destruction of Spanish Jewry as well as the birth of an American haven.

The commandment of sanctifying the new moon is given when it is clear that Pharaoh himself, master under the Egyptian sun, will not change.

After nine terrifying plagues, we might expect him to have a change of heart, but the leader of Egypt does not – cannot – relent. Despite all that he has witnessed, he refuses to let the Jews go.

All of the nay-sayers were certain that the Egyptian social hierarchy would never change. The Israelites were doomed to remain slaves in Egypt forever.

The message of this first commandment is that in contrast to the Egyptians, the Jews can and do change, emerging again and again as survivors from the fangs of evil. World society, individual nations and specific people can and will change, often for the better. "Chodesh" is the Hebrew word for month, "chadash" is the Hebrew word for new, and "chidush" is the Hebrew word for a brilliant, novel insight or invention as well as the word for renewal. Our optimistic scanning of the black-blue skies for the first sliver of the new moon is our testimony to the possibility of growth, change and development, and we must learn to sanctify that change. In the immortal words of Rabbi A.Y. Kook, the old must experience renewal, and the new must be sanctified (ha-yashan yitchadesh, ve-hachadash yitkadash).

There is yet another significance to our fascination with the moon. The most fundamental human sin – jealousy – is reflected in the phases ("imperfection") of the moon. Initially, records the Midrash, the moon and the sun were to have been equal in size, co-rulers over the hosts of heaven and earth. After all, the Bible records: "And the Lord made two great lights..." (Gen. 1:16). It is only in the continuation of the verse that we read: "the greater light to rule by day and the lesser light to rule by night" (ibid). What happened? Rashi explains:

"[The lights] were created equal in size, but the moon was lessened when it complained, saying that it was impossible for two rulers to share one crown." (Rashi ad loc.)

The moon expected God to remove some of the glory of the sun, but as punishment for greed and envy, it was the moon who had to suffer imperfection. It is this jealousy and greed, perhaps built into the very fabric of human nature, which caused Cain to kill Abel, the brothers to sell Joseph. Similarly, the Second Temple was destroyed due to baseless hatred (sinat hinam) The new moon, with its promise of wholeness and perfection, symbolizes our faith that we will overcome jealousy and envy, that humanity will redeem itself and that messianic peace is within reach. Our prayers during the ceremony of the sanctification of the new moon are for the moon to become free of her imperfection and for David – King of Israel, Messiah and redeemer. Our greeting to one another in the midst of these prayers is Shalom Aleikhem – peace and wholeness. Kiddush Levana closes with these words:

"May it be Your will...to readjust the deficiency of the moon so that it may no longer be reduced in size. May the light of the moon be again as the light of the sun, as it was during the first seven days of creation, before it was reduced..."

This prayer brings us full circle. Ultimately, when redemption finally arrives, the moon will return to its former glory and jealousy will no longer exist – neither between the lights in the sky nor between the lights down on earth, the human lights. Redemption will only happen when we humans join God in helping to make it happen – by sanctifying the moon, by sanctifying life, by sanctifying ourselves. The sanctification of the new moon is the first commandment: Our dream of renewal and redemption is our highest priority.

Postscript

Maimonides brings his crowning proof for Jewish faithful optimism in a more glorious future of world peace and harmony in defining the commandment to mark the new moon at the beginning of each month (Book of Commandments, Positive Commandment 153). He reminds us that our calendar was established by Hillel and that we could not maintain it today were the rabbis of our generation not considered the agents of that generation in Israel, which initially intercalated the months.

In addition, if a time ever came when there would cease to be a Jewish community in the Land of Israel or a religious court there, the agency could not be effective, because Torah (and therefore the calendar) can only come forth from Zion! But God would never allow such a

possibility, since the Almighty guaranteed that “the Jewish community in Israel will never be erased...” (ibid.). Maimonides is telling us that built into our Hebrew calendar is the unshakeable belief that there will eternally be a Jewish community and a Jewish religious court in the Land of Israel!

Remember that Maimonides expressed such an awesome and stirring faith despite the fact that he was chased from pillar to post in his lifetime by the marauding Moslem Almohads, and he lived at the time of the European Christian Crusades. It is especially significant that Maimonides expresses his eternal faith in the command to mark the new moon. And what more reason have we to be optimistic about the Jewish future, since our generation has witnessed the miraculous return to Jewish national sovereignty in Israel after almost two thousand years of exile!

May the Merciful Lord lead us to our land and enable us to walk on our land proudly and uprightly.

Shabbat Shalom

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### Parsha Insights

**By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner**

Parshas Bo

The Perfect Day

This week we read the parsha of Bo, containing the final three plagues followed by Bnei Yisroel’s {the Children of Israel’s} exodus from Mitzrayim {Egypt}.

“And it was in the midst of this day, Hashem took Bnei Yisroel out of the land of Mitzrayim... And Moshe said to the nation: Remember this day that you left Mitzrayim, from the house of bondage... On this day you are going out, in the month of the Aviv (spring). [12:51,13:3-4]”

Rashi explains by bringing the Medrash. “Didn’t they know in which month they left Mitzrayim? Rather Moshe was telling them to focus on the kindness that Hashem had showed them by choosing a good month for taking them out—not too hot, not too cold, no rains.”

What is the significance of Moshe specifying that on this day you are going out?

The S’forno writes that on that particular year, the lunar month during which they left Mitzrayim came out in the springtime. Moshe was telling them to guard and maintain the character of that day. Make the necessary leap years to ensure that this lunar month will always come out in the spring.

The Jewish year is counted according to the lunar months. With each month consisting of a touch more than twenty-nine and a half days, the twelve-month year comes out to approximately three hundred and fifty four days. The solar year consists of three hundred and sixty five days. As such, the lunar month runs at an annual eleven-day deficit. It is interesting to note that the Moslems, who also go according to the lunar year, don’t compensate for these eleven days. As a result, their holidays gradually work their way through the different seasons, falling eleven days earlier (according to the solar cycle) each year.

As we learned in the passuk {verse} above, we are commanded to adjust our calendar, keeping it synchronized with the solar year, thereby ensuring that each holiday will always fall out in the same season. This is done in the following manner: Every nineteen years, the lunar year would fall behind two hundred and nine days (nineteen [years] x eleven [days] = two hundred and nine). Therefore, within every nineteen-year cycle we have seven leap years. A Jewish leap year has an additional thirty-day month. Seven out of every nineteen years we have thirteen instead of twelve months in the year. That keeps us even with the solar year and its seasons. (These seven years x thirty days actually makes up two hundred and ten days. That extra day is accounted for by the fact that neither the lunar nor the solar years are perfectly even numbers.)

What is the underlying concept making it so crucial to maintain the holidays in their proper seasons?

Rav Eli Meir Bloch zt”l explained that there is a common misconception. People often think that after the world had been arranged with different seasons—planting, growing, ripening, harvesting, gathering—the holidays then fell out in the properly corresponding time.

Pesach, {Passover} the holiday of freedom, fell out in the spring. Shavuot, the holiday of the Torah being given, fell out in harvest time.

The truth, however, is actually very different. In the highest spiritual realms, there is a ‘time’ that is particularly suited and conducive for freedom. This is called Aviv. It is a time of renewal and birth. A time suited for a fresh start that will enable growth and development toward a far loftier aspiration. Freedom was not an end in and of itself but rather served as a means. It served to plant seeds for the nation. The fruits, born from those seeds, were only harvested seven weeks later when we stood at the foot of Sinai and received the Torah.

Being that there was this Divine Will of Aviv, this concept pierced its way down through the spiritual worlds, ultimately manifesting itself in our coarse, physical world as the season that we call spring. A time of planting, a time of things only beginning to develop and ripen. But the source and purpose behind this season is the freedom that it manifests.

The cold, barren inactivity of winter is a reflection of the spiritual freeze we were subjected to during the enslavement. The Aviv broke through the cold with the warming rays of the sun and the delicate seedlings peeking their heads out from the thawing earth. That physical manifestation of Aviv heralded the arrival of the Divinely designated time for freedom. We left Mitzrayim but immediately began counting the days toward Sinai. The harvest time, reflecting the Divinely designated time of generous bounty-giving, is the course exterior containing within the most precious bounty ever presented to mankind—the Torah.

“On this day you are going out, in the month of the Aviv. [13:4]” Maintain that day. Maintain the totality of the opportunity and the experience. Use it to the maximum every year.

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

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### Drasha

**By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

Parshas Bo

Oy Vey!

“Don’t get mad,” said the philosophers of the eighties, “get even.”

I am not sure if the objective of the ten plagues was for the Almighty to get even with the nation that had enslaved His people. Certainly there are Midrashic sources that correlate the ten plagues as direct punishment for Egyptian crimes against the Jewish people. (Tana D’bei Eliyahu Chapter 7) So perhaps we might say that the Jewish people got even.

There is, however, no scriptural reference to the fact that they got mad. In fact, each time Moshe went to Pharaoh a serene and calculated negotiation occurred. “Let My people serve Me,” Moshe commanded. When Pharaoh refused his obstinence was met with a clear and calculated threat. “If you refuse to allow the people to leave, I will send the following plague in you land.” And so it went. Sometimes a plague immediately followed a warning, other times plagues came with no warning at all. When Pharaoh found Moshe and arranged for a cessation of the scourge, Pharaoh reneged on his commitment soon after. Moshe became frustrated, perhaps he even became impatient, but there was no anger until the final plague. Then, he not only got even, he got mad.

Moshe warned Pharaoh with the words of Hashem, “At about midnight, I will go out in the midst of Egypt and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die.” (Exodus 11:4) Though Moshe detailed the ramifications of the plague he was greeted with an apathetic response.

Finally the Torah tells us, that “Moshe left Pharaoh in burning anger” (Exodus 11:8) Why, only then did Moshe storm out in a rage? Was he not accustomed to the callous recklessness of the Egyptian leader? What irked him during the last encounter more than any of the previous ones?

The great physicist Albert Einstein escaped the Nazi inferno to find a haven in the United States. During World War II his letter to President Roosevelt initiated the effort that spurred the creation of the atomic bomb. His theory of relativity was a prime factor in its development, and Einstein knew the destructive power that his ideas could potentially release. When Einstein heard in an August 6, 1945, radio broadcast that an atomic device was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, he reacted with

stunned silence. After a moment of somber reflection he only found two words to say. “Oy vey!”

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (d.1994) explains that Moshe had patience with Pharaoh up to a point. Throughout the ordeal, the reckless king’s obstinate decisions caused a great amount of discomfort to his people. Even when his advisors pleaded, “How long will this man [Moshe] be an obstacle, let them [the Jews] serve their G-d,” Pharaoh refused. His recalcitrance brought plagues of pestilence, boils, locust, and darkness — in addition to blood, frogs, and lice. All of these afflictions were vastly uncomfortable — but not fatal. Even the fiery hail did not harm the G-d-fearing Egyptians that sought shelter.

The last, the Plague of the First Born, had the most devastating ramifications. It meant the deaths of thousands of Egyptians “from the firstborn son of Pharaoh to those of the maidservant who was behind the millstone.” It was devastation so powerful that the Torah says that “such has never been and will never be again.” (Exodus 11:6) Pharaoh was able to stop the imminent destruction with one simple word — “Go.” Yet he chose to remain steadfast in his denial, bringing the downfall of his people and the death of innocents. And that callous and reckless behavior infuriated Moshe, whose compassion for the simplest of beings earned him the right to be the leader of the Jewish nation. The stark contrast displayed by his nemesis appalled him to the point of rage. The Torah commands us, “do not to hate the Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land.” (Deuteronomy 23:8) The Torah’s attitude toward a nation that held us captive is even more compassionate than that of its own leaders. Barbaric leaders egging on many simple people throughout the world, to act in a self-destructive manner are reminiscent of the Pharaoh who destroyed his own family to save his ego. It’s enough to make anybody — even the most humble man who ever lived — very angry.

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### Depressing Time, Productive Time, and Redemptive Time Is Time a Storm in Which We Are All Lost?

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Always Late

Sarah was always late to work no matter how much she tried to be on time, or how many times her boss scolded her. She just could not wake up on time. Her boss said she would fire her if it did not stop. Sarah decided to seek the advice of her doctor. He prescribed her some medication and told her to take one pill before going to sleep, so she can fall asleep immediately and rise early. She did just that and she woke up before dawn and headed into work feeling well-rested. Sarah told her boss about the doctor’s prescription and how well it worked.

Her boss said, “That is great, Sarah, but where were you yesterday?”

Choosing the World & the Jews

It is a strange Midrash, found in this week’s Torah portion, Bo. At the surface, it seems baffling, but upon deeper reflection, it contains an extraordinary meditation on how we live our lives and manage our time.

The Jewish calendar has twelve lunar months. The first day of each month is known as Rosh Chodesh (the head of the month); the first day of the year (the first day of the first month of the year) is known as Rosh Hashanah (the head of the year.)

Says the Midrash:[1]

שמות רבה טו, יא: דָּבַר אַחַר, הַחֲדָשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם. הַזֶּה הוּא דְקַתִּיב (תהלים לג, יב) אֲשֶׁרִי גִבּוֹר אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מִשְׁבֵּת הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ, קָבַע בּוֹ רִאשִׁי הַחֲדָשִׁים וְהַשָּׁנִים, וּכְשֶׁבֶת בִּינְעֻקֵב וּבְנָיו קָבַע בּוֹ רִאשׁ הַחֲדָשִׁים שֶׁל גְּאֻלָּה.

When G-d chose His world, He established ‘heads of months’ and ‘heads of years.’ When G-d chose Jacob and his children, the Jewish people, He established the ‘head of the month of redemption’ (the first day of the month of Nissan, the month of the Exodus).

What does this Midrash mean? What does it mean “when G-d chose His world?” Why does the Midrash not say, “when G-d created His world?”

And what does choosing a world have to do with the establishment of the head of a month and the heads of a year? And what does the Midrash mean when it says that “when G-d chose Jacob and his children, He established the Head of the month of redemption?”

Delineating time into months and years is based on the astronomical lunar and solar orbits. The moon completes its orbit after one month. The sun completes its orbit after a year. What does any of this have to do with G-d “choosing His world,” or “choosing Jacob and his children?”

An Address to High School Girls

On January 16, 1964 (2 Shevat, 5724), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) addressed a group of teenage girls, the graduating class of a New York Jewish girls’ high school, Beth Rivkah.[2] He offered them a most marvelous insight into this Midrash. This profound perspective can teach us volumes about how to view a one-liner in Midrash, and how to speak to the hearts of teenage girls.

(The following Shabbos 10 Shevat, Feb. 8, marks the 75th anniversary of the passing of the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (1880-1950), who passed away on Shabbos morning, Parshas Bo, 10 Shevat, 5710, January 28, 1950. On the same day, one year later, the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe succeeded his father-in-law as the leader of Chabad-Lubavitch. The following insight is characteristic of the profundity and richness of the Rebbe’s Torah insights and perspectives.)

Three Types of Time

Aristotle said that time was the greatest teacher who killed all his students. There is no “teacher” like time. What we learn through time and aging is unparalleled by any class or teacher. The experience of life is the greatest teacher. The saying goes: When a man with money meets a man with experience, the man with experience ends up with the money; the man with the money ends up with an experience.

And yet the clock stops for nobody. “Suspect each moment, for it is a thief, tiptoeing away with more than it brings,” John Updike said. You may be sleeping, sipping a coffee, surfing the web, or getting angry at your boss or your spouse, the clock is ticking away. How do we deal with the merciless reality of time?

There are three ways, suggests the Midrash. There are three experiences of time: depressing time, meaningful time, and redemptive time. You choose in which time-zone you will breathe.

Depressing Time

For some, time is just an endless flow, a shapeless blob, a random stream that never ceases. A day comes and a day goes, and then another day comes and goes. Each day is the same as the day before, and they all add up to nothing.

Sometimes you watch people who allow their days and years to pass without goals. Every day is an invitation to squander yet another 24 hours until it too will bite the dust. If the boredom gets to you, you find ways to escape and dull the void.

This is an empty time: time devoid of any theme. Time as it is on its own, without human initiative and creativity. Shapeless and formless. One set of 24 hours is indistinguishable from another set of 24 hours.

Productive Time

Comes the Midrash and says, “When G-d chose His world, He established ‘heads of months’ and ‘heads of years.’” For the world to become a chosen place, a desirable habitat, a place worth living in, a place that G-d not only created but chose, we must grant the endless flow of time the dignity of purpose. Every day ought to have a productive objective, every month—a meaningful goal, every year—a dynamic rhythm. The world G-d chose and desired was one in which humanity learns to confer meaning on time, to utilize it for constructive and beneficial endeavors. A meaningful life is a life in which every day is filled with meaningful choices and experiences, utilized to promote goodness, righteousness, and justice.

This is what it means to choose your world and choose your life, to appreciate that G-d chose this world. There is meaning and purpose in each moment. You can view life as random and valueless, or you can see life as a gift, and view time as priceless, something I ought to cultivate in the fullest way. I choose to invest all my energy, creativity, and passion into each moment; and for me, each day is an invitation to deeper growth and awareness.

So “When G-d chose His world, He established ‘heads of months’ and ‘heads of years.’” For time to be utilized purposefully, every month must have a “head,” which gives the month its tone and direction. Every year must have a “head,” Rosh Hashanah, the time to put into focus the year that passed and the year ahead. For time to be used productively, it must be delineated. I must take note of sunrise and sunset, of a new month and a new year. Each presents me with a specific energy, calling, and opportunity.

#### Redemptive Time

You can live a productive life, mark your days with worthy objectives. Your life has rhythm. You have a morning, a night, a lunch break, a weekend, and a vacation.

But you are still confined within the realm of a mortal, finite and frail universe. As one wise man said, Men talk of killing time, while time quietly kills them. Or: Time is a storm in which we are all lost; time is free, but it’s priceless; you can’t own it, but you can use it. You can’t keep it, but you can spend it. Once you’ve lost it you can never get it back.

Within the restricted structure of our bodies, life span, and circumstances, we can use our time productively. Yet, we can’t free ourselves from the prison of mortality. Even when I work hard and use my time well, it is still cruel to me. It ages me. At any moment something can happen which will shake up and destroy my entire structure and rhythm.

Here is where the Midrash opens us up to another dimension of time, and this is where the Jewish story is introduced into history. “When G-d chose Jacob and his children He established the head of the month of Redemption.” G-d gave us the ability to liberate and redeem ourselves from the natural, mortal, and finite reality. He allowed us to align our posture with Divine infinity; not just to be productive with our time, but to confer upon each moment transcendence, to grant it the resonance of eternity, to liberate it and ourselves from the shackles of mortality.

You can be productive with your time. You can use it to shovel the snow, mow the lawn, fix the garage, read a good book, shop in Costco, enhance your computer speed, sell a building, cook a gourmet meal, and help society. This is worthwhile. But you are capable of more: You can make each moment Divine, elevating it to the realm of the sacred, where each moment, hour, day, week, month, and year become infused with G-dliness and are thus transformed into eternity. You can allow your time to become a conduit for the timeless.

“When G-d chose Jacob and his children He established the head of the month of Redemption.” This is the month of Nissan, the month when we were set free of Egyptian bondage and were empowered to free ourselves from every form of bondage. Torah and Mitzvos make our time not only productive but Divine.

When you align your time rhythm with the Divine, realizing that every moment of time is an opportunity to connect with the infinite light vibrating through your body and the cosmos; when you use your time to study G-d’s Torah, to connect to G-d, to perform a mitzvah, and to live in the Divine consciousness of oneness, your time is not only productive, but it is redemptive, uninhibited by the shackles of nature finitude. You redeem and transform your time—by aligning it with the divine blueprint for life.

#### The Choice

When the sun rises, and I declare “Shema Yisroel” to align my posture with Divine oneness—the moment of sunrise is now etched in eternity. When the sun of Friday is about to set and I kindle the Shabbos lights, it is a moment transformed into transcendent peacefulness. When I take a moment to do a favor for another person, for tuning into the love of the universe, for studying Torah or praying, I elevate the moment into transcendence.

In the words of the Tanya (ch. 25), “In the higher reality, this union (between the soul and G-d when we perform a mitzvah) is eternal, for G-d and His will transcend time... Only here below is the union within the limits of time.”

Each of us can choose in which “time zone” we will live. Do I live in a “depressing time,” letting my days and nights pass without meaning? Do

I elevate my days into worthwhile experiences? Or, in my ultimate calling, do I turn each day into a redemptive experience, into a conduit for infinity?

#### How We Study Science and Physics

The Rebbe said one more thing to these girls about their academic studies. Some of us study the sciences and see them merely as interesting data, raw facts. However, much of humanity has come to appreciate that when we study biology, physics, history, or math it must be with a productive and meaningful purpose—to make the world a better place, to enhance life on our planet, and to promote justice and compassion.

Yet, our ultimate calling is to see all of our studies, all branches of wisdom, as an instrument to transform our world and our lives into an abode for the Divine infinite reality, to infuse all aspects of our lives with true and timeless meaning, with everlasting love and holiness, by revealing that ultimately, we are all one, and everything is part of that oneness.

[1] Shemos Rabba 15:11.

[2] The talk is published in Likutei Sichos vol. 4 p. 1263-1267. (The Rebbe bases his explanation on Or Hatorah Parshas Bo p. 264. This Sicha is an extraordinary example of how to “translate” a maamar into relevant language. The maamar in Or Hatorah is abstract and the Rebbe applied it in the most practical and relevant way.)

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### Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon and the Taryag Mitzvos

#### By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Most Important

What is the most important mitzvah of the Torah?

Question #2: Once, Twice, or Thrice?

The prohibition against mixing milk and meat is mentioned three times in the Torah. How many times is it counted in the 613 mitzvos?

Question #3: Counter Encounter

What are some practical halachic implications of different countings of the Taryag mitzvos?

Foreword:

Since this week includes the first mitzvos that Kelal Yisrael is commanded, we have an opportunity to return to a topic we have studied in the past – the counting of the Taryag Mitzvos.

Today, the most commonly used count of the 613 is that of the Rambam and the Sefer Hachinuch. However, there are numerous other counters of the Taryag Mitzvos -- beginning from the era of the geonim, through the rishonim and until the current day who count the Taryag Mitzvos. At the time of the Rambam, most followed the approach of the Baal Halachos Gedolos (usually abbreviated as Behag) in counting the Taryag mitzvos. The Rambam, who strongly disputed this approach, provided a system with rules to determine what qualifies as one of the 613 mitzvos.

Subsequent to the Rambam writing his Sefer Hamitzvos, his major work on this topic, most other authorities followed the Rambam’s general approach to counting the mitzvos, although the major writers on the topic, such as the Ra’avad, the Semag, the Ramban, the Tashbeitz, the Sefer Hachinuch, the Semaq and the Maharam Shick, all disagree occasionally with the Rambam on the details. Some, like the Sefer Hachinuch accepted almost all the Rambam’s count (he disagrees with only one mitzvah), whereas others, such as the Ramban, disagreed with many dozens of mitzvos, in which the Rambam counted something as a mitzvah and the Ramban disagreed, and vice versa. For example, whereas the Rambam does not count settling and living in Eretz Yisrael as one of the 613 mitzvos, the Ramban does.

Introduction:

This article will not focus on the Rambam’s counting of the mitzvos, but on an earlier counting of the mitzvos done by Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon. Whereas the Rambam wrote an entire sefer explaining the rules for counting the 613 mitzvos and then enumerated them, Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon left us with a couple of poems, written at different times of his life, in which he enumerates the mitzvos in a brief, poetic style. To the best of my knowledge, Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon’s approach to the enumeration of the 613 mitzvos was left without serious study until Rav Yehudah



Yeruchem Fishel Perla, one of the greatest gedolim of early 20th century Poland, made studying and explaining Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon's work his life's ambition. Rav Perla, who was born in Warsaw in 1846, devoted forty years to this study and writing up his conclusions, at times going for years without even leaving his home so that he could proceed undisturbed. During those years he relied on an opening between his home and a nearby shul through which he fulfilled the mitzvos of hearing kerias hatorah and shofar.

Many of the details of Rav Perla's life are shrouded in secrecy, and the brief biographies I have seen about his life, including those in recognized encyclopedias, notoriously contain many obvious factual errors. For example, in some of these biographies it is claimed that Rav Perla was a disciple of Rav Chayim Soloveichik at the time that Rav Chayim was the rav of Brisk. This is obviously impossible for several reasons:

1. Rav Chayim was seven years younger than Rav Perla.
2. Rav Chayim did not move to Brisk until 1892. Until that time, he had been a rosh yeshiva in Volozhin and he moved to Brisk (where his father, the Beis Halevi, was rav) when the Volozhin yeshiva was closed. In 1892, Rav Perla was already 46 years old, and had returned to Warsaw, his birthplace, more than twenty years before. He was married and had a family.

It is reported, probably reliably, that Rav Perla studied under Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin when the latter was the rav of Lomza. (This is before Rav Diskin assumed the positions as rav in Mezeritch, Kovno, Shklov, and Brisk, and eventually moved to Eretz Yisrael in 1877. It was then that the Beis Halevi, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik, was asked to assume the rabbonus of Brisk in Rav Diskin's stead, a position that the Beis Halevi held for the last fourteen years of his life. When he passed on, he was succeeded by his son, Rav Chayim, who became known to history as Rav Chayim Brisker.)

Rav Perla, whose family name was also sometimes spelled "Perlow" or "Perlman," was offered to be the rav of the best paying and most prestigious rabbinic positions in Poland of his era, but he refused them all to be completely devoted to learning and writing his seforim. His financial support was from the rental income of real estate that he had received from his father, a very righteous and wealthy Polish businessman. (It appears that Rav Perla's rebbitzen managed his real estate investments and collected the rents.)

Rav Perla specialized in early authors whose works had never had thorough commentaries written on them. He wrote very extensive works on the Ra'avan and the Kaftor Vaferech, but his magnum opus is his work on the counting of the mitzvos done by Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon.

Rav Perla's insights are brilliant and often very original. For example, in one place he resolves a dispute between the Ramban and the Rambam concerning an opinion of the Behag by demonstrating that they had in front of them two different and conflicting versions of what that gaon had written. In another instance, he unravels a baffling comment of the Ketzos Hachoshen by correcting the text printed in our editions.

Rav Perla's work elucidating the count of the mitzvos according to Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon and explaining in great depth the differences between the approaches of all the early counters of the Taryag Mitzvos was published in three volumes between the years 1913 and 1917. When we realize that the last volumes were published in the middle of what was then called "The Great War," when many of the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, and particularly those ruled by the Czar's Empire, were destroyed, we can only begin to appreciate the monumental undertaking to which Rav Perla devoted himself. His commentary on Rav Sa'adiyah's enumeration of the commandments totals 1600 pages. Rav Yeruchem Perla examines thoroughly Rav Sa'adiyah's choice of words and deduces from this Rav Sa'adiyah's understanding of each mitzvah and the halachic consequences that result. Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, with whom Rav Perla had begun a correspondence before the war, is reputed to have said: "Without the hasmadah of forty years of devotion to Torah study, no human being would have been able to author such a work."

Rav Perla owned a massive library and added thousands of comments to his personal copies of these seforim. Quite clearly, Rav Perla intended for the glosses in the seforim in his personal library to be printed at some future time to benefit Klal Yisrael. Many of these comments were eventually published in the annual Noam and numerous other rabbinic journals. Periodically, one of the auction houses specializing in Judaica sells a sefer that Rav Perla once owned. The seforim are rarely in top condition. They show wear from frequent and constant use; yet his copies still fetch high prices at auction. To quote one such auction announcement: "Dozens of important marginalia [some long], in the fine tiny handwriting of the renowned Torah scholar Rabbi Yerucham Fishel Perla. Signatures and various stamps: 'Yerucham Fishel Perla,' 'Yerucham Fishel Perlman,' and: 'Juda Perla – Warschau.'" I have no idea why Rav Perla used different stamps, with different spellings of his name, or why he stamped his seforim multiple times.

In the 1920's Rav Perla was widowed, and his children lived far from Warsaw. As an eighty-year-old veteran gadol, he moved to Eretz Yisrael, where he continued his studying and writing. At this point in his life, the rebbitzen of Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank brought meals to Rav Perla daily, while the octogenarian scholar continued his work, particularly an extensive commentary on the Kaftor Vaferech, a three-volume work on the mitzvos of Eretz Yisrael written by one of the rishonim. Rav Perla also contributed numerous profound essays to various rabbinic journals.

Having completed our lengthy introduction, I will now share several places where Rav Perla explains the brief poetic words of Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon to demonstrate that he disagreed with other mitzvah counters.

Most important

Let me begin by addressing our opening question: "What is the most important mitzvah of the Torah?"

While no one will say that the Torah has a specific mitzvah that is more important than any other, according to the Rambam, one of the most important of the 613 mitzvos is vehalachta bidrachav, to walk in the ways of Hashem. At great length and in several places, the Rambam explains that this involves evaluating one's personality and adjusting it and behaving so that it develops in the direction that the Torah wants. This mitzvah forms the foundation of the Rambam's work Shemoneh Perakim, a lengthy essay that is part of his commentary to the Mishnah as an introduction to Mesechta Avos. It also forms the basis of Hilchos Dei'os, which is the second section of the Rambam's magnum opus, the Mishneh Torah.

Notwithstanding that many halachic authorities consider vehalachta bidrachav to be perhaps the most important of the 613 mitzvos, Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon does not even count this as one of the 613 mitzvos! This unusual fact is not ignored by Rav Perla, who has a lengthy essay explaining Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon's opinion. Rav Perla demonstrates that Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon did not count this as one of the 613 mitzvos because, in his opinion, there is no specific commandment in the Torah to evaluate and adjust one's personality. The sources that the Rambam cites as basis for this mitzvah were viewed by Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon to be asmachos, meaning, in this context, concepts of which a person should always be conscious, but not part of the Torah's structure of commandments. As far as the words vehalachta bidrachav, Rav Perla presumes that Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon understood this as a general commandment to follow Hashem's instructions on how to live one's life that is not counted as one of the 613 mitzvos. We can compare this to the road sign that instructs us to "Keep Right," a message with both safety and ethical value, but should not be counted as one of the 613 mitzvos.

Thus, whereas many authorities contend that the most important mitzvah of the Torah may be developing one's character, according to Rav Sa'adiyah, this is not even one of the Torah's 613 mitzvos.

Basar bechalav

Here is another instance in which Rav Perla analyzes the words of Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon and the other mitzvah counters and reaches a fascinating conclusion. The Torah mentions the prohibition against mixing milk and meat in three different places, each time with the exact same five words, lo sevasheil gedi bachaleiv imo, "Do not cook a kid in



the milk of its mother.” Chazal explain that the Torah repeats this mitzvah three times to teach that there are three prohibitions min haTorah:

- (1) To cook meat and milk together.
- (2) To eat the mixture of meat and milk cooked together.
- (3) To benefit from such a mixture.

Rav Yeruchem Perla notes that there is a three-way machlokes among the rishonim whether this counts in the listing of Taryag Mitzvos as one mitzvah (Behag; Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon), two mitzvos (Rambam; Sefer Hachinuch) or three (Zohar Harakia of the Tashbeitz). Although most of the laws of basar bechalav will not be affected by this dispute, there are several ramifications that do result, particularly regarding the validity as a witness of someone who violates some of these laws intentionally, but observes the others. An example of this would be someone who benefits from a cooked mixture comprising meat and milk, such as by selling such a product as a salesman, but who does not eat or cook it. According to all opinions, he is violating a Torah prohibition. However, for reasons beyond the scope of this article, being invalidated as a witness is dependent on how many mitzvos are counted here.

Another counter encounter

Here is another example of a practical halachic dispute that results from two opinions whether a mitzvah is counted in the 613. The Gemara states that someone who frees a Canaanite slave violates a lo sa’aseh of the Torah, referred to as le’olam bahem ta’avodu. Among the rishonim, there is discussion about this law, since the Gemara notes instances when great Torah scholars did emancipate their Canaanite slaves. Rav Perla demonstrates that Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon never counts le’olam bahem ta’avodu as one of the Torah’s 613 prohibitions, and reasons that the gaon considered this to be a rabbinic prohibition. In a mammoth essay on the topic, he demonstrates numerous halachic ramifications that result from this dispute.

Mitzvas peru urvu

Rav Yeruchem Perla notes that there is a three-way dispute between Rav Sa’adiyah, the Rambam and the Rosh (Kesubos 1:12) whether kiddushin, getting married, and having children are one mitzvah (Rav Sa’adiyah), two separate mitzvos (Rambam) or whether the mitzvah is having children (Rosh). There are several very fundamental results of this dispute, but explaining them takes us very far afield from our topic.

Lo sikom

Here is an example of Rav Perla’s analyses that is not about whether a mitzvah is in the count of 613 but about the nature of a mitzvah. In parshas Kedoshim, the Torah teaches that we are not to take revenge nor are we to bear a grudge against a fellow Jew. To clarify the difference between the two prohibitions, Chazal explain that someone violates lo sikom, “Do not take revenge” when they ask a neighbor to borrow a tool and are turned down, and then subsequently refuse to lend their neighbor an item because they are angry and want to “get back” at him. (Should you have a valid reason not to lend him the item, such as, you think he will not take good care of it or he may not return it, you are not required to lend it.) The second prohibition, mentioned in the same pasuk, is lo sitor, “Do not bear a grudge!” Chazal explain that one violates this prohibition when, instead of refusing to lend the item to your neighbor, you lend it to him, but tell him, “See -- I am not like you. I am lending you an item, even though you refused to lend me your item previously.”

With his skillful analysis, Rav Yeruchem Perla demonstrates that the rishonim dispute whether the prohibition is the action, or whether it is the emotion, and harboring a vengeful feeling or a grudge against someone violates the Torah’s prohibition. According to Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon and most rishonim, the violation is the action -- refusing to lend him an item or reminding him that previously he did not lend you. However, Rav Perla proves that the Rambam and others contend that the violation is for the emotion, the mindset, not the action (Rav Perla’s commentary to the Sefer Hamitzvos of Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon, Aseih 19). In the Rambam’s opinion, if you are angry at the person who did not lend you to the extent that you are not prepared to lend him something, you have violated lo sikom. Alternatively, if you are prepared to lend it

to him together with a piece of your mind about how nasty and selfish he is, you have already violated the prohibition of lo sitor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that much halachic literature is devoted to counting and understanding the various counts of the 613 mitzvos. Some people have the practice of reviewing the mitzvos that are included in the week’s Torah reading at the Shabbos table, a praiseworthy minhag.

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## Rav Kook Torah

### Bo: The Special Pesach Offering

The offering brought for the Passover holiday, the korban pesach, has special laws how it is to be cooked and eaten: “They will eat the meat on that night ... Do not eat it raw, or cooked in water, but only roasted over fire.” (Exodus 12:8-9)

Why may the korban pesach only be eaten at the nighttime? And why must it be roasted?

National Holiness in Each Individual

All Temple offerings fall into two categories. Some are korbanot yachid, personal offerings brought by an individual; while others are korbanot tzibur, communal offerings brought in the name of the entire nation. An individual brings a korban yachid for private reasons — to atone for a particular sin or express gratitude for a personal deliverance. The Jewish nation as a whole, on the other hand, is represented by communal offerings which commemorate national events and holidays.

Of all the Temple offerings, the korban Pesach is unique, since it combines characteristics of both types of offerings. It commemorates a national historic event; and yet the obligation to bring this offering is not on the nation but on the individual. Why is it not like other communal offerings?

This unusual offering teaches us an important lesson about the Jewish people. The korban pesach reveals the quality of national holiness that resides in the soul of every Jew. Our ties to Knesset Yisrael are so deep that each individual’s pesach offering is like a korban tzibur representing the entire nation. And this special connection of each individual to the nation is reflected in the laws regulating how the korban pesach is to be eaten.

The Unity of Israel

Our daytime activities are characterized by extensive social interaction, while at night we retire to our homes and private lives. By stipulating that the Passover offering be eaten at night, the Torah is emphasizing that our connection to the Jewish people is not based on some form of social contract, a utilitarian agreement to band together due to common interests. Rather, our ties to the Jewish people reflect a unique shared commonality that binds together all of Israel. These national ties persist even at night, a time when each individual retreats to the privacy of his home.

The manner in which the offering is cooked is similarly instructive. Were it boiled in water or cooked together with other foods, the taste of the korban would spread outside of the meat. Roasting, on the other hand, prevents the flavor from dispersing to other foods. This ensures that the offering’s qualities of holiness remain concentrated inside the korban pesach. Why should this experience be so intense?

The mitzvah of eating the roasted offering has the power to uplift each individual with an intensity of pure holiness, a powerful quality rooted in the national soul of Israel. This concentrated holiness deepens our awareness of the singular unity of Israel, a result of the communal holiness that resides within each and every individual, in all of his being.

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## 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 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 mitzvot 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.

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## What Our Shuls and Communities can Learn from Disney

By Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

With my youngest child approaching his teenage years I thought my Disney days were over, but when my grandchildren came to me asking, “Zayda, can you come with us to Disney,” I couldn’t say no. And so, I spent two days this week at the Magic Kingdom and Epcot. As usual, I brought a baseball cap so that nobody would be able to tell that I am Jewish.

As we pulled into the park, though, I decided not to wear it. In a time when too many are trying to scare us, attempting to intimidate us into removing our symbols, hiding our practices or being ashamed of our identity, it is more important than ever to proudly wear our yarmulkas, show our tzitzis, or necklaces displaying Jewish stars, maps of Israel, or solidarity with hostages, and not cower from practices that are appropriate in public.

A woman and her family came over to me at one of the parks to say how happy she was to see Jewish people not afraid to wear their yarmulka in public. When I asked if she was Jewish, she told me she was and that she went to a Jewish school in Minneapolis as a child. A man walking by stopped to say, “Shalom.” I responded “Shalom” and asked if he was Jewish. He told me he is a pastor from Alabama and that he and his congregation regularly pray for Israel and the Jewish people. His wife quickly added, “and we have been praying constantly for the hostages.”

We got a “boker tov” from one of the Disney employees and a few more “shaloms” and, I’m happy to report, no negativity or hostility. The truth is, I would expect nothing more at the “Happiest Place on Earth.” It is hard to think of another place where such a large quantity of people all seem so courteous, kind, pleasant, and polite.

Generally speaking, one doesn’t find pushing or shoving, short tempers, a culture of criticism, or impolite and impatient people at Disney, despite having to wait on long lines, pay large fees, endure the hot sun, and spend hours on one’s feet.

As we observed the throngs of people with smiles on their faces and extraordinary consideration towards one another, I couldn’t help but think, wouldn’t it be amazing if our shuls were like Disney? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if people thought of our campuses and communities as the happiest places on Earth, places that even if they had to stand for long periods, sometimes wait on lines, endure imperfect temperatures, it would not only be well worth it, they would be clamoring and counting down to coming back.

How does Disney do it and what could we learn regarding creating a culture of happiness? Many years ago, I participated in a behind-the-

scenes tour of Disney to explore that very question. The design and layouts of the parks, the placement of vendors, and the timing of the shows are all meticulously and brilliantly strategized and arranged. But what struck me most from the tour was the culture and how the attitude of the Disney's tens of thousands of workers impacts each and every one of their guests.

In every employee only area, there are signs highlighting the Disney credo, including: "I project a positive image and energy. I am courteous and respectful to all guests including children. I go above and beyond." Disney understands a fundamental psychological principle supported by extensive research – happiness and joy are contagious. Just as if one person yawns others will follow suit, so too, if a person smiles, others around him will start smiling as well. A happy disposition, a positive spirit, and a pleasant countenance are quite literally contagious.

Whose responsibility is it to spread the smiles? Whose job is it to maintain the happiness effect? There are roughly 77,000 employees at Disney World in Orlando. All members of the staff, from custodial and maintenance, to the ride operators and people who wear the Mickey costumes, are all referred to as "cast members." How many of the 77,000 cast members do you think are responsible for picking up the garbage? The answer is all 77,000. How many are responsible for helping someone with directions or return a lost child to their parents? 77,000. How many are required to smile and spread the happiness? That's right, all 77,000. At Disney, the cast members know that they each have different tasks, but they are taught that they all have the same purpose: spreading happiness.

Disney has a regular contest among the employees to identify and reward "great service fanatics." These individuals are nominated by their peers and are celebrated for going above and beyond in being kind, helpful, and spreading happiness and joy.

How do we go from a culture of complaining and criticism to creating the happiest place on Earth? Perhaps we can create a culture in which every single Jew, every participant of the community is a member of the "cast." We must go from consumers, from members with entitlements and privileges, to stakeholders, cast members who feel a sense of personal responsibility, duty and obligation.

If we want to be a place that attracts all, that inspires non-observant and disaffected Jews, that makes teens and youth excited about their Judaism, we ALL need to be leaders in making happiness, joy and meaning contagious in our institutions and homes.

When speaking with a child, Disney cast members are trained to bend down and meet them at eye level. I saw firsthand the subtle but powerful impact of speaking to someone, even a child, at eye level instead of making them look up at you while feeling small. We need to speak to all the members and participants in our community at their eye level. Sometimes that will mean bending down, ensuring nobody feels small, no matter what their Jewish education or level of observance.

In complimenting and blessing Yehuda, Yaakov says, "His teeth are whiter than milk." Of all virtues, why is Yaakov highlighting Yehuda's teeth? The Talmud (Kesubos 111b) explains that Yaakov saw a quality in Yehuda he greatly admired and benefited from. Yehuda had a habit of smiling, of flashing the white of his teeth when seeing others. Indeed, the Talmud concludes when a person shows the white of his teeth to another by smiling widely, it is more beneficial than giving a cup of milk to drink. Why the comparison to milk?

Rav Shlomo Wolbe explains that milk nourishes and nurtures growth. What milk does for the body, a smile does for the heart and soul. He writes that just as plants require sunshine to live, converting the rays of the sun into nutrients, people convert smiles into energy and strength, and without it they wilt and perish. Dogs and cats can't smile. Smiling at one another is part of what differentiates us as humans.

Make an effort to always have a smile. Let's all be active members of the Jewish people's cast and convert our shuls and communities into the happiest places on Earth.

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### Chief Rabbi Mirvis

#### Bo

Valerie and I have just returned from Poland, where we had the privilege of accompanying His Majesty King Charles on a visit to Auschwitz for the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the camp.

As I stood on that ground, the place where the most horrific evil was perpetrated, I was comforted when I reflected on the words of the Prophet Jeremiah, which we will read this coming Shabbat in the haftara for the Parshah of Bo.

The prophet comments on the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt and some subsequent tragedies that befell our people, and then he brings these words of encouragement in the name of Hashem: "Ve'attah al-tira avdi Ya'akov ve'al techat Yisra'el" — do not fear my servant, Jacob; there is no need to be distressed, O Israel.

"Veshav Ya'akov veshakat veshva'anan ve'ein macharid" — Jacob will, at long last, be able to rest; there will be a period of quiet. Jacob will be at ease, and Israel will have no reason to fear. The prophet then goes on to talk about Jewish dispersion and says, "E'eseh challah bechol-haggoyim" — I will put an end to those nations who seek to put an end to the Jewish people.

"Otecha lo-e'eseh challah" — but I will never put an end to the Jewish people; the Jewish people will always continue to live on. Here we have echoes of the promise of Hashem to the founder of our faith, Abraham, in the Parshah of Lech Lecha, when Hashem said, "Those who bless you, I will bless, and those who curse you, I will curse, and all the families on earth will be blessed through you." If we reflect on the past few millennia, we will see how accurate and true those words have become.

The nations amongst whom we have lived — some of the most powerful on earth — who have sought to destroy the Jewish people, have in turn been destroyed. And those who have been well disposed towards us have been blessed, and tiny Am Yisrael has continued, always. Not just to live on, but also to thrive.

So, following our commemorations for the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, we can be certain, perhaps more than at any other time before, of the truth that Am Yisrael Chai. The Jewish people will always live on, thrive, and be blessed.

Shabbat Shalom.

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### Siyum in memory of YOCHANAN BEN YEKUTIEL YEHUDA (JOCHANAN KLEIN) is ready to enroll.

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