

BS"D

that Hashem has ordained for each and every one of us. Only then will we all be able to dwell as brothers in unity. How good and pleasant will it be!

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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON SHMOS - 5764

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TorahWeb.org [From last year]  
RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG  
BEHOLD, WITH JOY

"Behold, he is going out to meet you and when he sees you he will rejoice in his heart" (Shemos 4:14). Hashem had sent Moshe to redeem Am Yisrael (3:10), but Moshe asked Hashem to send Aharon, Moshe's older brother, who had served as a prophet (Rashi 4:10). Moshe feared that were he to assume superiority over Aharon that it would cause resentment (Rashi 10:14). Instead, Hashem promised Moshe that Aharon would rejoice, not resent. Aharon's heart, which had the capacity to resist sibling rivalry and jealousy, would be rewarded with the choshen (breastplate worn by the Kohen Gadol - High Priest) (Rashi 10:14).

Years later, after Korach sought Aharon's kehuna (priesthood) and was killed, Hashem told Aharon, "Behold I have given you the gift of kehuna," (Bamidbar 18:8). "Behold" (Hineh) is an expression of joy, as in "Behold...he will rejoice in his heart" (Rashi).

Korach sinned because he was jealous and coveted a leadership position (Rashi 16:1). Aharon, who lost his leadership position, was not jealous, but rather happy with his lot (Avos 4:1).

This is the meaning of the expression "Behold". One must recognize that his lot is ordained by Hashem, and be happy with it. Everyone will be called by name, set in place and given a position. No one shall encroach upon your wealth or kingdom, even for as much as a hairsbreadth (Yoma 38b-39a).

The proof text for happiness with one's lot is, "when you eat of the labor of your hands, you are praiseworthy and all is well with you," (Tehillim 128:2). This applies to family, wife and children, as well (128:3). The theme concludes with, "behold, for so is blessed the man who fears Hashem," (128:4). Fear of Hashem leads to the recognition of "Behold" and the happiness with one's lot that results.

Moshe refused to accept his mission of leadership for seven days, until Hashem became angry (Rashi 4:10). Moshe was punished in kind when his tenure as Kohein Gadol was terminated after seven days (Medrash Rabba Vayikra 11:6). At that point, Moshe sprinkled the oil of anointment on Aharon (Vayikra 8:30). The medrash (3:6) interprets the pasuk (Tehillim 133:2), "like the precious oil upon the head, running down the beard, the beard of Aharon," referring to this event. The medrash comments on the repetition of the word "beard", explaining that when Moshe saw the oil on Aharon's beard, he rejoiced as if it was running down his own. Moshe reciprocated Aharon's expression of joy and lack of jealousy.

This story is introduced by the pasuk, "Behold, how good and pleasant is the dwelling of brothers in unity." The same expression, "behold", describes the joy of these two great brothers, Moshe and Aharon. It also challenges all of us to eliminate jealousy and to happily accept the lot

From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org]

Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Shmos

"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Shmos These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 400 - Sh'nayim Mikra V'echad Targum.

What Constitutes a "Gadol"?

The pasuk [verse] in this week's parsha says, "The boy grew up (vayigdal hayeled) and she brought him to the daughter of Pharoah and he was a son to her. She called his name Moshe, as she said 'For I drew him from the water'" [Shmos 2:10]. The very next pasuk says, "It happened in those days that Moshe grew up (vayigdal Moshe) and went out to his brethren and saw their burdens" [2:11].

The Ramba"n comments that these two juxtaposed pasukim both use the same term -- 'vayigdal' -- to indicate the growth of Moshe. The Ramba"n points out that the first pasuk is referring to Moshe's physical growth and the second pasuk is referring to his spiritual growth. In the first pasuk, Moshe grew physically. In the second pasuk, he became a 'Gadol' -- a man of spiritual stature. This pasuk provides an insight into who the Torah considers to be an 'Adam Gadol' [great person].

The Medrash, on the phrase "Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and saw their burdens," states that Moshe saw their burden and cried over them. He would moan "Woe is me over your fate. If only it could be me who would suffer rather than you." He would then roll up his sleeves, so to speak, and participate in their hard labor.

The juxtaposition of the term "Gadol" (which the Ramba"n attributes to spiritual greatness) and the mention of Moshe's participation in the suffering of his brethren is a clear indication that the Torah's definition of a Gadol is someone who cares about the fate of his fellow Jew. The degree to which a person feels the pain and trouble of another Jew, defines how much of a "Gadol" he is.

This is one of the true hallmarks of the great personages amongst the Jewish people. An "Adam Gadol" in Israel is not just a person who is proficient in Torah. It is not only a person who is meticulous about his performance of mitzvos. It is not only a person who is perfect in his personality characteristics (midos). The true Gadol b'Yisroel is the person who empathizes with and encompasses the troubles and the needs of his brethren among the children of Israel.

If we picture in our minds people -- past or present -- who earned the title "Gadol b'Yisrael", invariably we one of the characteristics of such a person was his participation in the needs of the masses.

How does one attain such a level of spirituality? Rav Shimon Shkop (1860-1940), in his introduction to his classic Shaarei Yosher, writes as follows: There is an implicit dichotomy in every human being. From the moment that a every person arrives in this world, he is interested in one thing and one thing only -- himself! When a child is brought into this world and wants to be fed at 2 o'clock in the morning, the child does not care whether his mother is sleeping or not sleeping. "I'm hungry. I want to be fed." That is the only thing that interests the child.

As a child becomes a toddler, aware of the fact that there are other people in the world beside himself, he is still most concerned with himself. This is what the human condition is all about. People are primarily worried about themselves. Yet, there is an obligation upon a human being to worry about more than just himself. He needs to worry about the next person as well. But invariably worrying about the next

fellow contradicts the innate human condition, which is to worry primarily about oneself.

Rav Shimon Shkop asks, "How does one bridge this dichotomy between worrying about myself and worrying about the next person?" The 'trick' is, he said, to expand the parameters of what defines 'myself'.

Most normal people do have a bigger "I" than merely themselves. When a person gets married, his definition of "I" changes. "A man's wife is like his own self." When a person does something for his wife, he does not think of it in terms of "I'm doing a favor for someone else." His "I" has grown to encompass more than himself. It includes his wife as well.

For the most self-centered individuals, their "I" stops at their nose. Other individuals have an "I" that encompasses a spouse, parents, and children. The entire family circle is generally not viewed as "someone else" when we do favors for them.

Rav Shimon says that the "I" of a great person, one who walks in the path of Torah, encompasses the entire Jewish nation. When a person can expand the parameters of his own "I" to include his entire society, he is a greater person. The bigger the definition of "I", the bigger is the measure of greatness (gadlus).

Rav Shimon then provides this astute interpretation of the famous Mishneh in Avos [1:14]: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" Of course, Rav Shimon says, a person must worry about himself, because ultimately if he does not worry about himself, who will worry about him? But "k'sheANI l'atzmi" -- when my whole "I" just consists of myself, then what am I? I am just a self-centered individual whose "I" ends at his nose.

In 1905 there was a fire in Brisk. In olden times without the equipment and efficiency of today's fire departments, fires used to be fought with "bucket brigades." Inevitably, a large portion of the city burnt down in flames. People were without houses. In that period, Rav Chaim of Brisk did not sleep in his bed. He slept in a room off of the shul. His family tried to convince him to come back to his normal sleeping quarters. He responded, "How can I sleep in the comfort of my bed when there are people who do not have a roof over their heads?"

This is an "Adam Gadol." Rav Chaim was a person whose "I" was defined in terms of his entire city and in terms of his entire people.

This could also be the interpretation of the age-old prayer (recited at a circumcision) of "This little child will become a Gadol" (zeh haKatan Gadol yiheyeh). Of the millions and millions of little children who have had this prayer recited at their circumcisions how many have really gone on to become "Gedolim"?

Perhaps we are not necessarily requesting that the little baby become a "Gadol" in learning only. A person can become an "Adam Gadol" in other ways as well. This eight-day-old baby, who is now only interested in one thing - himself, will one day become a "Gadol". He should grow up and expand his horizons such that he becomes more than a self-centered individual (ANI l'atzmi).

People are born with clenched hands. After 120 years, when a person dies, the custom is to unclench the fists. A common proverb is that when a person enters the world, he acts like he wants to grasp it all for himself. But when a person leaves the world, he leaves with his hands open. The task in life is to open up a person's hands so that his concern is not just the "I", but extends to the entire world.

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From: Rafael Salasnik [rafi@brijnet.org] Sent: Thursday, January 15, 2004 1:32 AM To: daf-hashavua@shamash.org Subject: daf-hashavua Shemot 5764/2004 Shmot--5764 U N I T E D S Y N A G O G U E - L O N D O N (O) Shemot Vol 16 No 17 17 January 2004 23 Tevet 5764 BRIJNET - British Jewish Network

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JEWISH VALUES

by CHIEF RABBI DR JONATHAN SACKS

HOLINESS 1

In the hierarchy of Jewish values, the top rung is kedushah, holiness. Unlike other Biblical virtues, kedushah enters into the very definition of what it is to be a Jew. "You shall be to Me," said G-d at Mount Sinai, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." "For you are a people holy to the L-d your G-d," said Moses toward the end of his life. To be a Jew is to be summoned to holiness. What does this mean?

The word kadosh has many dimensions of meaning, but one above others resonates throughout Jewish history. "Holy" in Judaism does not mean "awesome, magisterial, transcendent, infinite." It means "set apart," something that stands outside the normal course of nature.

Ancient myth, like contemporary science, focussed on nature itself - the sun, the stars, the sea, the storm, or today the macro- and micro-cosmos from the birth of galaxies to the human genome. Judaism became the single most momentous leap in the history of civilization through its insistence that there is something beyond the measurable aspects of nature.

That is the revolutionary idea behind the phrase in Psalm 8, "When I see the heavens, the work of Your fingers." Even seemingly infinite space is the work of G-d who is beyond space. G-d is set apart, beyond, outside nature - just as human consciousness, though it has a biochemical and genetic dimension, can never be fully mapped by science. Hence G-d's decision that certain portions of space, time, history and humanity should be made holy - meaning that they should be windows through which we catch sight of something beyond, a distant landscape, an intimation of another order of reality.

In time, the key example is Shabbat. The ancient Sumerian calendar (from which Abraham emerged) was based on the number 6. A month had 30 days (5x6), the year 360 (2x6x30). The day had 24 hours (two segments of the day, before and after noon, multiplied by two for day and night, multiplied by six). The sky was divided into 360 degrees (6x6x10). Western civilization still preserves these last two. By declaring the seventh day holy, G-d was therefore adding a day to the week to represent that which is beyond nature and the predictable movements of the planets and stars.

In space, the land of Israel has a special holiness (it too is set apart from the great empires and continents by which it was and is surrounded), culminating in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. In history and humanity this task was assigned to the people of the covenant. We were commanded to be different, not to negate the rest of humanity (just as Shabbat does not negate the other six days), but to be a window through which humanity might glimpse signals of transcendence. On what this involves, I will say something in next month's column.

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com]  
PENINIM ON THE TORAH  
BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM - Parshas Shemos

Come, let us outsmart it. (1:10) One of the most notorious incidents that occurred after World War II was perpetrated by secularists who were in charge of an absorption camp, Atlit, on the outskirts of Haifa. Here, groups of Jewish youths, mostly survivors of the Holocaust and Soviet Russia, were subjected to unimaginable mental and physical cruelty with one goal in mind: obliteration of Judaism. These children - mostly orphans from frum, observant, homes in Poland - were sent to Palestine through the auspices of the youth Aliyah division of the Jewish Agency, via Tehran. Hence, the name Yaldei Tehran. It was during the terrible incursion against the Yaldei Tehran that Rav Moshe Blau and Rav Moshe Porush came to the Brisker Rav, zl, to consult with him regarding the correct action to take to save these children from spiritual annihilation. When the Brisker Rav heard what was happening, he began to scream and cry uncontrollably. He enjoined them to do everything humanly possible to save the children. Seeing the Rav respond with such intensity, Rav Moshe Blau was concerned for his health. "Why does the Rav scream so much? It is not good for his health. Anyway, screaming is not going to solve the problem," said Rav Blau.

The Brisker Rav replied, "Whether screaming helps or not is not the issue. When it hurts, one screams. To hear about the tragedy hurts!" He continued by elucidating the Midrash that says that three advisors sat with Pharaoh to guide him concerning the decision about the "Jewish Problem": Iyov, Yisro and Bilaam. They each reacted differently and were punished accordingly. Bilaam, who advised Pharaoh to kill the Jewish boys, was himself killed. Yisro escaped. Because he fled, his descendants sat in halachic arbitration in the Lishkas Hagazis, Chamber of Hewn Stones. Iyov, who was silent, was punished by having to endure severe pain.

A person is repaid in the exact manner, measure for measure, as his actions. Hashem will repay accordingly the individual who gives charity to a poor man with a smile and shares his wherewithal unbegrudgingly with others. Bilaam and Yisro received their due middah k'neged middah, measure for measure. Bilaam advised to murder the Jewish boys, so he himself was later killed. Yisro was wealthy and famous. He was revered and exalted by all of Egypt. He turned his back on fame and fortune and ran away. For this, he was granted the great distinction of having descendants that arbitrated and adjudicated Jewish law. What, however, was the middah k'neged middah of Iyov's punishment? What relationship is there between pain and silence?

The Brisker Rav explained that Iyov had many reasons for keeping silent. He was acutely aware that he could not change the decree; therefore, screaming would be to no avail. Iyov felt that if he would not succeed in averting the decree, he might as well remain silent and be politically correct. Perhaps, he would be able to help the Jews later on.

Therefore, Hashem punished him with severe pain, so that Iyov would cry out in agony. Does crying out allay the pain? Does the pain diminish when one cries? No, but when it hurts, one cries. Any person who is in anguish cries out, because it is the normal reaction to pain. Likewise, when Iyov heard the terrible decree, it should have hurt to the point that he could not remain silent. Why did he not cry out? Apparently, the decree did not cause him sufficient anguish to invoke a scream. Therefore, Hashem gave him cause to scream.

But as much as they would afflict it, so it would increase. (1:12)

The Midrash interprets the pasuk in the following manner: Ruach Hakodesh omeres kein, the Holy Spirit is saying, "You say - pen yirbeh, lest it will increase, but I say - kein yirbeh, just so, it will increase." I once heard a homiletical rendering of this Midrash. You, enemies of Yisrael, think that your evil decrees will have an effect on increasing the

pen, perhaps/the doubt factor, within the Jewish mind. You think that the more pain, the greater the persecution, the more intense the anguish, that the Jew will give up hope, will fall into apathy. You are wrong! I say - kein yirbeh, the kein, yes, the Jew's unequivocal commitment and unbreakable bond with Hashem will only get stronger and more enthusiastic.

We have seen this idea demonstrated throughout the millennia. The more they have persecuted us, the greater and more steadfast was our dedication to Torah and mitzvos. They said "Pen"- and we responded, "Kein!"

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was Shifrah and the name of the second was Puah. (1:15)

The Midrash cites a dispute between Rav and Shmuel as to the identity of the midwives. They both agree that Yocheved, Moshe Rabbeinu's mother, was one of them. Their point of contention is in regard to the second midwife. Was she Miriam, Moshe's sister, or Elisheva, the wife of Aharon Hakohen? Perhaps there is a message to be derived herein. Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential Jewish leader, the only human being who knew Hashem face to face, was truly a unique individual with exemplary character traits, leadership qualities and a sanctity that paralleled the Heavenly beings. His parents must have had an incredible zchus, merit, to have such a child. Moreover, whose "gene" did he inherit?

The Torah tells us that Hashem rewarded the midwives by making for them batim, houses, a term that denotes families or distinguished offspring. While Amram was a distinguished scholar and the undisputed leader of the generation, it seems that he was a pacifist. We do not see him taking steps to impede Pharaoh's genocidal activities. He was resigned to doom. Thus, he discouraged any further procreation. He decided that Klal Yisrael should not bring new Jews into a world of suffering and death. Pharaoh cannot kill what does not exist. The image we have of Moshe is in direct contrast to that of Amram. Moshe burst on the scene proactively, exhibiting opposition to the man in whose palace he was raised.

It seems that Moshe inherited his activism and leadership role from his mother, who not only frustrated Pharaoh's efforts to decimate the Jewish male population, but even raised funds and collected food to sustain the impoverished Jewish mothers. Moshe was her reward. Furthermore, if we are of the opinion that Elisheva was the other midwife, we can understand from whom her grandson, Pinchas Hakohen, received his legacy.

I suggest that there is a great lesson to be derived from here. Scholarly pursuit has been our mainstay throughout the generations. We are the people of the book, not only in character, but also in demeanor. A Jew must take a stand for his people. Activism must be secondary to Torah ideals and values, but without Torah activism, indifference and apathy will reign.

Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens. (2:11)

Moshe Rabbeinu did not simply empathize with his persecuted brethren. Rashi says that sam libo, he applied his heart, to sensitize himself to their pain. He wanted to feel what they felt. In order to perform chesed, loving kindness, in the correct and proper manner, one must attune himself to his friends' needs, to those areas wherein he senses a deficiency. Even if he may not be on the same "wave length" as I, my act of kindness must address what my friend needs - not what I might need.

I recently read an exceptional example of this form of 'chesed' cited by Rabbi Yechiel Spero, in his recent publication, "Touched by a Story." Rav Shraga Wollman, the Mashgiach of Yeshivas Mevor Chaim is the Baal Musaf for the Yamim Noraim. He has a unique ability to capture the essence of the day, and to convey its crucial message to all those assembled, as he inspires their tefillos with his melodious voice and

fervent devotion. On Yom Kippur, he returns to the amud to lead the Neillah service. His passionate rendition and his beautiful voice turn the Bais Hamedrash into a sea of prayer. This particular Yom Kippur, when our story took place, was no different.

Well, it was no different as far as the davening was concerned. There was something strange, however, about the Tallis Rav Shraga was wearing. It was not his. It was an old, tattered Tallis that he must have picked up somewhere. Was there something wrong with his own Tallis? Neillah was concluded and the crowd broke into a joyous dance, singing l'shanah habaah b'Yerushalayim. This was followed by Maariv, and everyone began to leave for home. The question regarding the strange Tallis kept gnawing at a few people, until one of them decided that he would question Rav Shraga about why he had used this old Tallis.

At first, Rav Shraga refused to answer, attempting to avoid the question. The more he dodged the question, the more his friend pestered on, until Rav Shraga had to reveal the truth. He explained that shortly after Mussaf, as he walked back to his seat, he noticed an elderly woman whose husband had passed away that year. As he wished her a "Gut Yom Tov," he noted that she was unusually depressed. She acknowledged that widowhood was not pleasant and that she missed her husband terribly. She was used to his company, especially on Yom Kippur. As she spoke, tears welled up in her eyes.

Rav Shraga then thought of an idea. He asked the woman if he could borrow her husband's Tallis for Neillah. This way, when she would gaze down on the Chazzan, she would see her late husband's Tallis. What greater remembrance could there be of her husband? This would bring her comfort and encouragement. Perhaps this Tallis was not as nice as his own, but what it represented was certainly more beautiful.

Chesed means identifying with another person's needs as if they are your own. Thus, if one's needs do not presently conform with those of his friends, he abnegates his own feelings for his friend. The following story concerning Horav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, zl, the venerable Rosh Hayeshivah of Chevron exemplifies this idea. It was 1929, and Klal Yisrael had sustained one of the most alarming atrocities of the Twentieth Century. A band of blood-thirsty Arabs, their hatred for the Jews elevated to a frenzy by their accursed leadership, ran through the streets of Chevron, murdering men, women and children in cold blood. Twenty-five students of the Chevron yeshivah gave up their lives that fateful day Al Kiddush Hashem, to sanctify Hashem's Name. The Rosh Hayeshivah, Rav Moshe Mordechai, became physically ill as a result. His feelings of personal responsibility for the murder of his students never really left him. He took his fatherly feelings of guilt with him to the grave, never recovering from the tragedy.

His clarity of vision, however, never waned. The Rosh Hayeshivah, whose love for his talmidim, disciples, was legendary, never forgot his mission in life. It was the last day of his earthly existence and Rav Moshe Mordechai lay in bed, unable to move, surrounded by his closest students and his children. He asked that everyone but his son leave the room. When everyone had left, Rav Moshe Mordechai turned to his son and said haltingly, "My dear son, I know my time to leave this world draws close. One of the talmidei ha'yeshivah, students of the yeshivah, is to be married tonight. I ask you that tonight, regardless of what happens today, you will encourage the rest of the students to attend the wedding and dance with joy and enthusiasm. I do not want this young man's wedding to be marred in any way."

An hour later, the Rosh Hayeshivah returned his soul to its Maker. Thousands of Jews from all areas of the Jewish spectrum attended the funeral. Rivers of tears were shed for the man who loved all Jews and whose love was reciprocated. The funeral concluded right before shkiah, sunset, at which point Rav Moshe Mordechai's last request was announced to the talmidim. How could these broken students, bereft of their loving and exalted mentor, dance at a wedding? That is exactly what their rebbe had wanted. Indeed, that is what their rebbe epitomized.

That evening, the crushed young men of the yeshivah, their eyes red with tears - the pain in their hearts still fresh and hurting - rejoiced at their friend's wedding, because that is what their rebbe wanted.

Sponsored l'iluy nishmas haisha hachashuva Rivka Tova Devora bas R' Chaim Yosef Meir a"h yahrtzeit 21 Teves With love Menachem Shmuel and Roiza Devora Salamon In memory of Mrs. Toby Salamon



From: Kerem B'Yavneh Online [feedback@kby.org]  
Sent: January 15, 2004 8:53 AM To: KBY parsha  
Subject:

Parshat Shemot THREE "BELIEFS" Rosh Hayeshiva  
RAV MORDECHAI GREENBERG Shlita

At the beginning of his mission to Bnei Yisrael, Moshe argues: "But they will not believe me." (Shemot 4:1)

Hashem responds: "My children are believers, sons of believers," as it says: "The people believed, and they heard that Hashem had remembered Bnei Yisrael and that He saw their affliction, and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves." (Shemot 4:31) Am Yisrael's faith repeats itself on the shores of the Red Sea: "They believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant." Their belief appears again a third time at the time of Matan Torah: "Behold! I come to you in thickness of the cloud so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever." (Shemot 19:9)

Why was there a need for belief at Mt. Sinai after the Torah already states that Bnei Yisrael believed in Egypt and at the Red Sea? The Rambam (Hil. Yesodei HaTorah 8:1) writes that the initial belief was not absolute because it was based only on the miracles that occurred in Egypt and at the Red Sea:

Someone who believes because of miracles, there is doubt in his heart ... When did they believe in Him? At the Revelation at Sinai, where our own eyes saw, and our own ears heard ... From where do we know that the Revelation at Sinai is the only proof that [Moshe's] prophecy is true, that it holds no doubt? Because it says: "Behold! I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever." This implies that before this they did not believe in him with a trust that could last forever, but a trust that leaves room for consideration and thought.

The Maharal, on the other hand, writes (Gevurot Hashem ch. 47) that these events are not different levels of belief; they are three foundations of belief:

1. The belief in Providence, as opposed to the denial that argues: "High above all nations is Hashem, above the heavens is His glory" (Tehillim 113:4), that Hashem does not know and is not interested in what occurs on the earth below.
2. The belief in Hashem's existence, that not only does he exist, but also that he is the Creator and Omnipotent, and that there is no existence without Him. He is not dependent on anything, whereas everything else cannot exist on its own and is dependent upon Him.
3. The belief in G-d's connection with man, that He spoke to him and gave him the Torah.

In Egypt Bnei Yisrael believed in Providence after they realized that Hashem saw their misery and remembered them. At the Red Sea they believed in Hashem's existence after He changed the sea to land, and they realized that the entire existence is dependent upon Him, and that He changes creation as he wishes. Rachav said: "For we have heard how Hashem dried up the waters of the Sea of Reeds ... For Hashem, your G-d, He is G-d in the heavens above and in the earth below." (Yehoshua 2:10-11) During Matan Torah they saw the voices and believed in prophecy and Matan Torah, as they said: "This day we saw that Hashem will speak to a person and he can live." (Devarim 5:21)

This is symbolized by the holidays, the three regalim (lit., feet). They are called regalim because "They are the feet of the religion, upon which the religion stands." Pesach indicates Hashem's ultimate existence and His ability to change the laws of nature. Shavuot corresponds, obviously, to the belief in Matan Torah. Succot, meanwhile, teaches about Divine Providence, as a reminder that Bnei Yisrael dwelled under the clouds of glory while Hashem guarded over them.

According to Sefer Ha'ikarim, Judaism is built on these three foundations, as opposed to the Rambam who mentions thirteen principles. Sefer Ha'ikarim writes:

What seems to me the correct path in counting the principles, which are the roots and foundations of the Divine Torah, is that the crucial and encompassing principles to the divine faith are three, and they are: Hashem's existence, Providence regarding reward and punishment, and that the Torah is from Heaven. These three are fathers to all the other principles of the Divine teachings.

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From: Jeffrey Gross [jgross@torah.org] Sent: January 14, 2004 To: weekly-halacha@torah.org Subject: Weekly Halacha - Parshas Shemos WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5764

By RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights  
A discussion of Halachic topics. For final rulings, consult your Rav

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<http://roshhashanah.torah.org/advanced/weekly-halacha/5762/vayera.html>

#### TEVILAS KEILIM - IMMERSING NEW UTENSILS

Utensils which are bought from a non-Jew, even if they are brand new, require immersion in a kosher mikveh. Just as a convert requires immersion, symbolizing his conversion from non-Jew to Jew, so too, utensils require immersion when being transferred from non-Jewish to Jewish ownership(1). Most of the Rishonim hold that this is a Biblical command(2). What follows is a basic review of which types of utensils require immersion.

Utensils fall into three categories as regards the obligation of immersion: a) utensils that definitely require immersion and the blessing of Al tevilas keilim(3); b) utensils which - For one reason or another-may require immersion and the blessing is not recited; c) utensils which do not require immersion at all.

The halachos concerning which type of utensils require immersion are based on two criteria: 1) The material from which the utensil is made; 2) the purpose for which the utensil is made and how it is used.

Let us review each of these criteria individually:

#### 1. THE MATERIAL FROM WHICH THE UTENSIL IS MADE?

There is one basic rule to follow: The Torah itself mentions only six types of metal utensils(4) as requiring immersion. The Talmud, however, says that all utensils made out of material which "when broken can be melted down and reformulated(5)" are considered like metal utensils and require immersion. The Talmud specifically mentions glass as being the type of dish that can be "reformulated" after breaking(6).

**UTENSILS WHICH DEFINITELY REQUIRE IMMERSION - WITH A BLESSING:** Utensils made from any type of metal, including brass, steel, and aluminum. Disposable aluminum pans which are used and thrown away do not require immersion. If they are going to be used more than once, most poskim require them to be immersed [even before using them the first time](7), while others allow them to be used two or three times and then discarded(8). Utensils made from any type of glass(9). Pyrex, duralex and corelle are all considered forms of glass(10).

**UTENSILS WHICH DO NOT REQUIRE IMMERSION AT ALL:** Wood(11). Stoneware(12). Boneware, ivory(13). Plastic, melmac, rubber, nylon(14). Non-glazed earthenware (flowerpot dull finish)(15). Paper, styrofoam.

**UTENSILS WHICH MAY REQUIRE IMMERSION BUT WITHOUT A BLESSING:** Earthenware which has been lined or coated with lead(16). Heavily glazed earthenware(17). Porcelain or porcelain enamel. Most of today's china dishes are included in this category. There are some poskim who maintain that these dishes do not require immersion at all(18) and one may follow this authoritative view(19). Other poskim disagree and hold that china should be immersed but without a blessing(20). In many places, this has become customary(21). Corningware(22) - follows the same rule as porcelain.

#### 2. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THE UTENSIL IS MADE

The basic rule to follow is this: The Talmud states that only klei seudah, utensils used for a meal, must be immersed. This includes all utensils which have direct contact with food - either during preparation(23) or at mealtime. Since the status of some items as klei seudah may be undetermined or in dispute, we will list different kinds of utensils - some that definitely require immersion, others which clearly do not, and those whose status is questionable and thus require immersion without a blessing. Bottle or can openers do not need immersion(24). A stove or oven rack [or a blech] on which pots are normally placed do not need immersion. If it is common for food to be placed on it directly, like a grill or a toaster-oven rack, then the rack requires immersion with a blessing(25).

Vegetable bins and refrigerator racks, even if the food touches them directly, do not need immersion(26). A serving tray used to bring plates to the table is exempt from immersion. If food is placed directly on the tray, it requires immersion with a blessing(27).

A nutcracker requires immersion. Some poskim require a blessing as well(28), while others rule that a blessing should not be made(29). A fruit and vegetable peeler requires immersion(30). If the peeler is used exclusively for raw, non-edible food, like a potato peeler which is used for nothing else, many poskim hold that no immersion is required(31). An arts and crafts knife does not need immersion, even if the knife is occasionally utilized for food preparation(32).

Jars, bottles, or metal containers which are used to store food but are never brought to the table, require immersion without a blessing. If they are brought to the table, then they require immersion with a blessing(33). Any utensil which is normally used for wrapped food only, does not require immersion. If it is a type of utensil which is normally used for unwrapped foods, then it must be immersed even if it temporarily being used for food which is wrapped(34).

Some poskim do not require immersion for a toaster(35). Many others require immersion with a blessing(36). Important Note: Many people mistakenly believe that utensils may be used one time before being immersed. This is wrong, and it has absolutely no basis in Halachah.

#### FOOTNOTES:

1 Ritva ibid. quoting the Ramban, based on Yerushalmi.

2 See Tevilas Keilim, pg. 34, for a complete list.

3 Our custom is to recite this text whether immersing one utensil or many; Aruch ha-Shulchan Y.D. 120:22; Taharas Yisrael 9; Kochavei Yitzchak 1:10-6; mi-Beis Levi (Nissan 5753, pg. 49).

4 Gold, silver, copper, iron, tin, and lead.

5 Based on the interpretation of Rashi.

6 For a more detailed explanation, see Aruch ha-Shulchan Y.D. 120:25 and Emes l'Ya'akov al ha-Torah and to Shabbos 15b.

7 Chelkas Yaakov 3:115; Minchas Yitzchak 5:32; mi-beis Levi (Nissan 5753, pg. 47).

8 Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:23.

9 Y.D. 120:1. The poskim agree that glass utensils are only Rabbinically obligated. A blessing is nevertheless recited, as in all Rabbinical mitzvos; see Chochmas Adam 73:1.

10 Harav M. Heinemann (Kashrus Kurrents vol. XV #3). There is also some metal mixed in them; Tzitz Eliezer 8:26.

11 Y.D. 120:6.

12 Rambam, Hilchos Ma'achalas Asuros 17:6.

13 Several poskim quoted in Tevilas Keilim, pg. 232. A minority opinion requires them to be immersed; see Darkei Teshuvah 14.

14 This is the view of most poskim, see Chelkas Yaakov 2:163; Kisvei Harav Henkin 2:60; Harav M. Feinstein (quoted in l'Torah v'Hora'ah, vol. 1, pg. 11; vol. 2, pg. 20 and pg. 42); Tzitz Eliezer 7:37; Be'er Moshe 2:52; Yabia Omer 4:8. A minority opinion holds that plastic dishes should be immersed without a blessing; see Minchas Yitzchak 3:76-78; Shearim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 37:4 This is the custom in German congregations. See (Kol ha-Torah, vol. 42, pg. 14) where Harav Y.Y. Weiss rules that a yeshivah may be lenient with this stringency.

15 Chochmas Adam 73:1.

16 Rama Y.D. 120:1. See Darkei Teshuvah 28 who rules that even if they are lined with lead on both the outside and inside, no blessing is said.

17 See Darkei Teshuvah 19 who quotes several views on this issue.

18 Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 120:2; Shalmas Chayim 1:13; Harav M. Feinstein (quoted in l'Torah v'Hora'ah, vol. 2, pg. 20).

19 Yabia Omer 4:8.

20 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 37:3 and Misgeres ha-Shulchan.

21 Melamed leho'il Y.D. 47; Aruch ha-Shulchan 120:29; Darkei Teshuvah 12.

22 Harav M. Heinemann (Kashrus Kurrents vol. XV #3).

23 Some poskim hold that only utensils which are used in the final stage of food preparation require immersion, e.g., a pot, but not utensils which are used in the preliminary stages, e.g., a cookie cutter.

24 Shach Y.D. 120:11. Even if the can opener touches the food it does not require immersion; Harav S. Vosner (quoted in Tevilas Keilim, pg. 233).

25 Y.D. 120:4 and Pri Chadash 12.

26 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Tevilas Keilim, pg. 196). See also Be'er Moshe 4:99.

27 Tevilas Keilim, pg. 213.

28 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Tevilas Keilim, pg. 220).

29 Harav M. Feinstein (quoted in Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 46). Shevet ha-Levi 6:245-4 questions if a nutcracker requires immersion altogether.

30 Tevilas Keilim, pg. 221.

31 Avnei Yashfei 1:146 based on Aruch ha-Shulchan 35-36. The same halachah applies to a pocketknife, etc.

32 Darkei Teshuvah 45, quoting Pri Chadash; Aruch ha-Shulchan 40-45. See Tevilas Keilim, pg. 52.

33 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Tevilas Keilim, pg. 197); Harav M. Feinstein (quoted in Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 45).

34 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Tevilas Keilim, pg. 55).

35 Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:24.

36 See Tevilas Keilim, pg. 208.

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#### TEVILAS KEILIM REVISITED: QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

Last week's column concerning tevilas keilim generated much discussion and requests for clarification. The following is a summary of questions and answers:

**QUESTION:** Do utensils which are manufactured by a Jewish company but sold in a store owned by non-Jews require tevilah?

**DISCUSSION:** Yes, they must be immersed.(1) While most poskim hold that a blessing is recited,(2) some hold that no blessing is recited in this case.(3)

**QUESTION:** Is it permitted to eat food that was inadvertently cooked in a pot which was not immersed?

**DISCUSSION:** Yes. Non-immersed utensils are not treif utensils and the food cooked in them does not become non-kosher.(4) Even if one knew that the pot was not immersed and cooked food in it anyway, the food may still be eaten.(5)

**QUESTION:** Do utensils manufactured by a company owned by non-observant Jews require tevilah?

**DISCUSSION:** No (6)

**QUESTION:** Do utensils which were manufactured by a Jewish-owned company whose workers are not Jewish, or vice-versa, require tevilah?

**DISCUSSION:** Most poskim maintain that the determining factor is the owner of the factory or company which manufactures the utensil - who the workers are is irrelevant.(7) The following rules apply: If the manufacturing company is - a. owned by a Jew, no tevilah is required even if the workers are non-Jewish.(8) b. owned by a non-Jew, tevilah is required even if the workers are Jewish.(9) c. co-owned by a Jew and a non-Jew, tevilah is required.(10) d. a public corporation (or a government agency<sup>11</sup>) which is controlled by non-Jews, tevilah is required. If the corporation is controlled by Jews, tevilah is not required.(12)

**Important note:** As stated before, if the utensil was bought from a non-Jewish store, it still requires tevilah even if it was manufactured by a Jewish-owned company. For example, utensils that were made in Israel are only exempt from tevilah if they are bought in a store owned or controlled by Jews.

**QUESTION:** What should be done if - after research - one cannot determine if the utensil was manufactured by Jews or non-Jews?

**DISCUSSION:** If the item was manufactured anywhere in the world except Israel, the utensil should be immersed and the blessing recited, as the vast majority of manufacturers world-wide are non-Jewish.(13) If the item was manufactured in Israel and the item was bought in a Jewish store, no tevilah is required at all. If one cannot determine where the item was manufactured, tevilah should be performed without reciting the blessing.

**QUESTION:** Does a sticker left on a utensil invalidate the tevilah?

**DISCUSSION:** In most cases, when the sticker should have been removed or will be removed at a later date, the sticker is considered a chatzitzah which invalidates the tevilah and the immersion must be repeated. In the atypical case where the sticker is supposed to remain on the utensil, then the sticker does not need to be removed before tevilah and is not considered a chatzitzah.(14)

**QUESTION:** If a utensil inadvertently falls into the mikveh, is the immersion valid or must it be repeated l'shem mitzvas tevilah?

**DISCUSSION:** The immersion, although inadvertent, is valid and does not need to be repeated. Tevilas keilim does not need to be performed l'shem mitzvah.(15)

**QUESTION:** May a boy under the age of thirteen or a girl under the age of twelve be given the task of performing tevilas keilim?

**DISCUSSION:** Technically speaking, yes. As mentioned earlier, even utensils which fell into the mikveh inadvertently are considered immersed; surely then, if they were immersed by a child the tevilah is valid. But practically speaking, if an adult did not supervise the tevilah, we have no assurance that the utensil was immersed properly. Merely relying on the child's say-so, even a child who is generally responsible and trustworthy, is not always halachically sufficient, especially in cases where the obligation of tevilah is Min ha-Torah. The following rules apply: 1. Utensils made of gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and lead, which require tevilah min ha-Torah, may not be immersed by a minor(16) unless an adult supervises the tevilah.(17) If an adult failed to supervise the tevilah, then it must be repeated by an adult. The blessing, however, should not be repeated.(18) 2. Utensils which must be immersed mi-derabanan, such as those made of

aluminum,(19) glass(20) (including, pyrex, duralex and corelle), glazed earthenware, lead-coated earthenware, china, corningware or porcelain enamel,(21) l'chatchilah should also be immersed by an adult.(22) But if an adult is not available, they may be given to a responsible and trustworthy minor for tevilah.(23) The minor then recites the blessing over the tevilah.(24)

**QUESTION:** May tevilas keilim be performed by a non-Jew?

**DISCUSSION:** Since tevilas keilim does not need to be performed l'shem mitzvah, it is permissible for a non-Jew to perform the tevilah as long as a Jew is standing by and supervising that it is being done properly.(25) It is permitted even l'chatchilah for a Jew to recite the blessing and immerse the first utensil and then have a non-Jew immerse the rest of the utensils.(26) If a non-Jew claims that he immersed utensils but there was no proper supervision, the tevilah must be repeated. Whether or not a blessing should be recited over this tevilah will depend on several factors. A rav should be consulted.(27)

**QUESTION:** If a utensil was mistakenly used several times without immersion, does it still need tevilah?

**DISCUSSION:** Yes. The obligation of tevilah remains no matter how many times a utensil was previously used, even if years elapsed from the time it was purchased. Thus a newly-observant family must immerse all of their old dishes. If the dishes also need to be koshered, then the koshering is done first, followed by the tevilah.(28) But, b'dieved, if the tevilah was done first, the immersion does not need to be repeated after the koshering.(29)

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**FOOTNOTES:**

1 Based on Y.D. 120:11.

2 See Darkei Teshuvah Y.D. 120:81 and Tevilas Keilim 3:2. See also oral ruling by Harav M. Feinstein (quoted in Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 41).

3 Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:21.

4 Rama Y.D. 120:16.

5 Igros Moshe Y.D. 2:41.

6 Chasam Sofer (quoted in Tzitz Eliezer 8:19); Doveiv Meishorim 1:85; Igros Moshe O.C. 3:4.

7 Aruch ha-Shulchan Y.D. 120:58; Darkei Teshuvah 120:81; Igros Moshe O.C. 3:4.

8 A minority view dissents and requires tevilah without a blessing; see Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 37:6.

9 A minority view dissents and permits - under extenuating circumstances - using utensils made of glass without tevilah in this case; see Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 120:12.

10 Based on Shach Y.D. 120:26 See Beur ha-Gra 28. A minority view dissents and maintains that no blessing is recited over this tevilah; see Shoel u'Meishiv, kama, 2:73.

11 Igros Moshe Y.D. 2:39.

12 Harav M. Feinstein (oral ruling, quoted in Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 41). See also Tevilas Keilim, pg. 64, quoting Harav S.Z. Auerbach.

13 Chazon Ish Y.D. 37:15; Igros Moshe O.C. 3:4; Yabia Omer Y.D. 6:12. A minority view holds that the blessing should not be recited; see Darkei Teshuvah Y.D. 120:81, quoting Teshuras Shai.

14 Tevilas Keilim, pg. 122, quoting Harav Y.Y. Weiss and Harav S. Vosner.

15 Shach Y.D. 120:28; Chochmas Adam 73:22.

16 Some poskim hold that merely being over bar or bas mitzvah age is insufficient - to perform tevilas keilim one must display signs of puberty; see Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 120:14.

17 Rama, Y.D. 120:14. If an adult is supervising, then even l'chatchilah a minor may immerse the utensils and recite the blessing; Levush Y.D. 120:14.

18 Based on the view of Beur ha-Gra Y.D. 127:32 that a minor can be trusted when it is beyado lesaken. See also Chochmas Adam 72:16.

19 Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:22.

20 Mishnah Berurah 509:30

21 Binat Adam 73:65. See also Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos, O.C. 451:31

22 Since Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos 451:6, quoted by Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 120:14 remains doubtful if a minor can be trusted in cases of ischazek isura.

23 Rav Akiva Eiger Y.D. 120:14; Chochmas Adam 73:21. See also Mishnah Berurah 437:17 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 19 who rules that minors may be trusted in mi-derabanan cases of ischazek isura.

24 Darkei Teshuvah Y.D. 120:105.

25 Y.D. 120:15.

26 Taz Y.D. 120:

27 Under certain conditions, we may, to some extent, accept a "trustworthy" non-Jew's word; e.g. mesiyach lefi tumo; see Chochmas Adam 72:17.

28 Y.D. 121:2.

29 Dagul Mirevavah Y.D. 121:2; Aruch ha-Shulchan Y.D. 121:9.

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From: RABBI BEREL WEIN [rbwein@torah.org] Sent: January 15, 2004 To: rabbiwein@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Wein - Shemos  
The kohanim and Leviim (priests and Levites) form a distinct and special group among the Jewish people. The Torah grants them special privileges and the Jewish people as a whole accord them special honors. In Temple times, they were the custodians and public servants of Israel in the Temple service. The gifts and tithes of Israel supported them and they were exempted from many civic responsibilities and national duties. They were to be devoted to the service of G-d and of Israel, a holy and dedicated cadre of teachers, role models and public servants. Even today, when Temple services in Jerusalem are nonexistent and the kohanim and Leviim receive no tithes or special gifts from the rest of Israel, they still receive special honors in the synagogue and family and are viewed with unique respect and honor. In the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt, which is described in this week's Torah reading, the tribe of Levi was exempted from the physical toil of forced labor. Moshe and Aharon, the first kohanim, were the leaders of Israel and it is through their hands that the deliverance from Egyptian bondage was achieved. We all know that being a kohen or a Levi is a matter of Jewish patrilineal descent. But nevertheless, there is a clearer and much more universal definition of being a member of this group that the Torah provides, and that definition includes all of us, in fact, every human being on earth.

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon in his Mishna Torah, at the end of Hilchot Shmita V'Yovel, states: "What differentiated the tribe of Levi...was that they were designated and separated from the others in order to devote themselves to the service of G-d, to teach G-d's righteous ways and just statutes to the many...Therefore, they were held apart from worldly ways and mundane tasks; they did not participate in the battles of war; they did not inherit or acquire land for themselves. Rather, they were G-d's army... and the Blessed One sustained them, for it is written: "I am your share and your inheritance." And this is true not only for the tribe of Levi exclusively, but "for every human being that enters this world, whose spirit moves one and one understands of one's own knowledge and will that one wishes to be apart and to stand before the Lord and serve and obey Him, to know G-d and to walk righteously as the Creator intended; to remove the yoke of the many schemes that man pursues - such a person is sanctified and is the holy of holies. The Lord will be that person's share and inheritance forever and the Lord will provide for this holy person in this physical world as well, so that the person will be able to have that which is sufficient for life, as the Lord so provided for the kohanim and Leviim."

This most powerful statement contains within it the essence of the Jewish worldview of life and its purpose. Rambam declares: "Everyone can be a Levi!" That was the hard lesson of Egyptian bondage - namely, that the way for a Jew to escape the physical bondage of society that otherwise engulfs one is to be a Levi. It is because of this insight, that Moshe and Aharon become the leaders of Israel and the redeemers and role models for all generations of Jews.

But in our time, perhaps even in past times, family descent is an insufficient guarantee of the spiritual future of any individual Jew, and certainly of Jewish society as a whole. The road of assimilation in American Jewish life is littered with the descendants of great Jews of previous generations. Hillel had it right when he said; "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?" It is not sufficient for Ephraim to be a Levi by descent and pedigree only. He must become a "Rambam Levi" and the accomplishment of that is dependent completely upon him.. It takes years of Torah study, personal sacrifice and unwavering commitment to become a "Rambam Levi."

The taskmasters of Egyptian bondage, in all of their attractive and unattractive guises, are persistent and cruel in our society, especially towards the young. Moshe and Aharon call out to redeem but sometimes Jews don't hear or listen to them. But the truth of the matter is that we all would like to be Leviim. And true Leviim - "Rambam Leviim" - never toil in the bondage of the Egyptian Pharaoh.  
Shabat Shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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From: ohr@ohr.edu Sent: Tuesday, January 13, 2004 3:01 AM To: weekly@ohr.edu Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Shmot TORAH WEEKLY - For the week ending 17 January 2004 / 23 Tevet 5764 - from Ohr Somayach www.ohr.edu Shmot http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/1415

An Offer You Can't Refuse "And there arose a new king over Egypt..." (1:8) Rabbi Leib Chasman was the mashgiach (spiritual mentor) of the Chevron Yeshiva in the 1930s. A certain problem faced the Yeshiva and it was decided that the issue should be decided in a general meeting of all the rabbis. One of the speakers, a venerable man in his late eighties, rose to the podium. His advanced years and fragility necessitated the help of two of the younger rabbis. Finally, he cleared his throat and began to speak. "My esteemed and honored colleagues hear my words! My body is weak and old. The natural desires of youth no longer affect my judgment. Nothing clouds my judgment any longer. All life's temptations have no taste for me anymore. Hear my words, and be guided by me!" Rabbi Chasman jumped to his feet and pounded the table. "Not true. All desires may wane with age except one, and that gets stronger and stronger - the attraction to status and honor."

Our internal negative impulse is an opportunist. He's always looking for an opening. When one door closes on him, he pushes even harder to get in the other.

"And there arose a new king over Egypt..."

The people of Egypt came to Pharaoh after Yosef's death to organize themselves against the Jews. Pharaoh wouldn't hear of it. "We only live because of them. How can we turn on them?" Their reaction was to depose Pharaoh. He became a mere commoner, no longer enjoying the position of king and the honor that goes with it. After cooling his heels for three months, he suddenly saw the light, did a 180° about-face, and embraced the will of the people. Thus the Torah writes, "And there arose..." - meaning that the former Pharaoh "arose" from his deposed position.

Such is the power of status. Our deepest convictions can be held to ransom by an offer we can't refuse.

Sources: - Da'at Zekeinim miba'alei Hatsofot, Rabbi Mordechai Perlman  
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From: Rabbi Riskin's Shabbat Shalom List [parsha@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: Wednesday, January 14, 2004 2:59 AM To: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column Subject: Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Shemot by RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Shemot (Exodus 1:1-6:1) By Shlomo Riskin  
Efrat, Israel - The Biblical Book of Bereishit (Genesis) depicts the creation of the world and the Divine election of a unique family, the family of Abraham; the Biblical Book of Shemot (Exodus) shows how the family developed into a nation. The family - and of course the nation - is inspired and defined by a special mission it must impart to the world, the message of a G-d of love, justice and compassion who desires - and guarantees - that humanity be united in peace. Hence the family and the nation are to be viewed as G-d's agent or shlichim.

Agency, or shlihut, is both a legal-halakhic as well as an existential concept; the shaliah is often consumed by his agency, as in the case of Abraham's servant Eliezer when he was sent to find a suitable wife for Isaac – indeed, his entire personality was taken over by his task, to the extent that the Bible never calls him by his personal name during the entire sequence of the account (Genesis, Chapter 24). In the instance of the agency of the Abrahamic family and nation, however, what is of cardinal importance is precisely how the agent defines his agency. Thereby hangs the failure, success or degree of success of the mission.

Towards the end of the Book of Genesis, Father Jacob appoints his chosen son Joseph as an agent to his brothers (v'eshlahakha aleyhem), sending him from the valley of Hebron to come to Shekhem" (Genesis 37:13,14). The Sages of the Talmud query that Hebron is a mountain, not a valley!; they therefore suggest that Jacob – Israel make Joseph an agent to communicate the deep (emek, amok) counsel of the righteous Abraham buried in Hebron, the message of the Covenant between the Pieces (B.T. Sotah 11a, Rashi ad loc). Father Jacob had evidently hoped that Joseph would inspire and unite his brothers to carry forth the family mission "to observe the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:9).

Unfortunately Joseph did not yet understand how to unite through inspiration and love; he thinks the only way to unite is through mastery and Kingship. Hence his dreams see his brothers bowing in subservience before him – and he is rejected by them, even thrown into the pit and sold into Egyptian slavery by them. This is hardly an auspicious way to begin an agency.

Yehudah also acts as an agent, during one of the tensest moments in the early history of this very special family. Famine has enveloped the world, only Egypt has surplus grain, but the Grand Vizier of Egypt will only sell grain to the sons of Jacob if they bring him Benjamin. Jacob hesitates, filled with anguish and dread at the thought that he might lose this only remaining son (sic) of his beloved wife, Rachel. At this moment, Yehudah steps forward: "Let me be the agent for the lad...; I shall be a surety (guarantor) for him, from my hand shall you claim him... (Genesis 43:8,9). This is a heightened form of agency, and acceptance of responsibility much as a co-signer for a loan (arev in Hebrew) assumes individual and complete responsibility to repay the loan if the borrower defaults.

Assuming unity through co-signership – the responsibility which says that your obligation is my obligation – is certainly better than assuming unity through control and mastery. And perhaps it is for this reason that Yehudah is given the first-born status by father Jacob on his deathbed (Genesis 49:8,10). But in the final analysis, each form of agency – Joseph's as well as Yehudah's, - is found wanting.

Joseph's form of uniting people under a strong – and even despotic – leader suggests a unity of serfdom before a human master. Indeed, this is the economic policy he brings to Egypt, putting money out of circulation and subjugating all of the Egyptians – their land as well as their bodies – to Pharaoh. He even resettles them from one end of Egypt to another, clearly a form of exile (Genesis 47:14,17,18,21,23). It is difficult not to conclude that between the lines of Bible the descendants of Joseph are enslaved by Pharaoh as just punishment due to the individual who enslaved the Egyptians to Pharaoh!

Even Yehudah interprets his co-signership in terms of servitude: when the goblet is found in Benjamin's sack, he first suggests that all the brothers be enslaved to Pharaoh (Genesis 44:16), and then he begs that he be allowed to be Pharaoh's slave instead of Benjamin (Genesis 44:32). An agency, which announces human freedom, will have to await the Book of Exodus.

Moses is the great leader – and agent – of the emergence of the Hebrew nation. And Moses' mission is to herald human freedom, to punish those who enslave: "And now go and I shall appoint you an agent to Pharaoh to take My nation – the children of Israel – out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10).

Again and again the Bible speaks of Moses as the agent of G-d, a reluctant agent but nevertheless an agent, with the verb shalah iterated and re-iterated throughout the text. And the overwhelming mission – the primary message which Israel must convey to the world – is the very first of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the House of Bondage." (Exodus 20:2) Tragically, the world has yet to internalize this crucial message which Israel is charged to impart. Perhaps the defeat of Iraq is a welcome step in the right direction.

Shabbat Shalom.

You can find Rabbi Riskin's parshiot on the web at: <http://www.ohrtorahstone.org.il/parsha/index.htm>

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