Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet
BO 5786

Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Parshas Bo

The Pharaoh-Moshe Dialog Regarding Who Will Participate in the "Chag L'Hashem Machar"

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1366 I Don't Open Bottle Caps on Shabbos, You Do. Can I Ask You to Open My Bottle? Good Shabbos!

The Pharaoh-Moshe Dialog Regarding Who Will Participate in the "Chag L'Hashem Machar"

In this week's parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu warns Pharoah about the impending plague of arbeh (locust). Pharoah initially refuses to budge. His servants protest: "How much longer will this be a snare for us? Send out the men that they may serve Hashem their G-d! Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?" (Shemos 10:7) Pharaoh then appeared to soften his position. He brought Moshe and Aharon back and asked them to specify "Mi v'mi ha'holchim?" (Who exactly will be leaving?) Moshe famously answered "B'neureinu u'b'zekeineinu neilech (We will go with our youth and our elders), with our sons and daughters, with our flock and with our cattle shall we go, because it is a 'Chag l'Hashem lanu'" (Festival to the L-rd for us). (Shemos 10:9) However, Pharoah was not prepared to accept such a universal holiday. "'Not so, let the men go and serve Hashem, for that is what you have been asking.' And he chased them out from before Pharoah." (Shemos 10:11)

There is one glaring question on this pasuk. Pharoah said "Ki oso atem mevakshim" (for that is what you have been asking). Where did Pharoah get the idea that Moshe only asked for the adult men to go out? Pharaoh is making this up. It is fake news. The whole parsha never mentions once that Moshe requested that only the male adults leave! If Pharoah was willing to send out the men, let him present that as his own compromise proposal. It seems like he was claiming that he was conceding to a position previously offered by Moshe!

The answer to this question is based on a Medrash that is equally difficult to understand. The Medrash says that when Pharaoh asked "Mi v'mi ha'holchim," he was alluding to something else. He was alluding to the fact that in the future, a Jewish leader would also use the expression "Mi v'mi." Pharoah was alluding to the pesukim "Mi ya'aleh b'har Hashem u'mi yakum b'mkom kodsho? Neki kapayim u'bar leivov asher lo nasa l'shav nafshi v'lo nishba l'mirma." (Who will ascend the Mountain of the L-rd and who will arise to His holy place? Someone of clean palms and pure heart who has not sworn in vain by My soul, and has not sworn deceitfully.) (Tehillim 24:3-4)

Of course, the Medrash does not mean that Pharaoh knew Sefer Tehillim and that he was actually quoting a pasuk from Dovid Hamelech's classic composition. Rather, the Medrash is speaking of an allusion to a concept embodied in those pesukim in Tehillim.

The sefer Kometz Hamincha explains the dialog between Moshe Rabbeinu and Pharoah: They had a fundamental difference of opinion about religion. Pharaoh says "Listen here, I am religious myself. But in my religion, religious practice is reserved for the holy people in the nation. Not every Tom, Dick, and Harry is expected to engage in religious practice. And certainly not a bunch of children. It is reserved for people who can understand theology and the concept of a God. Consequently, when you advance a request 'We want to go out and worship,' in my mind it means you go out with the adults, with the elders. You go out with those about whom it is stated 'Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem? (the type of people who are "Neki kapayim u'bar leivov"). Those types of people worship God. But children – what do they know? The rif-raf, the simple people – religion is not for the proletariat. Religion is reserved for the priests, for the kohanim.

Some religions endorse this philosophy until this day!

That is the thrust of Pharoah's claim "For this is what you asked." You want to have a religious service – a "Chag l'Hashem lanu?" I know what that means. It means the adults! Pharaoh could not even relate to the concept that children should be involved in the concept of "Chag l'Hashem lanu!" That is Pharaoh's view of religion.

Moshe responds, "No. We don't do it like that. We do it 'b'neureinu u'b'zekeineinu'" (with our children and with our elders). This statement itself is curious because normally we would place the "elders" before the "children". However, here, Moshe first emphasizes that we go with the children and then mentions the elders. We know that the only way to perpetuate a religion is to inculcate the children when they are still young.

Unfortunately, people who are not aware of this fundamental principle of chinuch are at high risk for losing their children. There are people who think that maybe we need to deal with a child's education until he is bar mitzva, but after that, he is on his own! That is not the way it works.

The extent to which we, as a Torah community, do this for our children – especially in this day and age – is incredible. We are very aware of the secret of "we go forth with our children and our elders." Very few individuals of my age and generation had a "Haschalas Gemara Mesiba" (a party marking the occasion when someone starts learning Talmud). Now, we participate in such occasions when our children and grandchildren begin learning Gemara. The moment is commemorated as a significant educational milestone in the child's life. Likewise, who of my generation went to a "Rebbe" when he put on Tefillin for the first time? My father taught me how to put on Tefillin at home. I went to shul the next day and I put on Tefillin!

Why do we do all of these things nowadays? We do all of them because we want to inculcate and infuse in our children the beauty and importance of mitzvos and the big deal that they are! Some people even take their children to Eretz Yisrael for hanachas Tefillin. Like everything else in life, it is possible to go over the top. To take a whole family to Eretz Yisrael for a bar mitzva boy's first hanachas Tefillin is not "nussach Baltimore."

With many such things, it is possible to "go over the top." Someone sent me a copy of an invitation to a "Vach nacht." (I was not personally invited, but someone sent me a copy that he received.) A "Vach nacht" is the night before a child's bris, when the neighborhood children come and say Krias Shma. The new father gives them "goody bags" and they all have a good time. I saw an invitation for a "Vach nacht" in a hotel! It is easy to view this negatively as yet another over-the-top way to spend money. But there is also a positive perspective that this stems from giving prominence to mitzvos and the chinuch of our children.

At any rate, the underlying idea is true: We go forth with our youth and with our elders – but the emphasis is on the youth. If we want to be successful in giving over the legacy of our heritage, we cannot allow it to just be handled through "zekeineinu." We always need to include and even put the "dagesh chazak" on neureinu.

The Dilemma of Accepting Reparation Money From the Egyptians

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin comments on a question we discussed recently (and many times in the past) on the pasuk "Please speak in the ears of the people and let each man request of his fellow and each woman of her fellow, vessels of silver and vessels of gold." (Shemos 11:2). Why is there suddenly a need to preface the instruction to ask for money by the word "Please?" Since when is it necessary to beg people to ask for money?

We are all familiar with the Gemara (Berochos 9b) that Hashem's request "Please ask them to request the money" was based on His prophecy to Avraham at the Bris Bein Habesarim. The Ribono shel Olam was concerned that Avraham should not complain that Hashem fulfilled His promise that Avraham's descendants would be slaves for four hundred years but He did not fulfill His promise that "afterwards they would leave with great wealth."

The obvious question is, would the Ribono shel Olam not have kept His own word if not for Avraham? Rav Zalman Sorotzkin gives an answer which reveals the historical perspective of the era in which he lived. He introduces his remark by stating: "The Chachomim raise this question

and do not adequately answer it, until the current events of our time provided an answer." In other words, this scriptural difficulty existed for thousands of years and could not be adequately understood until our generation.

He was referring to the then-burning issue of whether the State of Israel should accept reparation money from Germany for confiscated Jewish property during World War II. People in Israel were very torn about this issue. There were those who were adamant that "our murderers should not be our benefactors." They did not want the Germans to feel that they could "pay us off" for the crimes they committed against us. Others felt that practically it was most proper for Germany to offer the money and for Israel to take it. (The former position was fiercely advocated by Menachem Begin, whose "Cherut" party was then the opposition in Knesset and the latter position, which was ultimately adopted, was advocated by Ben Gurion and his Labor Party, which then controlled the government.)

The first time I came to Eretz Yisrael, I noticed that all the taxis were Mercedes. To me – not that I ever contemplated spending $75,000 on a Mercedes – riding in a Mercedes was almost like a 'yihareg v'al ya'avor" (capital offense). The same applied to riding in a Volkswagen (another brand of German automobile). For those who may have seen documentaries about World War II, Porsche was a fellow who had a factory that made cars. He built the Nazi tanks and contributed heavily to their war machine. I should drive a German car? No way!

And yet, in Eretz Yisrael, every Tom, Dick and Harry was driving a Mercedes. The explanation is that it was all part of the reparations. The automobiles were given to them at either a significantly reduced prices or for free.

This, then, was the debate in Eretz Yisrael: To take reparations or not? Is it a kappara (atonement for the Germans) or is it not a kappara? Do we allow them to get a kappara or do we not allow them to get a kappara? What should we do?

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin noted: We can study this debate to analyze the emotions of our ancestors who were leaving Mitzrayim. The same dispute played out in Mitzrayim three thousand years earlier. Certainly, there were people who could never make peace with the memory that the Mitzrim killed their children. They threw them into the Nile and used them as bricks in building the pyramids. They considered the silver and gold they were supposed to ask the Egyptians to give them to be "blood money." They protested: "I should accept money for the life of my son who they killed?" Others argued, "No! The Jewish people deserve compensation for all their 210 years of slave labor. It is time for the Mitzrim to pay up!"

Rav Zalman Zorotzkin said that the Ribono shel Olam saw this dilemma. Therefore, he did not give a straight-out command: "Take the money!" He knew that for some people, that would be too difficult. It went against their grain and therefore He did not demand that they take it. Rather, he politely requested: Please take the money… so that Avraham Avinu will not say I did not keep my promise. I understand your dilemma and your hesitation regarding taking the money, but I need to make this request of you because I have a commitment to Avraham Avinu. Even though you are uncomfortable with it, please do Me a favor and take the money.

[CS – Adding recent dvar torah:
from**: Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>
date: Jan 22, 2026, 7:33 PM
Tidbits for Parashas Bo 5786 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l
Parashas Bo • January 24th • 6 Shevat 5786

Some have the custom of reciting Parashas HaMon (Shemos 16:4-36) on Tuesday of Parashas Beshalach, which is next Tuesday, January 27th. This is considered a segulah for parnassah. Some read it shenayim mikra v'echad targum (reading the pasukim two times and the Targum Onkeles once).

This week, the week of Parashas Bo, is the third week of ShoVavim. The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is early Monday morning, February 2nd at 2:07 AM EST.

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Menachos 13 • Yerushalmi: Succah 36 • Mishnah Yomis: Arachin 6:4-5 • Oraysa (coming week): Yevamos 23a-25a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 47:8-21

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Tu Bishvat is on Monday, February 2nd. Taanis Esther is on Monday, March 2nd. Purim is on Tuesday, March 3rd.

Summary: BO: Hashem tells Moshe that Pharaoh's obstinacy will result in still more miraculous plagues • Moshe demands that the entire nation be allowed to leave Egypt, including the young and elderly; Pharaoh agrees to only the men leaving • Arbeh: A swarm of locust consumes all vegetation • Choshech: three days of utter darkness followed by three days of paralyzing darkness • Pharaoh agrees to let Bnei Yisrael go if their livestock stay behind • Pharaoh warns Moshe not to return to him • Jews are told to request expensive vessels from Egyptians before departing • Warning of the final Makkah, Makkas Bechoros (death of the first-born) • Hashem commands the mitzvos of Kiddush HaChodesh and Korban Pesach • Bnei Yisrael put blood from the korban on their doorposts and lintel, as a sign for the destroyer to pass over their homes • Mitzvos of matzah and Pesach for generations • Makkas Bechoros • Pharaoh begs Bnei Yisrael to leave • Bnei Yisrael are rushed to leave, even before their dough can rise • More than 600,000 males age 20 and up leave along with their families • Commemorating the Exodus for all generations via Mitzvos of Bechor, Chag HaPesach, and Tefillin.

Haftarah: Eight hundred years after Yetzias Mitzrayim (Exodus from Egypt), the countries of Bavel and Mitzrayim were competing for global dominance. The haftarah is the prophecy to Yirmiya (46:13-28) that Mitzrayim will suffer a crushing downfall at the hands of Nevuchadnetzar of Bavel.

Mitzvos: 9 Obligations & 11 Prohibitions 1) Kiddush HaChodesh - Beis Din shall declare and sanctify the new moon each month. 2-3) Sacrifice the Korban Pesach on Erev Pesach and eat it on Leil Pesach. 4) Do not consume the Korban Pesach raw or cooked in water. 5) Do not leave over any Korban Pesach meat until morning. 6) Remove chametz from your possession on Erev Pesach. 7) Eat matzah on the night of the 15th of Nisan. 8-9) Chametz may not be found in a Jew's possession, nor may it be consumed for the duration of Pesach. 10-11) The Korban Pesach may not be eaten by a mumar (apostate), ger toshav, or non-Jew. 12) Do not remove the Korban Pesach from its designated eating place. 13) Do not break a bone of the Korban Pesach. 14) An uncircumcised person - as well as one who failed to circumcise his child or slave - may not eat the Korban Pesach. 15) Attend to the holiness of bechor, a first-born male person or (kosher) animal. 16) Do not derive any pleasure from chametz. 17) Chametz may not be found in plain sight. 18) Relate the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim (to your child) on the night of Pesach. 19-20) Transfer the sanctity of a first-born donkey onto a sheep via redemption; failing that, the donkey must be killed with a blow to the neck.

Dvar Torah "לֹא כֵן לְכוּ־נָא הַגְּבָרִים" "No! Only the grown men may go" (Shemos 10:11) In their conversation prior to makkas arbeh, Pharaoh agrees to allow the older generation to go, but not the youth. Moshe Rabbeinu responds that we will only go out "with our elders and our youth, with our sons and our daughters together." What was the sticking point in this negotiation, and why was Pharaoh so insistent on keeping the youth behind? The Maayan Hashavua quotes from the Rambam (Igeres HaRambam) that Pharaoh's tactics are reminiscent of the yetzer hara. One of the tools of the yetzer hara is to seek and create a wedge between generations in order to disrupt the continuity from one generation to the next. Through a variety of tactics, such as convincing the youth that their elders are "out of touch" or erecting other barriers, the yetzer hara seeks to cause a hefsek in the mesorah of Am Yisrael. This was Pharaoh's scheme, to which Moshe responded that we will always keep our generations together so that we can pass the flame of Yiddishkeit eternally to our successive generations.]

[CS Late-breaking addition:
from: Team TorahAnytime <info@torahanytime.com>

date: Jan 22, 2026, 7:21 PM
Your TorahAnyTimes Parashat Bo is here
Jan 23, 2026 • Parshat Bo
Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik
Rabbi YY Jacobson
In Prison With You
This story took place several years ago in North Carolina, and to this day, it has left a lasting impression.
Joe Serna was arrested for driving under the influence. As part of his probation, he was required to abstain from alcohol for a specified period of time. When it was later discovered that he had violated this condition and had been untruthful about it, he was summoned back to court—this time before Judge Lou Olivera.
Judge Olivera felt he had little choice. A violation of probation required consequences, and so, Joe was sentenced to spend one night in jail. The sentence was carried out immediately.
As Joe was escorted into the cell and the door shut behind him, his body was overcome with terror. In his words, "It came back."
What came back? We so often know very little about the hidden stories people carry.
Joe is a decorated American combat veteran. He served three tours in Afghanistan and was awarded two Purple Hearts for bravery. His Green Beret unit survived bombings and even a suicide attack. Yet the most terrifying moment of his life did not occur in battle.
One night in Afghanistan, Joe was traveling in a military truck with three fellow soldiers along the edge of a creek. Without warning, the road collapsed beneath them and the truck plunged into the water and began to sink.
They were trapped.
Joe remembers the water rising—first to his legs, then his chest, then his neck—until it stopped just beneath his chin. The night was long and pitch black. By morning, Joe was the only one who made it out alive. His three closest friends drowned beside him.
hen Joe returned home from war, he suffered from severe post-traumatic stress disorder. Confined spaces, especially locked ones, triggered the terror of that night underwater.
So when Judge Olivera sentenced Joe to a night in jail, he was unknowingly sending a war veteran straight into one of his deepest fears: confinement, helplessness, and suffocation.
The judge later explained: "I knew Joe's history. I knew accountability mattered. But I also knew that a jail cell could be horrific for him."
And so Judge Olivera did something extraordinary. Shortly after Joe was locked inside the cell, the door opened again. Joe looked up in shock as someone else stepped inside.
It was the judge himself.
Judge Olivera chose to spend the entire night in the cell with the man he had just sentenced. He arrived with a change of clothes and a homemade meatloaf, and he stayed.
They talked through the night about family and life, dreams and disappointments, fears and hopes. They spoke not as judge and defendant, but as two human beings.
Joe later said: "With the judge there, the walls disappeared and my anxiety melted away. I was no longer trapped in a truck underwater in Afghanistan. I was back in a room in North Carolina, speaking with an intelligent, compassionate human being."
By morning, Joe promised there would be no more mistakes. When the cell door opened, the two men embraced like old friends reunited after many years.
Judge Olivera later reflected: "Sometimes jail is not what a man needs. Sometimes the best sentence is compassion."
We often rush to discipline. But if we fail to understand the inner world of the person standing before us and lack the humility and empathy to enter their distress, we may win the moment but lose the person. At times, our responses do not heal; they deepen anxiety and pain.
Real leadership requires stepping off the high horse and into the cell. It means being present with someone in their fear, meeting them with warmth, and saying, "I am here with you."
When we show people that we are not afraid of them, they begin to believe they do not have to be afraid of themselves.
And this truth applies inward as well. Can we sit with our own frightened inner child—our own darkness, pain, and turmoil—without judgment? Can we offer ourselves the same compassion we would offer another?
The peace we seek often lies beyond the pain we are avoiding. The connection we long for exists on the far side of the solitude we resist. And authenticity emerges only when we stop trying to become someone else to earn love.
Do not fear the darkness. Enter it and bring light with you. Kindle compassion and embrace every part of yourself.
Because that is where real change begins.]

[CS addition:
from: Team TorahAnytime <info@torahanytime.com>
date: Jan 22, 2026, 7:21 PM
Your TorahAnyTimes Parashat Bo is here
Jan 23, 2026 • Parshat Bo
Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik
Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser
When Justice Meets Redemption
The Pasuk in this week's Parsha says, "And Moshe said, 'Thus says Hashem: At about midnight I will go out within Egypt'" (Shemos 11:4).
This wording immediately raises a fundamental question.
Hashem Himself told Moshe that the final plague—the Death of the Firstborn—would occur precisely at midnight, "Ba'chatzos halailah." If so, why does Moshe Rabbeinu convey the message to Pharaoh that the plague will occur "Kachatzos," at about midnight? Why the imprecision?
Rashi addresses this question directly. He explains that Moshe intentionally avoided absolute precision so as not to give the Egyptian astrologers an opportunity to discredit him. Should they miscalculate the exact moment of midnight, and the plague not occur according to their reckoning, they would accuse Moshe Rabbeinu of falsehood. To preempt such distortion, Moshe said, "Around midnight."
But the Zera Shimshon offers a different explanation, one that reveals the metaphysical drama of that night.
That night was governed by two distinct mazalos, two cosmic influences. Until midnight, the world was under the influence of Tzedek, a mazal associated with kindness, righteousness, and beneficence. After midnight, the governing force shifted to Din—judgment, severity, and destructive power.
Had the plague occurred before midnight, the Egyptians could have claimed: "The Jewish people were spared not because they were worthy of redemption, but because the mazal of Tzedek, righteousness, was ruling at the time. It was merely good fortune."
And had it occurred after midnight, they could have said the opposite: "The Egyptians were struck not because of Divine justice, but because the mazal of Din was dominant. It was bad luck."
Either way, redemption would be reduced to astrology. Fate, not G-d. Mazal, not truth. Therefore, Hashem orchestrated the moment with infinite precision.
The redemption occurred exactly at chatzos, after the mazal of Tzedek had ended, and one instant before the mazal of Din took hold. In that infinitesimal moment, Hashem demonstrated that neither kindness nor judgment, neither fortune nor fate, rules history, but only Him.
It was a double revelation: Klal Yisrael was redeemed not because of luck, but because Hashem chose them. And the Egyptians were struck not because of a harmful cosmic force, but because Divine justice demanded it.
This idea finds a haunting echo in modern Jewish history.
A survivor of the Holocaust, who endured the horrors of Bergen-Belsen, once stood up on the day the Nuremberg Trials began and the Nazi leaders ym"s were finally being brought to justice.

"Today I am witnessing a double miracle," he said. "First, that I and my brothers and sisters survived and were redeemed. And second, that Jewish spilled blood was not ignored. Justice has come."
Redemption is incomplete without justice. And justice is hollow without redemption. That night in Egypt, at midnight, Hashem taught the world that history does not hinge on chance or constellation. It turns on Divine will.
And that lesson still speaks to our past, our present, and our future.]

[CS addition:
from: Team TorahAnytime <info@torahanytime.com>
date: Jan 22, 2026, 7:21 PM
Your TorahAnyTimes Parashat Bo is here
Jan 23, 2026 • Parshat Bo
Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik
Rabbi Berel Wein zt"l
Seeing the Light
This week's Parsha marks the culmination of the events that lead to the Jewish people's liberation from Egyptian bondage. Moshe Rabbeinu leads them toward freedom, as the final three plagues unfold, and all the foundational laws of Pesach are introduced.
One of the plagues described is choshech, darkness. But this was not merely the absence of light. The Torah describes a darkness so thick and overwhelming that a person could not rise if seated, nor sit if standing. It was a palpable darkness, a physical, immobilizing force. For three days, Egyptian society was paralyzed.
Rashi, citing the Midrash, reveals something even more sobering. During these days of darkness, a large portion of the Jewish population in Egypt also perished. This tragedy preceded the plague of the firstborn. Jews, too, died, quietly and mysteriously, in a way the Torah does not fully describe.
Later we read that the Bnei Yisrael left Egypt chamushim. While the simple meaning is "armed," the Midrash understands it as echad me'chamishim—only one out of fifty. Even according to the more generous interpretation, only one out of five Jews left Egypt. That means that the overwhelming majority of Jews died in Egypt.
Why?
Because they no longer believed. They had abandoned Moshe and relinquished their traditions and identity. They chose to remain former slaves who assimilated into the lower strata of Egyptian society. When Pharaoh and his army were destroyed at the sea and slavery was abolished, those Jews who remained behind disappeared from Jewish history altogether.
This moment becomes a painful paradigm for Jewish history.
Throughout the generations, we see a recurring process of attrition. Not everyone who begins Jewish history remains part of it. Over time, numbers diminish and entire branches fall away. It is estimated that tens of millions of people in Europe today have Jewish ancestry, yet are no longer Jewish. In the 19th century alone, massive waves of conversion erased whole communities from the Jewish future.
This is not accidental. The Torah itself states explicitly: "Lo merubchem mikol ha'amim… ki atem hame'at mikol ha'amim" (Devarim 7:7). Hashem did not choose us because we are many, because we never would be. We are destined to be few.
Even today, the pattern continues. Traditional communities grow, while assimilated communities struggle to sustain themselves. This, too, is part of the darkness.
And yet, the Torah tells us something astonishing: "U'lechol Bnei Yisrael haya ohr bemoshvosam—And for all the Jewish people, there was light in their dwellings" (Shemos 10:23). The commentators explain that this is not merely physical light; it is symbolic. There are people who live in full daylight and still cannot see, like the blind person feeling his way at noon, surrounded by sunlight yet unable to perceive it. That is the deepest darkness of all.
The irony of choshech is precisely this: for those willing to see, there was light everywhere. But for those who refused to see, the light meant nothing. That influence lingered. Throughout the desert journey, whenever hardship arose, voices cried out, "Let us return to Egypt." Egypt was no longer a place, but a mindset, an inability to rise to challenge, a refusal to trust the future.
This pattern repeats throughout exile.
There is a segment of the Jewish people who live in light, and when one lives in light, one can see one's shadow. "Hashem tzilcha al yad yeminecha." Hashem is your shadow. As you move, the shadow moves. You shape your own destiny.
But for those who cannot see, there is no shadow at all. No awareness of Divine presence. No sense of responsibility or direction. Those are the ones who remain in Egypt.
That is what it means "to see the light."
Rashi adds that one of the purposes of the plague of darkness was to allow the Jewish people to bury their dead without the Egyptians noticing. Had the Egyptians seen Jewish suffering as well, they would have dismissed the plagues as random tragedy. It would have been viewed as something that happens to everyone and the message would have been lost.
The darkness therefore concealed, but also revealed. It revealed to the Jewish people a truth that echoes through every generation: survival requires vision. Faith requires choice. Light must be sought. We cannot control what happens to everyone. But we are responsible for ourselves and for our families and our communities.
That is the enduring message of the ninth plague.
May we merit to be among those who see the light, choose the light, and walk forward with clarity and faith.]

[CS Late-breaking: from: RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>
date: Jan 21, 2026, 10:37 PM
Bo: Liberation, Vengeance, and the Meaning of Freedom
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman
The Torah reading this week, and the broader theme of the Jews' experiences leaving Egypt, provides insights into the modern world in some possibly unexpected ways.
One particularly notable point is one verse that is relevant in two contrasting directions: Exodus 12:22, addressing the night of the plague of the firstborn: "None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning."
One explanation of this is provided in the Talmud (Bava Kama 60a), in the name of Rav Yosef "Once permission is granted to the destroyer to kill, it does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked."
This difficult idea raises important questions regarding Divine morality: Does God actually endorse, and commit, an offensive that includes the unwarranted loss of innocents? This is surprising especially in light of Abraham's argument regarding the destruction of Sedom (Gen. 18:25): "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (see Torah Temimah to Gen.)
However, the two situations are not necessarily comparable. In Sedom, God planned on apparently punishing the innocent together with the guilty, prompting Abraham's challenge. In Egypt, the concern was significantly different. The measure that needed to be taken against the Egyptians as a group was, by its nature, a blunt tool directed against a guilty collective. Those who deserve no part of their fate would not necessarily be included in it. However, this did not mean that they could endanger themselves needlessly through unprotected proximity. The plagues were a warlike environment, one that accomplishes a harsh necessary goal in a dangerous manner. It is the way of the world that such circumstances imperil all who are within reach. The guidance given to the Israelites at that time would be applicable to any battlefield.
The Talmud's explanation here of the mandate to stay inside is not the only rabbinic explanation; a number of other interpretations exist as well. For example, the Midrash Tanchuma has Moses insisting "we will not depart at night like thieves", but openly and with dignity.

It is especially illuminating, though, to contrast that first explanation with Rabbi Soloveitchik's interpretation of the original verse:

"Freedom does not rid a man of his morals, but on the contrary, adds to his morals. The transition from slavery to freedom is very critical. The masters who exploited, tortured, humiliated, find themselves suddenly at the mercy of the slaves to whom they showed no concern, displayed no human emotion. The natural reaction of the one who is suddenly freed is to avenge himself on the tyrant who murdered his baby who disgraced his daughter, who mercilessly beat him for any minor infraction… it is usually a bloody, ruthless, and vengeful transition.. Fear of an upheaval haunted all the tyrants of antiquity, as well as those of modern times. Rebellion meant total destruction… European history knows of the Peasants' Rebellion in medieval Germany and of the bloody Cossack revolt in Ukraine...They were eager to settle a long account of cruelty… Did anything of that kind happen on the night of the exodus?... Did the liberated slaves set fire to the exclusive neighborhood of their former overlords? Did the teenagers at least smash the window panes of the offices where their taskmasters would assemble to plan restrictive and sadistic edicts? Nothing of the sort. Not one person was hurt, not one house destroyed. The liberated slaves had the courage to withdraw, to defy the natural call of blood... it is unique in the history of revolutions." (Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Ex. pp. 94-95).

Rav Soloveitchik here seems to be addressing the mentality of Frantz Fanon, who advocated violence against "oppressors" (real or perceived) as inherently justified, and preached the sanctification of violence as catharsis and moral reset. In "The Wretched of the Earth," he wrote that "violence is a cleansing force" ... that "frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction. It makes him fearless and restores his self-respect." The slave must strike the master so that he can be liberated mentally. Otherwise, he remains psychologically shackled and traumatized by the perceived superiority of the oppressor. It is the mentality that typifies the contemporary terrorist, for whom oppression, resistance, and revolution are the guiding terms of behavior.

To R. Soloveitchik, this is the opposite of Jewish morality. The slave becomes free not by striking his master, but by restraining himself. The blood at his door protects not only his body but his soul as well. Through mastery over himself, he becomes truly liberated.

This echoes the interpretation R. Soloveitchik gave of the commandment that came earlier in this week's reading. The first formal commandment to the Jewish people as a whole, that of sanctifying the new moon, is formulated, "This month shall be to you…" (12:2). The Rav picked up on the deliberate phrase. The slave is now free not because he is no longer responsible, but quite to the contrary, because he is responsible; to now exercise control over time and schedule, to not submit to the forces of nature, whether they be anger, vengeance, or simple inertia and purposelessness. Through implementing the discipline to infuse time with meaning, the once enslaved is now liberated.

The balancing of the two interpretations of the mandate to "stay inside" - the two crucial components of self-preservation - has many implications for understanding the demands of justice, the necessities of war, the realities of collective identity, the dangers of the terrorist ideology, and the balanced moral system the new nation was to embody. It was a bold new vision, then and now.]

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Bo

Break No Bones About It

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

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

At first, in the early part of the parsha, the Torah details the way the lamb is roasted and how it is eaten. "But if the household is too small for a lamb or kid, then he and his neighbor who is near his house shall take according to the number of people; everyone according to what he eats shall be counted for the lamb or kid.: They shall eat the flesh on that night — roasted over the fire — and matzos; with bitter herbs shall they eat it.: "You shall not eat it partially roasted or cooked in water; only roasted over fire — its head, its legs, with its innards: You shall not leave any of it until morning; any of it that is left until morning you shall burn in the fire: "So shall you eat it – your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; you shall eat it in haste — it is a Pesach-offering to Hashem" (Exodus 12:4-7).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The prohibition against breaking bones is not just a culinary exercise. The Sefer HaChinuch explains it is a fundamental ordinance that defines the very attitude toward that Jews should have toward mitzvos. Though we eat in haste, we must eat with class. We don't break bones, and we

don't chomp at the meat; especially mitzvah meat. That fact is as fundamental as the others it is placed with. A person's actions while performing a Mitzvah is inherently reflective of his attitude toward the Mitzvah itself. The Torah, in placing this seemingly insignificant, command about the way things are eaten together with the laws of who is to eat it tells us that both the mitzvah and the attitude are equally important with no bones about it.

International Dateline

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: International

Does the International Dateline have any halachic ramifications?

Question #2: Date

Can you change your date?

Question #3: Line

Did the Torah create a line where, if you crossed it, you could mysteriously leave Shabbos and then cross it back and return to Shabbos?

The International Dateline follows a path near the 180° longitude but deviates to accommodate national borders.

Foreword

Where, what and why is the International Dateline (IDL)?

From virtually every place on earth you can move east or west. If two people start from the same point, one traveling eastward and the other westward, wherever they meet again on the globe, they will be observing different days of the week. The reason is that one has been observing sunset later each day as he moves west, whereas the other has been observing it earlier each day as he moves east. Eventually, the combined differences of their travels add up to a full day.

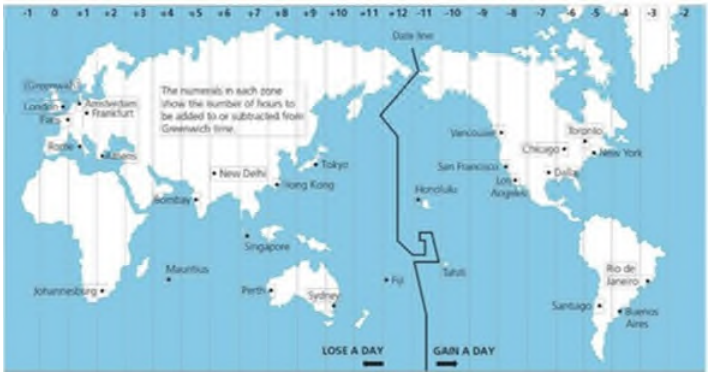
There is no such thing as the easternmost "beginning" of world time or the "last" place to observe Shabbos, unless one establishes a point, line or boundary to be the beginning. When mankind began traversing the globe in the sixteenth century, the European colonizers usually established the day of the week according to which way they had traversed the globe and not with any regard to the location of the colony. Thus, Indonesia, which the Dutch colonized by circumnagiating Africa, followed the day of the week as it was observed in Europe, whereas the Spanish who colonized the Phillipines on their travels westward from the Americas used the next day. If you look at a map, you will see that the Phillipines lie due north of Indonesia.

In the nineteenth century, nations decided that it was a good idea to establish an accepted demarcation line, east of which would be considered as far as you can go west on the day later, and west of which is as far as you can go east and is on the day earlier. Once you cross that line eastward, you have "gained" a calendar day, and you repeat the calendar day you just lived through. Crossing it westward, you skip 24 hours ahead, i.e., you lose a calendar day. This line is the International Date Line (IDL). The IDL runs from the North Pole to the South Pole and is at the 180th meridian, i.e., halfway around the world from the prime meridian (0° longitude), which runs through Greenwich, UK. The IDL is not straight, but curves around landmasses and national borders. It tilts east around Siberia at the Bering Strait, westward around the Aleutian Islands, and eastward in the central Pacific to allow countries that are composed of islands to keep the entire nation on the same date. The 180th meridian was selected as the basis for the International Dateline because it runs mostly through a very sparsely populated area in the vast middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Introduction

Since the time of the rishonim, there has been halachic discussion that revolves around the following: Except for the flat earthers (which no rishonim accept), all halachic authorities recognized the observable proofs that the earth is basically round and that, therefore, from virtually every place on earth you can move east or west.

As described above, an international dateline was established in the nineteenth century, which follows 180 degrees from Greenwich Mean Time, with certain exceptions. The IDL passes almost exclusively through water – predominantly the Arctic, Pacific and Antarctic Oceans,



going over land only in Antarctica, which affects only a few penguins and researchers.

Our question is whether and where is the halachic dateline? Although halachic authorities have wrestled with this question for almost a thousand years, its relevance to practical halacha began in the nineteenth century, when Jews began populating Australia, Siberia, China, Japan, the Philippines, Alaska, Hawaii, Korea, New Zealand and similar areas, as we will soon see. Literally, dozens of books and essays have analyzed the topic, and many different conclusions have been reached. As always, this article is to provide background, and any individual who intends to travel in the areas that will be discussed here should ask their rav or posek what to do.

Stopover in the Far East

I am going to pose a very curious shaylah that I was recently asked which most people would not even realize involves this issue. Someone who lives in Eretz Yisrael had a family emergency on the Pacific coast of the United States and quickly booked a ticket to leave Israel on Thursday and arrive at their destination on Friday morning. They were so appreciative of finding a connection that had them arriving before Shabbos that they did not realize that they had any shaylah until they settled in on their flight. Their flight connection was through Seoul, South Korea, but they could just as easily have made a booking that connected through Tokyo. As we will see in the course of our discussion, either of these stopovers might create a serious halachic shaylah.

Opinions of halachic authorities

Perhaps the earliest authority who discusses the ramification of where halacha might place a dateline was the Kuzari (Book 2, Section 20). This work is devoted to hashkafah and the beauty and importance of Torah, Jewish thought and values and it is not usually considered a halachic work. Yet, based on his explanation of a passage of Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 20b), the Kuzari concludes that halacha recognizes a dateline that is 90 degrees east and 270 degrees west of Yerushalayim. Any point east of this line follows the date of the Americas, and any point west of this line starts its day earlier than Yerushalayim.

The Kuzari's approach to understanding both the topic and the passage of Gemara is followed by the Ba'al Hama'or in his commentary to the Rif's Halachos on Rosh Hashanah. However, this is only one approach to explaining the passage of that Gemara. For example, according to Rashi's approach, which is explained brilliantly by the Ben Aryeh (to Rosh Hashanah 20b) and Rav Henkin (Lev Ivra, pages 51-60), this passage of Gemara has nothing to do with the concept of a halachic dateline.

A disciple of the Rosh named Rav Yitzchak Yisraeli authored a work on astronomy entitled Yesod Olam, in which he discusses the contributions of the Kuzari and the Ba'al Hama'or on the subject and objects very strongly to their conclusions. Among the concerns that he raises is that their calculations assume that Yerushalayim is on the east-west midpoint of the Eurasian landmass and that the distance eastward from the easternmost point of the Eurasian landmass to its westernmost point is approximately the same as the east-west distance of Eurasia. He notes that neither of these calculations is at all accurate. He further notes that, according to the opinion of the Kuzari, two people could stand together and be observing two different days of Shabbos, because the imaginary line 90 degrees east of Yerushalayim stands between them. He objects to this possibility. He understands that the proper place of the halachic dateline should not be 90 degrees of Yerushalayim, but should be at the

east-west midpoint of the Eurasian landmass, which is considerably to the east of Yerushalayim.

The Yesod Olam, himself, locates the halachic dateline 23.5 degrees further east than do the Kuzari and the Ba'al Hama'or. This places it east of most of Japan, although it still runs through Australia, placing both Sydney and Melbourne on the "wrong" side of the dateline, although the Yesod Olam would have had no way to know that. It is possible that, if the Yesod Olam had the geographic information that we currently have, he would have determined the line to be farther east, off the eastern coast of Siberia, and this is the conclusion of the Atzei Hasadeh (page 66) and several other authorities.

In the early 16th century, the Radbaz (Shu't Haradbaz 1:76), probably the greatest halachic authority of his era, also weighed in on the subject, concluding that there is no halachic date line. In his opinion, each individual should continue his count of the days of the week from where he left. When a community is established, it will determine when its Shabbos is, based on the starting point of most of its membership. The community will then have an established day for Shabbos that will be binding on all its members and visitors. Should two nearby communities be established, one of people who traveled from the east and the other of people who traveled from the west, we could indeed have the phenomenon of two nearby communities that observe Shabbos on different days. However, each community, and all members of that community, will always observe Shabbos on the same day each week, seven days after they did the previous week, which is seven days after the week before, going back to when their community first established itself.

Date

The second of our opening questions was: "Can you change your date?" What this question means is -- can the date in a certain place be changed to a day earlier or a day later?

Indeed, I am aware of at least two times that this happened:

The first "westerners" to visit Alaska were fur trappers from Russia. Thus, Russia was the first state to place a claim on possessing Alaska. When this claim was made by the czar of Russia, the date in Alaska was observed according to eastern Asia, as the earliest point – the easternmost point -- of the world. When Alaska was sold to the United States in 1867, its date was changed so that it became the last time zone of the United States, that is, the westernmost point of the Americas, rather than the easternmost point of Asia. Suddenly, what had been considered Friday night and Saturday now became Thursday night and Friday.

A second place where this happened was the Philippines. Although these are islands off the eastern coast of mainland Asia, they were colonized by Spain who governed them as a sub-colony of Mexico, very far to the east. When the Spaniards did this, they counted the days in the Philippines as the westernmost point of the Americas, rather than part of the Far East. This is indeed strange, since Taiwan, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, all island nations lying far to the east of the Philippines, kept their days the same as mainland Asia. Thus, someone traveling from any nearby country to the Philippines found themselves a day in the week earlier.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Holland and Spain were frequently at war in the Far East. At the time, Holland controlled many east Asian islands that eventually became Taiwan and Indonesia. The Dutch repeatedly attempted to wrest the Philippines from Spain by attacking either Manila Harbor or the Spanish navy. Although the Dutch did not succeed in colonizing the Philippines, they did at times capture Spanish prisoners of war, who discovered that, not only were they now slaves, but they also had to change their days of the week to accomodate their new masters!

This situation existed in the Philippines from the sixteenth century until the 1820's when Spain lost Mexico and almost all of its new world colonies. Once Spain no longer governed the Philippines from Mexico, they eventually changed its date to the same as the rest of the east Asian world.

There apparently was no Jewish community in the Philippines when this change occurred. Had there been one, they would have had to ask a shaylah whether they are now to observe Shabbos on Friday!

The Mid-19th Century

Slightly past the middle of the 19th century, such great luminaries as Rav Shemuel Mohliver and Rav Alexander Moshe Lapidus wrote works on the topic of the halachic dateline. They were well aware of the contributions on the subject by the Kuzari and the other rishonim that we have quoted. Most of these scholars contended that, notwithstanding that the Kuzari appears to be the only rishon who provided an opinion on the subject of the dateline, his approach was not accepted by the majority of rishonim and early halachic opinion. In addition, Rav Shemuel Mohliver noted that neither the Kuzari nor the Ba'al Hama'or ever expressly stated that they were ruling that there is a halachic dateline to determine when Shabbos begins. However, Rav Lapidus concluded that the dateline is 90 degrees east of Yerushalayim. Thus, he ruled that Japan, Korea, Kamchatka, Harbin, Melbourne, Sydney, New Zealand and eastern Indonesia should observe Shabbos, Yom Kippur and other Jewish laws as if they are part of the Americas, a day later than mainland Asia.

Rav Kook Torah

Bo: Training for Greatness

Before the Jewish people left Egypt, God made an unusual request:

"Please speak to the people, and let each man request from his neighbor gold and silver articles. Let every woman do the same." (Exod. 11:2)

The language in the verse is surprisingly gentle. God typically commands the Israelites; here He asks gently, "Please speak." Why the request?

The Sages noticed this anomaly. According to Rabbi Yanai, God was asking the Israelites for a favor: they should request gold and silver from their Egyptian neighbors so that Abraham would not be able to claim that God fulfilled the prophecy of enslavement, but not the promise that his descendants would leave Egypt with great wealth (Berakhot 9a–b).

But if God wanted the Israelites to leave Egypt with riches, surely He could have arranged it without any effort on their part. Why involve them at all? Why have them borrow from the Egyptians to fulfill His promise to Abraham?

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

To understand this, we must consider not only the physical liberation of slaves, but also the emancipation of their spirit.

Bontsha the Silent

I. L. Peretz tells the story of Bontsha the Silent, a simple Jew who accepted all of life's humiliations — and he suffered far more than his fair share — with quiet resignation. His life and death passed unnoticed in this world.

In the World to Come, however, Bontsha's arrival caused great excitement. Trumpets blew, important angels rushed to greet him, and he was crowned with a golden crown.

Bontsha reacted to all this commotion exactly as he had in this world: with silence. His silence was due to great trepidation; he was certain that a terrible mistake had been made.

However, when Bontsha's trial began, and the defending angel related the long tale of misfortune and injustice that had been Bontsha's daily lot, he slowly began to take heart. It is me they are talking about!

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

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

The heavenly Judge then turned to Bontsha. "Your reward is not just a small portion of Paradise, but everything. Ask for whatever you wish."

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

After a long pause, Bontsha finally spoke. “If it pleases the Court,” he said hesitantly, “I would like to be served every morning a warm roll with fresh butter.”

A stunned silence filled the courtroom. The angels bowed their heads in shame, and the prosecutor laughed bitterly.

Emancipation of the Spirit

Slavery is not just a legal status; it is also a state of mind. It is not enough to free the slaves. They must be trained for independence, courage, and aspiration. A lifetime of oppression can create a poverty of spirit, in which the highest imaginable good is a warm roll with fresh butter.

The Torah relates that the enslaved Israelites were incapable of accepting Moses’ message of redemption because of “smallness of spirit” (Exod. 6:9). Even in the desert, the former slaves remembered Egypt nostalgically, fondly recalling “sitting by the pot of meat” as they ate fish, onions, and melons (Exod. 16:3; Num. 11:5).

Against this background, we can understand God’s request. Asking the Israelites to borrow gold, silver, and fine garments from their Egyptian neighbors was an educational exercise. It was meant to raise their aspirations above fish and onions; to cultivate dignity, confidence, and a sense of worth.

Gold was not the true goal. Therefore, the Israelites were only entreated, not commanded to request these items. Only for spiritual goals and mitzvot does God command us.

It was not easy for the Hebrew slaves to make requests of their former masters. The Midrash relates that they would have happily foregone the Egyptian gold and left Egypt immediately. But they would require courage and greatness of spirit for the difficult journey ahead. Maimonides noted in the Guide for the Perplexed that the forty years in the wilderness were necessary to instill courage and independence in the former slaves — qualities a free people must possess.

God desires humility, but not the passive meekness of a Bontsha. He desires the humility of Abraham and Moses: great souls, dignified and bold, capable even of arguing with God.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Freedom’s Defence

Bo

Chatting with schoolkids

And you shall explain to your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.’

Ex. 13:8

It was the moment for which they had been waiting for more than two hundred years. The Israelites, slaves in Egypt, were about to go free. Ten plagues had struck the country. The people were the first to understand; Pharaoh was the last. God was on the side of freedom and human dignity. You cannot build a nation, however strong your police and army, by enslaving some for the benefit of others. History will turn against you, as it has against every tyranny known to humankind.

And now the time had arrived. The Israelites were on the brink of their release. Moses, their leader, gathered them together and prepared to address them. What would he speak about at this fateful juncture, the birth of a people? He could have spoken about many things. He might have talked about liberty, the breaking of their chains, and the end of slavery. He might have talked about the destination to which they were about to travel, the “land flowing with milk and honey”. Or he might have chosen a more sombre theme: the journey that lay ahead, the dangers they would face: what Nelson Mandela called “the long walk to freedom”. Any one of these would have been the speech of a great leader sensing an historic moment in the destiny of Israel.

Moses did none of these things. Instead he spoke about children, and the distant future, and the duty to pass on memory to generations yet unborn. Three times in this week’s sedra he turns to the theme:

And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this rite?’ you shall say...

Ex. 12:26-27

And you shall explain to your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.’

Ex. 13:8

And when, in time to come, your child asks you, saying, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall answer...

Ex. 13:14

About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators. That is what made Moses not just a great leader, but a unique one. What the Torah is teaching is that freedom is won not on the battlefield, nor in the political arena, nor in the courts, national or international, but in the human imagination and will. To defend a country, you need an army. But to defend a free society, you need schools. You need families and an educational system in which ideals are passed on from one generation to the next, and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. So Jews became the people whose passion was education, whose citadels were schools and whose heroes were teachers.

The result was that by the time the Second Temple was destroyed, Jews had constructed the world’s first system of universal compulsory education, paid for by public funds:

Remember for good the man Joshua ben Gamla, because were it not for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. At first a child was taught by a father, and as a result orphans were left uneducated. It was then resolved that teachers of children should be appointed in Jerusalem, and a father (who lived outside the city) would bring his child there and have him taught, but the orphan was still left without tuition. Then it was resolved to appoint teachers in each district, and boys of the age of sixteen and seventeen were placed under them; but whenever the teacher was angry with a pupil, he would rebel and leave. Finally, Joshua ben Gamla came and instituted that teachers be appointed in every province and every city, and children from the age of six or seven were placed under their charge.

Baba Batra 21a

By contrast, England did not institute universal compulsory education until 1870. The seriousness the Sages attached to education can be measured by the following two passages:

If a city has made no provision for the education of the young, its inhabitants are placed under a ban, until teachers have been engaged. If they persistently neglect this duty, the city is excommunicated, for the world only survives by the merit of the breath of schoolchildren.

Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah 2:1

Rabbi Judah the Prince sent Rabbi Chiya and R. Issi and R. Ami on a mission through the towns of Israel to establish teachers in every place. They came to a town where there were no teachers. They said to the inhabitants, “Bring us the defenders of the town.” They brought them the military guard. The rabbis said, “These are not the protectors of the town but its destroyers.” “Who then are the protectors?” asked the inhabitants. They answered, “The teachers.”

Yerushalmi Haggigah 1:6

No other faith has attached a higher value to study. None has given it a higher position in the scale of communal priorities. From the very outset, Israel knew that freedom cannot be created by legislation, nor can it be sustained by political structures alone. As the American justice Judge Learned Hand put it: “Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it.” That is the truth epitomised in a remarkable exegesis given by the Sages. They based it on the following verse about the Tablets that Moses received at Sinai:

The Tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the Tablets.

Ex. 32:16

They reinterpreted it as follows:

Read not charut, engraved, but cherut, freedom, for there is none so free as one who occupies himself with the study of Torah.

Mishnah Avot 6:2

What they meant was that if the law is engraved on the hearts of the people, it does not need to be enforced by police. True freedom – cherut

– is the ability to control oneself without having to be controlled by others. Without voluntarily accepting a code of moral and ethical restraints, liberty becomes license and society itself a battleground of warring instincts and desires.

This idea, fateful in its implications, was first articulated by Moses in this week's sedra, in his words to the assembled Israelites. He was telling them that freedom is more than a moment of political triumph. It is a constant endeavour, throughout the ages, to teach those who come after us the battles our ancestors fought, and why; so that my freedom is never sacrificed to yours, or purchased at the cost of someone else's. That is why, to this day, on Passover we eat matza, the unleavened bread of affliction, and taste maror, the bitter herbs of slavery, to remember the sharp taste of affliction and never be tempted to afflict others.

The oldest and most tragic phenomenon in history is that empires, which once bestrode the narrow world like a colossus, eventually decline and disappear. Freedom becomes individualism ("each doing what was right in his own eyes", Judges 21:25), individualism becomes chaos, chaos becomes the search for order, and the search for order becomes a new tyranny imposing its will with the use of force. What, thanks to Torah, Jews never forgot is that freedom is a never-ending effort of education in which parents, teachers, homes, and schools are all partners in the dialogue between the generations.

Learning - Talmud Torah - is the very foundation of Judaism, the guardian of our heritage and hope. That is why, when tradition conferred on Moses the greatest honour, it did not call him 'our hero', 'our prophet' or 'our king'. It called him, simply, Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our teacher. For it is in the arena of education that the battle for the good society is lost or won.

Parshat Bo: The Wicked Child – What Do We Say and What Must We Do?

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

"When you come to the land that God will give you as He promised, you must also observe this service. And when your children will say to you, 'What is this service to you?' You shall say, 'It is the Passover service to God. He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He plagued the Egyptians [by killing their firstborn], and He saved our homes.'" (Exodus 12:25–27)

Who is to be considered a wicked child – and how are we, the parents of the community, to relate to such a child? The author of the Passover Haggadah, in the fascinating aspect of the Passover Seder highlighting the four children, refers to the questioner in the above-mentioned verses as "the wicked child." Why? What is there in the question which would make us think that this child is wicked?

The first reason, which the Haggadah itself emphasizes, lies in the questioner's exclusion of himself or herself from the family ritual: "What is this service to you?" And so the Haggadah explains: "Saying 'you,' he excludes himself, and because he excludes himself from the group, he denies a basic principle of our faith." From this perspective, wickedness as a Jew happens when one excludes oneself from Jewish ritual-familial experiences.

There are other more subtle giveaways that tell us the wicked nature of this questioner. The Torah often prefaces a question with a phrase like "when your child will ask you tomorrow, saying." In this instance, the child tells rather than asks his or her parents: "And it shall come to pass when your children shall say unto you" (Ex. 12:26). An honest question reveals a willingness to learn, but a statement implies a certain superiority. The wicked child, who feels above the tradition, is not really interested in answers – only statements.

To add another discordant note to the rebellious music behind the words of this child, the biblical response is ve-amartem (Ex. 12:27), "you shall say," without the expected continuation "to him," a pronoun which would identify who it is that is being addressed. The answer thereby becomes a general, open-ended statement – giving the impression that the questioner asked and ran, was interested in saying what she thought but not in hearing what the parent had to say. From all of this we could logically conclude that a wicked child excludes himself from family traditions and traditional explanations – it's not that he disagrees, he simply isn't interested.

What might be our response to such a child? It is fascinating that the Bible itself gives one response, "It is the Passover service to God. He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt [when he slew the Egyptian firstborn] and He saved our homes" (Ex. 12:26, 27), while the author of the Haggadah gives another "You cause his teeth to be on edge, and say to him, 'Because of this has God done for me when I went out of Egypt'" (Ex. 13:8).

Why the difference, and what is the specific message of each response? After all, it is critical that we know how to at least try to respond to this most difficult child!

Let us begin with the biblical response.

The Netziv teaches that the wicked child's statement reflects his belief that the Passover service is an anachronism, that it has no significance or relevance because we've left Egypt behind generations ago. After all, he argues, perhaps in Egypt there was a need for the paschal lamb in that it reflected the reality of the blood of the Jewish sacrifice being placed on the doorposts as a sign to save the Jewish firstborn. But now that we've arrived, sitting here at a Seder so many hundreds (if not thousands) of years after the original events, is there any rational reason for retaining such an old-fashioned and outmoded service? The biblical answer in our Torah reading is that it is a Passover sacrifice to God who saved our homes and families.

We must remember that there are two central pillars in Judaism: family ties and togetherness as well as divine laws and directions. The covenant with Abraham emphasized our family-nation-homeland while the covenant at Sinai emphasized our God-laws-service.

On Passover we achieved our national freedom, and the Jewish nation was developed from the matrix of the first Jewish family. A family as well as a nation has shared experiences which have been repeated over tables of celebration passed down from generation to generation, in order to weld the individuals together and provide fundamental continuity between past and future. The family has been an important Jewish value from the very beginning of our history, when Abraham is told that he is distinguished and loved by God "so that he command his children and his family after him that they do righteousness and justice" (Gen. 18:19). And when Pharaoh's servants agree to allow Moses to leave Egypt – but only with the males – Moses and Aaron respond, "We shall go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters" (Ex. 10:9). It's a family affair.

Hence, the Bible tells this wicked child that the Passover sacrifice is a reminder of a critical occurrence at a crossroads of Jewish history, a divine miracle which preserved the Jewish family. It is precisely the kind of family ritual which is crucial for familial continuity.

The author of the Haggadah goes one step further, citing another verse: "And it will be when the Lord brings you to the land which He swore to your fathers to give to you, you shall do this service on that month…And you shall tell your child on that day, saying, 'Because of this has God done for me when I went out of Egypt'" (Ex. 13:5, 8).

The Bible pictures a situation many generations after the Egyptian Exodus. Nevertheless, parents are commanded to tell their children: God took me out of Egypt, therefore I continue to perform these rituals. I am my past; my past formed and informed me. To deny my past is to deny my truest essence; to consciously forget my past is to will oneself into a state of Alzheimers.

The key words here are "done for me." The continuity of the generations requires the ability to transform past history into one's own existential and personal memory. The initial biblical answer emphasizes the importance of familial experiences for familial continuity; the author of the Haggadah adds that without incorporating past into present there can be neither meaningful present nor anticipated future! I am my past.

The author of the Haggadah has yet another message. Despite the fact that the wicked child has denied her roots (kafar ba-ikar), we dare not tear her out of the family. She may want to remove herself from

historical continuity, but it's the family's job to bring her back, to welcome her into the Seder celebration.

The Haggadah instructs us to set the teeth of the wicked child on edge. The phrase in Hebrew is hakheih et shinav.

It doesn't say hakeh which means to strike, to slap him in the teeth, but rather hak-heih, (heh, kuf, heh, heh), from the language of the prophet Ezekiel: "The fathers eat the sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." (Ez. 18:2). The prophet is here expressing the fundamental unfairness of the fact that the parents have sinned, but their children must suffer the pain of exile. Indeed, children do suffer for the sins of their parents – always. Anyone who comes from a difficult or dysfunctional home will bear the burden.

Children need nurture; children deserve parental time and concern. The author of the Haggadah is therefore reminding each parent that just as the child has responsibility to his past, the parent has responsibility to the future. Are we certain that the wicked child's teeth are not set on edge because of the sour grapes we, the parents, have eaten?

Have we lovingly demonstrated the beauty and the glories of our traditions, have we been there to hear her questions when she was still ready to ask them and to listen to answers, have we been the appropriate models for her to desire continuity within our family?

The author of the Haggadah – subtly, but forthrightly – reminds both parents and children of their obligations to each other, to past and to future.

Shabbat Shalom

[CS – Adding this dvar torah:
https://outorah.org/p/81355/

Inside the Exodus: Understanding the Korban Pesach

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

Introduction: One Thread Too Many?

Our discussion this week begins with a mitzvah that will not actually appear until the middle of Chumash Bamidbar. Although not formally one of the mitzvos that commemorate the Exodus – and there are many of those – the mitzvah of tzitzis nonetheless has a significant connection with that event. Indeed, the parsha of tzitzis, which we read daily as the third paragraph of the Shema, concludes with the Exodus from Egypt:

אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹקֵ-יכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לֵא-לֹקִים

I am Hashem, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to be a God unto you.[1]

Developing this theme further, Rashi[2] quotes his teacher, R' Moshe Hadarshan, who explains numerous details within this mitzvah as reflecting aspects of the Exodus:

· The place on the garment where the tzitzis are attached, the "כנף" (corner), corresponds to the verse which states that Hashem took us out from Egypt "עַל כַּנְפֵי נְשָׁרִים – On eagles' wings"[3]

· The tzitzis are attached specifically to a garment that has four corners, corresponding to the four expressions of deliverance from Egypt, mentioned in the beginning of Parshas Vaeira.[4]

· The eight strings of the tzitzis correspond to the eight days from when the Jewish people left Egypt until they sang at the banks of the Red Sea.

This last comment of Rashi has been the focus of much discussion over the generations, for a very simple reason: There were not eight days between us leaving Egypt until crossing through the Red Sea, there were seven – including both of the day of leaving and that of the crossing! Indeed, Rashi himself states this explicitly in his commentary to Parshas Beshalach.[5] How then, can he say elsewhere that the crossing took place eight days after leaving?

The Exodus: Process and Purpose

Coming back to the verse itself at the end of the parsha of tzitzis, we note that it not only mentions the event of the Exodus, but also emphasizes its purpose: "לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לֵאל-קִים – to be a God unto you." Indeed, to lack awareness of this goal is to see the Exodus purely in a negative light, that is to say, to define it solely in terms of what we are not – i.e. no longer slaves to Pharaoh. However, it doesn't touch on what we are – Hashem's people – so that the sum-total of our freedom is simply defined as the absence of slavery. It is our singular connection to and relationship with Hashem that was formed through the Exodus that gives a positive definition to that process. Moreover, the verse later on in Chumash Devarim[6] refers to Egypt as a "כּוּר הַבַּרְזֶל – smelting furnace," informing us that everything we experienced there was in order to refine us of core impurities and enable us to become Hashem's nation. In light of this defining statement, to lose sight of that goal would be to render the entire Egypt experience – both the subjugation therein and the deliverance therefrom – not only incomplete, but effectively meaningless.

"A Festival for Hashem" – For All Generations

This fundamental idea will not only give us a fuller and more meaningful understanding of the Exodus from Egypt, it will also explain both its scope and its permanence. The Jewish people have not always enjoyed the political freedom that they attained on that first Pesach. There have many times in our history when we have found ourselves in conditions that were not too dissimilar to those in Egypt – if not worse. And yet, the attainment of our status as Hashem's People has never left us. It is with reference to that aspect of the Exodus to which we refer in the Maariv prayer when we say:

ויוצא את עמו ישראל מתוכם לחירות עולם

And He took His nation Israel out from [the Egyptians'] midst to everlasting freedom.

Political freedom has not always been with us, but the freedom of becoming Hashem's nation is eternal and ongoing. According to the Meshech Chochmah, this profound idea is expressed in a simple reading of one of the verses in our parsha concerning the festival Pesach:

וְחַגֹּתֶם אֹתוֹ חַג לַה' לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם תָּחָגֻּהוּ

And you shall celebrate it as a festival for Hashem, for your generations, as an eternal law shall you celebrate it.[7]

As if to say: If you celebrate Pesach primarily as a festival over your temporal freedom, there may be generations where such celebration is not warranted or appropriate. However, when you celebrate it as a festival for Hashem, over the relationship with Him as His people that you attained upon leaving Egypt, then it will be a festival worthy of celebration every year – in all generations and for all time.

Initiating the Relationship

All of this should give us new appreciation of the significance of the Korban Pesach that we brought on the day preceding the Exodus. For it turns out that although the full realization of the purpose of the Exodus, namely, becoming Hashem's people, took place at Har Sinai seven weeks after we had left Egypt, the first step of that process was actually initiated before we left – with the offering of the Pesach! Our relationship with Hashem is expressed by us being His servants. As such, the actualization of our status as "avdei Hashem" (servants of Hashem) occurred through the avodah – Divine service – of the korban Pesach.[8] Indeed, this idea was especially accentuated with the first korban Pesach, which incorporated a public repudiation (and renunciation) of idolatry, taking the lamb that was worshipped by the Egyptians as a deity and leaving it tied to the bed-post for four days before offering it as a korban to Hashem.

Understanding the Korban Pesach as the initiation of our relationship with Hashem will explain why neglecting to bring this korban carries the unusually severe punishment of kares (Divine excision). Failure to fulfil a positive mitzvah almost never results in any punishment, certainly not one as severe as kares. In fact, there is only one other example of this, and that is one who fails to perform milah. And indeed, we now understand that the reason for both of these is the same. They are not "only" mitzvos; rather, they both represent our entry into a covenantal relationship with Hashem. Hence, their neglect carries with it such severe consequences.

Moreover, in this light, we can further understand that the Pesach that is to be brought each year in subsequent generations is not merely commemorative in nature, but rather represents a renewal of the relationship that began with the original Korban Pesach in Egypt.[9]

Pesach as the Name of the Offering

Developing this idea further, we know that the Korban Pesach is intimately bound up with the plague of the firstborn, with its very name deriving from the fact that Hashem "passed over" (pasach) the houses of the Jewish people during that plague, whose doorposts and lintels were smeared with the blood of the offering. Here, too, the full significance of this act was not just that the blood on the doorposts acted as a sign that there were Jews inside so that Hashem would "know" to pass over the house. Rather it was a sign that the occupants of the house had involved themselves in service of Hashem, thereby connecting themselves to Him and elevating themselves beyond reach of the plague.

Indeed, the placing of the blood on the doorposts also had a basic function within the mitzvah of bringing the korban. Every korban requires the application of some of its blood on a mizbeyach (altar). The Gemara[10] states that on the original Pesach, the doorposts and lintels of the Jewish houses assumed this role, and the blood that was smeared on them fulfilled the requirement of applying the blood of a korban! Although this appears to be a distinct idea from the blood as a "sign" for Hashem to pass over, upon deeper reflection they are the same. The fact that the doorposts attained the status of a mizbeyach was the product of the Divine presence having entered the homes of the Jewish people to initiate the relationship, thereby elevating those homes to the status of the Mishkan. Hence, the blood on the doorposts, as the sign of that elevation, indicated that the occupants of the house were likewise elevated beyond the harmful effects of the plague.

Feasting at God's Table

Appreciating the role of the korban Pesach as establishing our unique connection with Hashem as His people will give us a deeper insight into one of the central features of the offering – partaking of its meat. Although there are numerous offerings which contain a mitzvah to partake of their meat, this element is highlighted in the Pesach to a degree not found in any other offering. Thus, for example:

· If an animal is brought as a korban Pesach, but none of its participants are capable of partaking of its meat, the offering is disqualified.[11]

· A Pesach that is brought when the people are in a state of tumah (impurity) can also be consumed by them even though they are tamei. This is in contrast to other communal offerings which, although they can be brought in a state of tumah, they cannot be consumed in that state.[12]

The central importance of partaking of the Pesach is also reflected in the Rambam's codification of the mitzvos. Whereas with other korbanos that are eaten, the Rambam categorizes the eating of the korban as a detail within the mitzvah of that korban, when it comes to the Pesach, he codifies the eating of the korban as a separate mitzvah from actually bringing the korban.

Why does the eating of the Pesach enjoy such central status within the korban? In truth, the very idea of eating from an animal that has been brought as an offering to Hashem is itself most unusual. Surely, having been sanctified and offered to Hashem as part of Divine service, the notion of people then partaking of it is seems inappropriate in the extreme! Rather, the aspect of the kohanim – or the owners of the korban – partaking of a korban is an indication of the fact that they, too, are sanctified, to the extent that they have an affinity with food even of such consecrated status. Indeed, the Talmud phrases this idea most profoundly and beautifully by saying, "They receive [this food] from the table of On High."

The sanctification of the Jewish people to the degree that they could partake of korbanos itself took place at the time of the original Pesach offering, for it is an expression of the relationship that was initiated with Hashem as His people. Hence, this element of eating the offering receives such special emphasis within the korban Pesach.[13]

The Clocks of Redemption

Let us now return to the strings of the tzitzis, which Rashi informed us correspond to the days from when we left Egypt until we sang at the Red Sea. The connection of the mitzvah of tzitzis to the Exodus is that the reminder that it serves to fulfill all of Hashem's mitzvos is the purpose of Hashem taking us out of Egypt. Hence, a garment must have four corners to be obligated in tzitzis, corresponding to the four expressions of redemption. The first three of those expressions refer to Hashem saving us from the Egyptians, while the fourth expresses the goal of that salvation, "And I shall take you to Me as a people and I will be a God unto you."[14]

As we have seen, this relationship began with the bringing of the korban Pesach the day before we exited Egypt – the fourteenth of Nisan. We can now appreciate why, in terms of the association of tzitzis with the Exodus, it is that day that will be considered the first day of our freedom, with the day on which we sang Az Yashir then being the eighth – represented by the eight threads of the tzitzis![15]

[1] Bamidbar 15:41. [2] Commentary to Bamidbar Ibid. s.v. ani. [3] Shemos 19:4. [4] Ibid. 6:6-7. [5] Shemos 14:5 s.v. vayugad. [6] 4:20.
[7] Shemos 12:14. [8] Maharal, Gevuros Hashem chap. 35, 60. [9] R' Leib Mintzberg, Ben Melech Parshas Bo. [10] Pesachim 96a. [11] Pesachim 61a. [12] Ibid. 76b. [13] Ben Melech ibid. [14] Shemos 6:7.
[15] See Maharal, Gur Aryeh to Shemos 14:5. [The Maharal points out that while the mitzvah of eating matzah does not being until the fifteenth of Nisan, the prohibition against eating chametz already starts frim midday on the fourteenth, expressing thereby in that in some sense, the festival has already begun at that time. Indeed, the Taz (Orach Chaim sec 432) points out that in commanding to destroy chametz, the Torah (Shemos 12:15) refers to the fourteenth as "יום הראשון", which generally means "the first day". Although Rashi explains, based on the Gemara Pesachim 5a, that the word "ראשון" can also mean "prior", nonetheless, the simple reading also indicates that while this is not the first of the seven days of the "Festival of Matzos," it is still in some way the first day of the festival celebrating our freedom.]