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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON SHMOS - 5773

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SHEMOT

In this week's parsha we are introduced to the most central figure in all of Jewish history - even in all civilized history, our teacher Moshe. The Torah, as is its wont, does not tell us many details about the life of Moshe from the time he was just past twenty years of age, fleeing from Pharaoh's wrath at his killing of an Egyptian taskmaster, until his reemergence as the leader of the enslaved Jewish people when he is already eighty years of age. Legend has Moshe serving as a king of an African nation during this period of time. The Torah only relates to us how he chanced across the daughters of Yitro, saved them from the persecution of their fellow - but male - shepherds, eventually married one of them, Zipporah, and remained in the employ of his father-in-law, Yitro.

On the surface, at least, this is not much of a resume' for the greatest prophet, leader and lawgiver in all of human history. Yet strangely enough this is a template that repeats itself in Jewish history. We are taught: "Man sees only superficially with one's eyes while the Lord sees to the true heart and abilities of the person." The great King David, the messianic forbearer of Jewish and human destiny, was overlooked even by the prophet Samuel as being worthy of founding the house of Jewish royalty. All of Jewish history, in fact all of human history, is nothing more than a collection of ironies, seeming coincidences and unexpected choices and events. All human history is truly a province of God's inscrutable will. The Torah apparently does not desire leaders of Israel who had perfect backgrounds. The Talmud pithily teaches us that no one should be appointed as a public official unless he carries with him on his shoulders "a box of crawling reptiles." In our raucous world of Israeli politics, this adage is many times to an extreme of

observance. Nevertheless it is obvious that great leaders may emerge from strange places and backgrounds. In our own times great leaders and teachers of the Torah community gained prominence and influence even though they did not come from the normal yeshiva world track. Some were literally anonymous figures until their greatness in Torah and leadership somehow emerged in public view. Background, yichus, family pedigree, education and previous experience are all certainly to be taken into account when choosing a mate, an employee, a leader and anyone to whom great responsibilities are to be assigned. But one should always be prepared for the unexpected in Jewish life and especially in leadership in Jewish society.

Moshe, David, the Gaon of Vilna and many others became the unlikely leaders of Israel through God's grace and their own diligence, talents, charisma and devotion to the God and the people of Israel. The rabbis again stated correctly "The people of Israel are never bereft and widowed without leadership." That leadership may arise from a surprising source but it always does arise to guide and strengthen us. Shabat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Jan 3, 2013 at 8:07 PM subject: Parshat Shemot - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

Leadership and the People Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

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The sedra of Shemot, in a series of finely etched vignettes, paints a portrait of the life of Moses, culminating in the moment at which G-d appears to him in the bush that burns without being consumed. It is a key text of the Torah view of leadership, and every detail is significant. I want here to focus on just one passage in the long dialogue in which G-d summons Moses to undertake the mission of leading the Israelites to freedom - a challenge which, no less than four times, Moses declines. I am unworthy, he says. I am not a man of words. Send someone else. It is the second refusal, however, which attracted special attention from the sages and led them to formulate one of their most radical interpretations. The Torah states:

Moses replied: "But they will not believe me. They will not listen to me. They will say, 'G-d did not appear to you.'" (4:1)

The sages, ultra-sensitive to nuances in the text, evidently noticed three strange features of this response. The first is that G-d had already told Moses, "They will listen to you" (3:18). Moses' reply seems to contradict G-d's prior assurance. To be sure, the commentators offered various harmonising interpretations. Ibn Ezra suggests that G-d had told Moses that the elders would listen to him, whereas Moses expressed doubts about the mass of the people. Ramban says that Moses did not doubt that they would believe initially, but he thought that they would lose faith as soon as they saw that Pharaoh would not let them go. There are other explanations, but the fact remains that Moses was not satisfied by G-d's assurance. His own experience of the fickleness of the people (one of them, years earlier, had already said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?") made him doubt that they would be easy to lead.

The second anomaly is in the signs that G-d gave Moses to authenticate his mission. The first (the staff that turns into a snake) and third (the water that turned into blood) reappear later in the story. They are signs that Moses and Aaron perform not only for the Israelites but also for the Egyptians. The second, however, does not reappear. G-d tells Moses to put his hand in his cloak. When he takes it out he sees that it has become "leprous as snow". What is the significance of this particular sign? The sages recalled that later, Miriam was punished with leprosy for speaking negatively about Moses (Bamidbar 12:10). In general they understood leprosy as a punishment for lashon hara, derogatory speech. Had Moses, perhaps, been guilty of the same sin?

The third detail is that, whereas Moses' other refusals focused on his own sense of inadequacy, here he speaks not about himself but about the people. They will not believe him. Putting these three points together, the sages arrived at the following comment:

Resh Lakish said: He who entertains a suspicion against the innocent will be bodily afflicted, as it is written, Moses replied: But they will not believe me. However, it was known to the Holy One blessed be He, that Israel would believe. He said to Moses: They are believers, the children of believers, but you will ultimately disbelieve. They are believers, as it is written, and the people believed (Ex. 4: 31). The children of believers [as it is written], and he [Abraham] believed in the Lord. But you will ultimately disbelieve, as it is said, [And the Lord said to Moses] Because you did not believe in Me (Num. 20:12). How do we know that he was afflicted? Because it is written, And the Lord said to him, Put your hand inside your cloak . . . (Ex. 4:6). (B.T. Shabbat 97a)

This is an extraordinary passage. Moses, it now becomes clear, was entitled to have doubts about his own worthiness for the task. What he was not entitled to do was to have doubts about the people. In fact, his doubts were amply justified. The people were fractious. Moses calls them a "stiff-necked people". Time and again during the wilderness years they complained, sinned, and wanted to return to Egypt. Moses was not wrong in his estimate of their character. Yet G-d reprimanded him; indeed punished him by making his hand leprous. A fundamental principle of Jewish leadership is intimated here for the first time: a leader does not need faith in himself, but he must have faith in the people he is to lead.

This is an exceptionally important idea. The political philosopher Michael Walzer has written insightfully about social criticism, in particular about two stances the critic may take vis-à-vis those he criticises. On the one hand there is the critic as outsider. At some stage, beginning in ancient Greece:

Detachment was added to defiance in the self-portrait of the hero. The impulse was Platonic; later on it was Stoic and Christian. Now the critical enterprise was said to require that one leave the city, imagined for the sake of the departure as a darkened cave, find one's way, alone, outside, to the illumination of Truth, and only then return to examine and reprove the inhabitants. The critic-who-returns doesn't engage the people as kin; he looks at them with a new objectivity; they are strangers to his new-found Truth.

This is the critic as detached intellectual. The prophets of Israel were quite different. Their message, writes Johannes Lindblom, was "characterized by the principle of solidarity". "They are rooted, for all their anger, in their own societies," writes Walzer. Like the Shunamite woman (Kings 2 4:13), their home is "among their own people". They speak, not from outside, but from within. That is what gives their words power. They identify with those to whom they speak. They share their history, their fate, their calling, their covenant. Hence the peculiar paths of the prophetic calling. They are the voice of G-d to the people, but they are also the voice of the people to G-d. That, according to the sages, was what G-d was teaching Moses: What matters is not whether they believe in you, but whether you believe in them. Unless you believe in them, you cannot lead in the way a prophet must lead. You must identify with them and have faith in them, seeing not only their surface faults but also their underlying virtues. Otherwise, you will be no better than a detached intellectual – and that is the beginning of the end. If you do not believe in the people, eventually you will not even believe in G-d. You will think yourself superior to them, and that is a corruption of the soul.

The classic text on this theme is Maimonides' Epistle on Martyrdom. Written in 1165, when Maimonides was thirty years old, it was occasioned by a tragic period in medieval Jewish history when an extremist Muslim sect, the Almohads, forced many Jews to convert to Islam under threat of death. One of the forced converts (they were called *anusim*; later they became known as *marranos*) asked a rabbi whether he

might gain merit by practising as many of the Torah's commands as he could in secret. The rabbi sent back a dismissive reply. Now that he had forsaken his faith, he wrote, he would achieve nothing by living secretly as a Jew. Any Jewish act he performed would not be a merit but an additional sin.

Maimonides' Epistle is a work of surpassing spiritual beauty. He utterly rejects the rabbi's reply. Those who keep Judaism in secret are to be praised, not blamed. He quotes a whole series of rabbinic passages in which G-d rebukes prophets who criticised the people of Israel, including the one above about Moses. He then writes:

If this is the sort of punishment meted out to the pillars of the universe – Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and the ministering angels – because they briefly criticized the Jewish congregation, can one have an idea of the fate of the least among the worthless [i.e. the rabbi who criticized the forced converts] who let his tongue loose against Jewish communities of sages and their disciples, priests and Levites, and called them sinners, evildoers, gentiles, disqualified to testify, and heretics who deny the Lord G-d of Israel?

The Epistle is a definitive expression of the prophetic task: to speak out of love for one's people; to defend them, see the good in them, and raise them to higher achievements through praise, not condemnation.

Who is a leader? To this, the Jewish answer is, one who identifies with his or her people, mindful of their faults, to be sure, but convinced also of their potential greatness and their preciousness in the sight of G-d. "Those people of whom you have doubts," said G-d to Moses, "are believers, the children of believers. They are My people, and they are your people. Just as you believe in Me, so you must believe in them."

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<http://www.njop.org/html/printfiles/Shemot5773-2012print.html>
Shemot 5773-2013

"The Role of Exile in Jewish History" by Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Shemot, the book of Exodus opens with the story of the people of Israel's enslavement in the land of Egypt.

From the time of Abraham, the fate of exile, enslavement and persecution for the Jewish people was already etched in stone. In the Covenant Between the Pieces, G-d told Abraham, Genesis 15:13-14, that he should know with certainty that his offspring will be strangers in a land that is not their own. In exile, the people will be enslaved and oppressed for 400 years. G-d also predicted that He will judge the nation that enslaves the Israelites, and that afterwards, the people of Israel will leave with great wealth. The questions remained: What country would enslave Israel and by what means would Israel enter into exile, to experience the enslavement and persecution? Two Midrashim describe the Divine process of bringing the Children of Israel down to Egypt and fulfilling the prediction of the Covenant Between the Pieces. The Midrash Tanchuma on Genesis 39:1 explains: This is comparable to a cow, upon whom it was desired to place a yoke [so she could plow]. But the cow was withholding her neck from the yoke. What did they do? They took her calf from behind her, and drew him to the place where they wanted her [the cow] to plow, and the calf was bleating. When the cow heard her calf bleating, she went despite herself, because of her child. By the same token, G-d wished to fulfill the decree (Genesis 15:13), "Know with certainty that your children will be strangers in a land that is not their own..." So He plotted all these events [of Joseph's sale to Egypt]... The Midrash Rabba adds the following details: Jacob might have been brought down to Egypt in chains. But, then G-d declared: "He is My first born son; shall I then bring him down in disgrace? Now, if I provoke Pharaoh [with the intention of bringing Jacob down], I will not bring him down with befitting honor. Therefore,

I will draw his son [Joseph] before him, so he will follow despite himself.” It is not by chance that this week’s parasha, parashat Shemot, opens with the declaration, Exodus 1:1, “V’ay’leh shemot b’nay Yisrael ha’bah’eem Mitzraymah,” And these are the names of the children of Israel, who are coming to Egypt. This statement is a word-for-word repetition of the first words of the verse found in Genesis 46:8, which describe the seventy souls who went with Jacob down to Egypt, after Joseph revealed himself. The verse in Genesis introduces the exile, as the family begins the process of descending to Egypt. With the opening of the book of Exodus, the narrative of the exile develops, until it ends with the miracle of the exodus and the giving of the Torah at Sinai. In one of her exceptionally brilliant discourses found in Studies on Exodus, Professor Nehama Leibowitz, offers a compelling analysis of the role that exile plays in the history of the Jewish people. Professor Leibowitz cites Professor Isaak Heinemann’s introduction to the book of Exodus, in which Professor Heinemann draws a distinction between the scientific/historic approach to exile and the homiletic/Midrashic approach to exile. Science asks: What motivated Egypt’s persecution and enslavement of Israel? The Midrash asks: Why was Israel persecuted and enslaved more than any other nation in the world? Professor Leibowitz notes two distinctions between the questions. Science is concerned only with the first exile of the Jewish people to Egypt, 3,500 years ago and seeks to determine what was the immediate cause of the persecution? The Midrash wants to know the underlying reason for persecution and why there is a recurring pattern of exile that began with Egypt, but continues to our very day? In her penetrating analysis, Professor Leibowitz asks: What was the reason for the people’s exile to Egypt? Citing the normative Jewish understanding of evil, Professor Leibowitz states, “Like all other calamities that have overtaken us, this exile too was a punishment for sin.” What was the particular sin of the Jewish people in this case? Their desire to assimilate. As proof of the people’s massive assimilation, Professor Leibowitz notes that when the children of Jacob first entered Egypt, they declared to Pharaoh (Genesis 47:4), that they intended to stay in Egypt only temporarily, “La’goor ba’ah’retz bah’noo.” Eventually, however, Genesis 47:27 reports, “Vah’yay’shev Yisrael... vah’yay’ah’chah’zoo vah,” that not only did the sons of Jacob settle in Egypt, they took permanent foothold in Egypt! Furthermore, the Midrash Rabba on the verse (Exodus 1:8), “Now a new king arose,” notes, “This teaches you, that when Joseph died, they [the Jews in Egypt] abrogated the rite of circumcision. They said, “Let us be like the Egyptians.” Because they did so, the Holy One, blessed be He, turned the love that the Egyptians bore them, into hatred... The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni also confirms that the Jews of Egypt were entirely assimilated. On the verse (Exodus 1:7), “And the land was filled with them,” the Yalkut Shimoni explains, that the amphitheaters and circuses of Egypt were filled with Hebrews. The Ha’amek Davar points out cogently, that, originally, Joseph had arranged for the Jewish people to reside in an exclusive ghetto area in the land of Goshen. The fact that during the tenth plague, the Al-mighty had to pass over the homes of the Hebrews that had the mark of the blood on the door, indicates that the Jews had forsaken Goshen, and were now entirely dispersed, living in Egyptian neighborhoods into which they had assimilated. Says the Ha’amek Davar, “the Israelites were punished for violating Jacob’s wish that they should live apart from the Egyptians in Goshen. The Midrash relates that they wished to be like the Egyptians. As a result of intermingling with them, they preferred to imitate them, and not be different. This is the reason why we [Jews] suffer persecution in every age, because we do not desire to keep apart from the nations.” Nehama Leibowitz points out a keen difference between the approach of the Midrash and the approach of the Ha’amek Davar. According to the Midrash, the punishment that the Israelites experienced emanated directly from Heaven. G-d turned the love with which the Egyptians bore them, into hatred. The Ha’amek Davar, who sees the punishment as a

natural consequence of the people’s desire to assimilate, insists that the Jews brought the hardships upon themselves. The non-Jewish nations particularly resent the Jewish minority invading their economic and cultural life. The approach of both the Midrash and the Ha’amek Davar, who see exile and persecution as a result of Jewish sinfulness, is of course, very troubling. However, there seems to be much in Jewish rabbinic literature to corroborate that assumption. The rise of Amalek is attributed to the rejection of Timnah, who came to each of the Patriarchs, pleading to convert. The cries of the Jews in the times of wicked Haman is attributed to the cries of Esau, who felt that he had been cheated of his birthright and his blessing. The forty years of wandering in the wilderness, is directly attributable to the ten scouts who came back from Canaan with an evil report. The destruction of the First Temple, is attributed to the violation of the three cardinal sins of idolatry, sexual immorality and murder. The destruction of the Second Temple, is attributed to Sin’ah’t Chee’nam, wanton hatred among the Jewish people. What then could the Jewish people have possibly done to deserve the Holocaust? It is a question that we dare not ask, one that shakes the very foundations of our existential beliefs. Fortunately, Professor Leibowitz offers a second approach, also culled from traditional sources. Professor Leibowitz refers to a number of Midrashim that regard the sufferings and the exiles of the Jewish people, not as punishment, but as a source of inspiration, one that serves a vital educational purpose. Citing the verse in Proverbs 13:24, “Spare the rod and spoil the child,” the Midrash in Shemot Rabba claims that whoever spares his son corrective punishment, drives him to delinquency and hates him. The fact that Absalom fell into evil ways, is attributed to the fact that his father, King David, failed to correct him. Declares Professor Leibowitz, “Exile and suffering are here invested with the refining and purificatory character.” Professor Leibowitz cites a host of Torah verses to substantiate this viewpoint: Exodus 22:20 declares that one must not wrong a stranger or oppress him. Exodus 23:9 demands that Jews not oppress a stranger. Deuteronomy 16:11 insists that a Jew must “Rejoice before the Lord...the stranger, a widow and fatherless.” Deuteronomy 5:14-15 declares that “your manservant and maidservant may rest like thee.” Deuteronomy 15:14-15 insists that a Jew must provide payment for a slave upon his release. Leviticus 25:43 prohibits one from being cruel to a servant. In each case, the Bible attributes the reason for this highly moral behavior to the fact that Jews must always remember that they were once strangers and slaves in the land of Egypt. All of these, are lessons that the Jewish people were supposed to learn from their own bitter experiences in Egypt. From this vantage point, suffering and exile must be seen not as a punishment for what the People of Israel have done, but as a lesson of what we must not do to others. The question then remains: Is it not possible to learn these lessons through education, rather than coercion and suffering? Is it only possible to receive an ethical and moral education, through pain and hurt. This, of course, is a most germane question to ask, in light of the Newtown, Connecticut massacre. Must it take the pain of twenty dead children and six adults, for our country to come to its senses? While intelligent people might argue over the merits of banning assault weapons, rifles and other instruments of wanton destruction, many will agree that our culture fails to sufficiently promote proper reverence for the sanctity of life. Without a fundamental appreciation for the sanctity of human life in our country, no amount of laws and firearms restrictions will effectively prevent such recurring tragedies. Our children are fed on a constant diet of murder and violence on television, in books, newspapers, video games, and violent sports, such as wrestling, football, boxing, and more. 85% of entertainment in America features sex or violence. Little or nothing is done to promote or profile good. Should we then be surprised that violence of this magnitude strikes? If we see exile as a punishment, we need to mend our ways. If we see exile as an educational opportunity, we need to learn to appreciate its lessons. Can it be done without pain? At

least according to the analysis of Nehama Leibowitz, apparently not. Hopefully, we have already experienced the pain, and can now proceed to repair our society. May you be blessed.

Rabbi Frand - Parshas Shemos **Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

<ryfrand@torah.org> 12:05 PM (11 hours ago) Parshas Shemos

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #796 – English Names Revisited. Good Shabbos!

Jews Are Like The Stars

The first Rashi in the Parsha notes "Even though He enumerated the tribes during their lifetime, He counted them again after their death to make known how precious they are because they are compared to the stars which He brings out and brings in by number and by their names, as it is written: 'He Who takes out their hosts by number; He calls them all by name' [Yeshaya 40:26]." Another pasuk is more familiar than the pasuk Rashi quotes from the prophet Yeshiyahu because it is recited as part of our (Pesukei d'Zimra) prayers: "The One Who counts the number of the stars, to all of them He gives names" [Tehillim 147:4]

The (present) Munczatzcher Rebbe makes an interesting observation: The Torah says that Hashem brought all the animals in front of Adam and asked him to give them all names, which he did. The commentaries tell us this was not an arbitrary exercise in labeling the animal kingdom, but each name was appropriate to the specific creature and was basically a definition of what that animal was all about.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch points out that the Hebrew word for "name" is "shem", which has the same letters as the word "shum", meaning "there". A "shem" therefore defines where an object is. It is "shum" – there! Adam possessed the great wisdom to look at all the creatures and give them appropriate names.

But, the Munczatzcher Rebbe said, Adam only had that ability regarding the animals, but regarding the stars, even Adam in his great wisdom was NOT able to name them. Only the Almighty is capable of naming the stars. The stars are so numerous and so vast, so overwhelming and so complex, that only the Master of the World could name them.

We look at the stars and they seem all the same to us. Hashem is able to look at the billions and trillions of stars and define the uniqueness of each one! The Rebbe adds that when Hashem took Avram outside and told him "Gaze now toward the Heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them, so too will be your seed" [Bereshis 15:5], He meant the following: Even though there will be millions of Jews and seemingly all are very similar, each Jew in his own right is so complex and so different that he is like the stars. Each one is unique and is a world unto himself.

When we stand on this planet and sometimes think of our insignificance because of the vast number of people with whom we share the planet – even in comparison with the vast number of other Jews out there – we must bear in mind that Jews are like the stars. Just as the Ribono shel Olam can give names to the stars because He perceives the uniqueness in each, so too are the children of Avraham unique as well. We may be vast and numerous and superficially quite similar to one another, but each of us is a world unto himself and the Almighty knows the difference between each and every one of us.

Newborn Children Represent Bundles of Potential

Moshe's sister inquired of Pharaoh's daughter – who had just found the baby Moshe floating in a basket on the Nile – "Shall I call for you a wet nurse from amongst the Hebrew women?" [Shmos 2:7] The Talmud [Sotah 12b] says that Moshe refused to nurse from an Egyptian woman. "Shall the mouth which is destined to speak with the Divine Presence suck something which is impure?" [In other words, Egyptian women consumed impure food items which would find its way into their milk

supply which would ultimately affect the infant who would be nourished from such milk.]

The Ramoh writes [Yoreh Deah 81] that when it possible to obtain a Jewish nursemaid, one should not permit a Jewish child to nurse from a non-Jewish woman, because such nursing can have an effect on the child later on in life. The Vilna Gaon references the Gemara in Sotah as a source for this halacha.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks: How can this Gemara be the source that a Jewish child should not nurse from a non-Jewish woman? The reason the Gemara gives is "Shall the mouth which is destined to speak with the Divine Presence suck something which is impure?" Which baby born today (or 500 years ago at the time of the Ramoh) is likely to talk to the Divine Presence at some time in his life? Moshe was a "special case" which should not be cited as precedent for a practical halachic matter in this area!

Rav Yaakov writes that we see from here that we must look at every single Jewish baby as a bundle of potential that maybe one day will speak with the Shechinah. Maybe the Bais HaMikdash will be speedily rebuilt, the Moshiach will come, prophecy will be restored, and this little baby born today could have a mouth which will speak with the Divine Presence.

Rav Moshe Feinstein points out that when Moshe is born (in Parshas Shmos), the Torah doesn't make a big deal of his genealogy (yichus). The Torah merely states "A man went from the House of Levy and he married the daughter of Levy..." It is only later in Parshas Vayera when Moshe is about to appear before Pharaoh at the beginning of his mission of deliverance that the Torah tells us exactly who his father was and from who he descended.

Rav Moshe explains that when a child is born we do not know what will become of him. Every baby is an unknown. But that "unknown" is potentially a "mouth who will speak with the Shechinah".

A number of years ago, I heard the following amazing story. There was a meeting of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of Agudas Yisrael. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky happened to be staying in Flatbush at the home of his son, Rav Avraham Kamenetsky and he hosted the meeting there. His daughter-in-law (who was pregnant at the time) brought out cake and tea for the distinguished Roshei Yeshiva. They ate in the dining room and were about to retire into another room to have their meeting.

A question of protocol arose as to who should leave the room first. The daughter-in-law assumed that she should let her distinguished guests leave the room first. Rav Yaakov insisted that she be the first to leave the room: Perhaps she is pregnant with the Moshiach so she should go through the door first: Maybe she is carrying the future savior of Israel, who would trump all the Roshei Yeshiva in the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah!

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Shmos are provided below: Tapes, CDs, MP3s or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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Moses at the Burning Bush

by Rabbi Yehuda Appel

Shmot(Exodus 1:1-6:1)

Moses at the Burning Bush

In her novel, "Briefing for a Descent into Hell," Dorris Lessing makes the point that perception is largely dependent on what we expect to perceive. A character in her novel observes that whole armies of angels could fly past a person, but if that person were not expecting such a phenomenon, it would likely go unnoticed. The Torah commentators make this same point by asking why the Bible, in introducing us to Abraham, is seemingly silent about his virtues. Why aren't we told what made Abraham worthy to have a close relationship with the Almighty?

The answer is that the Torah is actually telling us about Abraham's greatness just by the mere fact that Abraham heard the Almighty's call. While God talks to many, only Abraham was able to perceive His words.

One of the most remarkable "perceptions" of all-time appears in this week's Torah portion, Shmot. In the Parsha, Moses is shepherding his father-in-law's sheep in the middle of the desert. Suddenly, Moses spots an extraordinary phenomenon: a bush is burning, yet is not consumed. Curious to know what is going on, he turns towards the Bush and ...

suddenly a voice is heard. God speaks to Moses and charges him with the responsibility of saving the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. There is much discussion amongst the Torah commentators as to why the Almighty would choose the vision of a Burning Bush to initiate His contact with Moses. Rashi sees the Burning Bush as a symbol of God's sheltering presence during times when the Jews will go through "burning difficulties." Just as the Bush is sustained because the Almighty supports its existence, so too will the Almighty support the Jewish people's survival in their time of need. Rabbenu Bechaya offers two additional interpretations. He quotes a Midrash that notes the Hebrew word for bush ("Sneh") is similar in spelling to the Hebrew word "Sinai." This Midrash sees the Burning Bush, then, as a symbol of the fire which will burn atop Mount Sinai during the giving of the Ten Commandments. On another level, Rabbenu Bechaya suggests that the image of the Burning Bush is a paradigm for all physical reality. Since the physical world is a product of Godly, spiritual creation, it is logical to assume that the physical universe should be consumed by the overwhelmingly powerful spiritual flow emanating from God. The continued existence of the entire physical universe, therefore, is very much like the continued existence of this Burning Bush. Through the symbolism of the Bush, the Almighty gave His reassurance to sustain the world.

* * *

Perhaps the most striking observation is made by the Sforno. He says that at the Bush, Moses was receiving a lesser level of prophecy than he would receive in later years. Jewish thought maintains that there was a crucial, substantive difference between Moses' and all other prophets' prophecies. While all other prophets received God's messages in the form of images that had to be subsequently interpreted, Moses heard God's word directly without the need for intermediary images. The Burning Bush, however, is the one exception to this rule, and suggests that Moses' spiritual perceptions still were in need of development. The Tosafot Daa't Zekanim also note that a bush cannot be used for idol worship and thus Moses was hearing God's will from a medium that would be free of all spiritual pollution. Other Midrashim see the Bush as a sign of humility, signaling to Moses that God dwells with the truly humble. Just as the Burning Bush is a symbol of lowliness, but pregnant with possibilities beyond the natural order, so too would Moses' later prophecies go beyond what he could spiritually perceive at the present

moment ... taking him to heights that no other human would ever achieve in history.

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<http://www.aish.com/ci/s/Sandy-Hook-A-Jewish-Antidote.html>

Sandy Hook: A Jewish Antidote

by Rabbi Emanuel Feldman

How the Torah instills moral sensitivity and self-discipline.

What more is there to say about the Newtown massacre? Questions, answers, and accusing fingers punctuate the air. Can a human being do such a thing? Is this an aberration, an exception, or is this a reflection of something deeply implanted within American society? How is it that other countries have not experienced such wholesale bloodletting?

On a physical and transcendental level, the questions haunt us. The enormity of the evil strikes us dumb – though there is the concurrent the inherent goodness of the teachers who protected the children with their own bodies.

The proposed remedies are familiar: more gun control, since America has more than 280 million civilian firearms now in circulation, with a murder rate more than fifteen times that of other developed countries; curbing television, movie, and video violence; teaching self-control and anger management to our young people. All good, all well-meaning – and all only stop-gap measures that do not address a fundamental issue: the nature of man.

Left to his own devices, a person will remain a rapacious, self-centered infant. There are, of course, no quick fixes, but Judaism offers some useful insights. The Talmud (Kiddushin 30b) records an incisive tradition in which God says: "I have created the inclination to do evil, but I have also created an antidote, which is the Torah." Thus, man is not born a warm and fuzzy creature. He is born grasping and selfish, fists tightly closed, concerned exclusively with his immediate needs. Says God in Genesis 8:21: "The inclination of man's heart is evil from his very inception." Left to his own devices, not taught the ways of civilized behavior, so will he remain throughout life: a rapacious, self-centered infant masquerading as an adult whose fists will not open until he departs this earth.

There is an antidote, the Torah, whose teachings enable us to construct and maintain self-discipline and self-control, and ultimately to metamorphose into a mensch. For one of the underlying purposes of Torah is to tame the savage beast within us and to transform us into responsible human beings with a conscience that enables us to differentiate right from wrong.

Take, for example, the fundamental, basic need for food. Animals eat, humans eat. Is there to be no difference? The Torah wants there to be a difference, so at the very beginning of history, the first commandment given to the newly minted Adam and Eve concerns food: You may eat from all the trees in the Garden except one, from which you may not eat.

The hidden message is that even for basic human appetites and desires, there are guard-rails and boundary lines and restraints. This food discipline surfaces later as the laws of Kashrut. Certain creatures, beast and fowl, are permissible; other species are always forbidden. Even permissible foods are to be eaten in a disciplined way: slaughtered and prepared in a certain way, with a blessing to God required before and after eating. There are restraints as to where we eat even permissible foods (during Sukkot we eat only in the sukkah); what we eat (Passover restricts even that which is normally permitted); and even if we eat (on Yom Kippur all food is off limits). And year-round there is a further discipline concerning the mixing of meat and dairy.

The very basic human desire for food becomes a subject for rigorous personal self-control. "I want to eat!" cries out the creature. "I, too, want you to eat," replies God. "But I want you to rise above the beasts and

remain a human being while engaging in this most fundamental act of survival.”

Discipline Power

Look at another basic human drive: sexuality. Here, too, the Torah considers it an intrinsic part of human life, but endeavors to bring it within certain boundary lines. It is noteworthy that the Torah reading for Yom Kippur afternoon — the holiest of days — deals with impermissible sexual activity. Certain sexual activities are always off limits and certain other activities are permitted only in certain circumstances. The Torah takes the overpowering sex drive and endeavors to channel it and direct it, so that our engaging in it — once again — is not that of an animal but of a human being.

In every facet of human life, the Torah injects into our souls a shot of self-discipline. So it is throughout Torah, whether it be human speech (“watch what comes out of your mouth” — Deut. 23:24); acquisitiveness and self-centeredness (tzedakah); the tendency to violence (the story of Cain and Abel and “Do not kill”); the desire to take what is not mine (“Do not steal”); the instinct to lie (“Keep far from falsehood” — Exodus 23:7); the temptation to gossip and slander (“Do not be a gossip — Leviticus 19:16); the impulse to mistreat animals (copious laws of cruelty to animals, in which for example, the master must feed his animal before he feeds himself); and respecting the property rights of others.

In every facet of human life, the Torah injects into our souls a shot of self-discipline. Not everything is mine; not everything is permissible, not everything I want to utter may I utter, not everything I want to take may I take. This world is not a plaything created solely for our pleasure.

Divine Cameras

One overarching idea transcends all else, and gives this discipline its own power and force: This self-control is not simply a directive from a neurosthenic teacher or guardian, but emanates from the loving God in Whose image we are made. Such consciousness infiltrates the human soul, especially when Jewish tradition contains statements like: “An eye sees, an ear hears, and all that you do is recorded in a Book...” (Avot 2:1) If, when driving a car, for example, the awareness of hidden cameras at certain junctions is enough to make us more careful drivers, how much more so can the classic Jewish concept of hidden “Divine” cameras transform us into more careful human beings.

With such teachings embedded in the soul, the very thought of violence is removed from the realm of possibility. When such teachings become part and parcel of life and enter the human soul, one lives with sensitivity and concern for the feelings and the property of others. One becomes a more noble human being. So embedded do such teachings become in the soul, so intrinsic a part of daily behavior, that the very thought of hurting or doing violence to someone is removed from the realm of possibility.

Is it not curious that in Israel — where thousands of reservists in civilian life store their army-issued weapons at home — we do not find such wanton destruction of human lives as we do in the U.S.? Could it be that through the centuries, the divine discipline of Torah has seeped into the very bones of the Jewish people — so that the contemporary Jew could not possibly engage in such random violence? This is worth pondering.

Mass killings are complex and subtle matters. But transcending all the proposed remedies, perhaps we should give some consideration to bringing spiritual matters like God and His teachings back into the forefront of civic life. Not just perfunctory benedictions at the beginning of athletic contests or of grand openings, but as a daily, living component. It is time to stop being embarrassed by religion.

A recent cartoon shows one person asking another, “Why didn’t God stop the shooting in that school?” The other answers, “How could He? He’s not allowed into the schools.” It captures the question a Hassid once asked his Rebbe: “Where is God?” The Rebbe answered: “Wherever He is allowed to enter.”

Simplification, granted. But well worth pondering.

This article can also be read at: <http://www.aish.com/ci/s/Sandy-Hook-A-Jewish-Antidote.html>

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Shema Koleinu

19 Teves 5772

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SUSPECTING THE INNOCENT RABBI MICHAEL TAUBES

When Moshe Rabbeinu is told by Hashem at the burning bush that he should go and inform Bnei Yisrael that Hashem has spoken to him and will soon redeem them from slavery, he reacts by stating that the people will not believe he’s telling the truth (Shemos 4:1). Hashem immediately responds by giving Moshe two signs that he may show the people to prove the veracity of his claim; as part of the second sign, Moshe’s hand becomes afflicted with Tzora’as (ibid Pasuk 6). The Gemara in Shabbos (97a) understands that this affliction was not merely a random sign for Moshe to use, because, as Rav Achai Gaon explains in the She’iltos, (Sheilta 40), Hashem could have selected any number of other signs. Rather, he chose a sign which contained a lesson, indeed a punishment, for Moshe himself because he had suspected Bnei Yisrael of not believing him. The Gemara thus derives from this story that one who is Choshed B’ksheirim, that is, he unjustly suspects innocent people, is punished with a physical affliction as Moshe was.

The Mishnah in Yoma (18b) states that as part of the preparation for the Avodah in the Beis Hamikdash on Yom Kippur, the elders among the Kohanim would have the Kohein Gadol swear that he would not alter the service in any way; following this, both the Kohein Gadol and the elders would cry. The Gemara (ibid 19b) explains that he would cry because they even suspected him of being a Tzeduki (coming from that group of people who do not believe in the validity of the Torah SheB’al Peh or the authority of the Rabbanan), and they would cry because if they were indeed being suspicious of an innocent man, they would be deserving of the above cited punishment which is visited upon one who is Choshed B’ksheirim. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 4:4) lists Choshed B’ksheirim as one of the Aveiros which prevents a person from being able to fully do Teshuva, explaining that people do not even realize that it is an Aveirah to consider a good person to be a sinner; people will therefore rarely even attempt to do Teshuva for this Aveirah. It is clear from the above that it is prohibited to suspect an innocent person of being a sinner.

Does this prohibition apply to one’s attitude towards all people, or is it possible that sometimes one may indeed be suspicious of someone else? The Rambam, in discussing the case of the Kohein Gadol (Hilchos Yom Hakippurim 1:7), implies that it is prohibited to suspect anyone whose actions and motivations are not known, because perhaps he has nothing wrong in mind. In his Peirush on the above Mishnahin Yoma (Perek 1: Mishnah 5), the Rambam likewise writes that it is forbidden to suspect someone whose actions are unclear and might be bad; the Tosafos Yom Tov (ibid: V’Hein) on that Mishnah accepts this as well. This position appears to work out very nicely with that of the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (Perek 1: Mishnah 6) which states “He’ve dan et kol adam l’kaf zechus”, teaching that one should judge all people favorable, a trait which the Rambam (Hilchos De’os 5:7) says must be possessed by a Talmid Chochochom. Rashi there (ibid Vehevei) asserts that unless one knows otherwise for sure, one should assume that other people’s

actions are all good, and, citing a Gemara in Shabbos (Daf 127b), writes that one who does this will himself be judged favorably by Hashem.

The Beraisa in Masseches Kallah Rabbasi (Perek 9), however, states that one should always consider another person to be like a thief (at least potentially), which, of course, implies the exact opposite. The Gemara there (ibid) immediately questions this statement based on another Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (Perek 2: Mishnah 4) which teaches that one should not judge someone else [negatively, as the Bartenura (ibid V'al Tadin) points out there] until one has been in that situation, implying, again, that one should not suspect another person without knowing all the facts. The Gemara (ibid) responds that in Pirkei Avos, the Mishnah (ibid) is talking about a person whom one knows—he should not be judged unfavorably unless all the facts are clear. In Masseches Kallah Rabbasi, however, the Beraisa (ibid) is referring to a person whom one does not know—he may justifiably be suspected of being wicked.

Rabbeinu Yonah, explaining the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos about judging others favorably (Perek 1: Mishnah 6), writes that one should judge the average person favorably whether one knows him or not, adding in his Sha'arei Teshuva (Sha'ar 3:218) that this is required by the Torah, but someone who is known to be a wicked person should always be viewed in a negative or suspicious light. The Klei Yakar, commenting on the Posuk in the Torah (Vayikra 19:15) quoted by the Gemara in Shevuos (30a) as the source for the idea of judging people favorably, notes as well (B'Tzedek) that a wicked person should not be judged favorably because the assumption is that he has remained wicked; one is not considered a choshed b'ksheirim for suspecting such a person because this person is not considered to be among the k'sheirim. The Bartenura on that Mishnah (ibid Vehevei) also writes that physical punishment is inflicted only upon a choshed b'ksheirim but one who is choshed a rasha) has done nothing wrong. We see from here that this prohibition to be suspicious of other people is not necessarily all-encompassing; there are possible exceptions.

Because of this prohibition, though, it is also necessary for one to avoid doing things that make other people suspicious of him. Rabbeinu Yehuda HaChassid notes in his Sefer Chassidim (Siman 44) that one who causes suspicions to be raised about himself is responsible for the reactions of the people who see him, and hence, their punishment, when applicable. There may, however, be a distinction between an individual and a large group of people because one won't usually suspect an entire group of being sinners. The Gemara in Avodah Zarah (43b) indeed says that the prohibition of being choshed does not apply regarding a group; we thus need not worry that someone will be choshed an entire group. The Ramo (Yoreh Deah 141:4) rules accordingly, and an activity forbidden to an individual because it may raise suspicions about him may therefore be permissible for a group.

This last ruling is debated by the Poskim, but the Magen Avraham (Orech Chaim 244:8) concurs, explaining that a non-Jew may thus do certain work for a community on Shabbos which he wouldn't be able to do for an individual because there will be no suspicion of an entire community. He therefore rules that strictly speaking, although it has been forbidden for other reasons, a non-Jew may, under certain circumstances, work on building a Shul on Shabbos because nobody will think that the community sinned by hiring him. The Chasam Sofer (Sha'ailos U'Teshuvos-Orech Chaim: 60) suggests that this is true only for something like a Shul where the community participates in it together, but if many people happen to be doing the same thing, each on his own behalf, then a problem is created because they are then like individuals who must avoid suspicious activities, even though there are many of them. The Pardes Yosef on the Posuk in this Parsha (Shemos ibid pasuk) quotes that perhaps this is why Moshe was punished despite being suspicious of a group; he was really being suspicious of each of Bnai Yisrael as individuals.

Questions? Comments? Email: shemakoleinu1@gmail.com

<http://www.aish.com/tp/i/gl/Miriam---The-Life-Giver.html>

The Guiding Light

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Miriam - The Life Giver

Shmot(Exodus 1:1-6:1)

Miriam - The Life Giver

One of the most important characters in the Book of Exodus is undoubtedly Miriam, the elder sister of Moses and Aharon. It is clear that her greatness is not merely due to her illustrious relatives, rather her own achievements are noteworthy in and of themselves and are worthy of examination. There are a number of aspects to this remarkable woman's life, but analysis of two of them can teach us an important lesson about the key to her greatness. Firstly, it is a well known fundamental of Jewish thought that the name of any person or item teaches a great deal about their essence. What is the significance of the name Miriam? The Yalkut Shimoni tells us that her name is connected to the word, 'mar' which means bitter because at the time of her birth the Egyptians embittered the lives of the Jewish people.(1) Evidently, the fact that Miriam was born during such a terrible period in Jewish history plays a central role in defining the person that Miriam became. A second clue into understanding Miriam is provided by the Talmud. During the Jewish people's forty year tenure in the desert they were miraculously provided with water, food, and protection. The Talmud tells us that the food in the form of the manna from heaven came in the merit of Moses, the protection in the form of the Clouds of Glory was in the merit of Aharon, and the water was in the merit of Miriam.(2) What is the connection between Miriam and the water that kept the Jewish people alive for forty years? The Kli Yakar explains that Miriam excelled in the trait of gomel chasadim (bestowing kindness). He cites the example of how she saved the lives of the Jewish babies in Egypt - when Pharaoh decreed that the Jewish boys be murdered, he instructed the midwives, Miriam and her mother Yocheved to perform this gruesome task. However, they put themselves in great danger by ignoring his orders and saving the babies. As a result of this great act of kindness, the Kli Yakar explains, Miriam merited to be the source of the well (named Be'er Miriam after her) that provided the people with water, the most basic necessity that humans need to survive.(3) It is possible to expand on the Kli Yakar's explanation: Miriam's kindness was specifically directed towards the saving and maintaining of the lives of the Jewish people. This trait was expressed by Miriam from a very young age. For example, the Midrash tells us that after Pharaoh decreed to kill every Jewish newborn baby, Miriam's father, Amram decided to separate from his wife, Yocheved in order to prevent the inevitable death of any future sons. As Amram was the leader of the Jewish people, the other men followed his example and separated from their wives. Upon hearing this, the five year old Miriam rebuked her father, saying: "your decree is harsher than that of Pharaoh for he only decreed on the boys, but you have done so to the boys and girls." (4) Amram accepted the rebuke and publicly remarried Yocheved and in turn everyone else followed their example and remarried. In this sense Miriam was the ultimate creator of life. If not for her, then untold numbers of Jewish children would never have been born, and Moses himself could never have come to life. As a result Miriam is given an alternative name in Divrei HaYamim, (5) that of Ephrath, (whose root form is paru - pei, reish, vav which means being fruitful) because, the Midrash tells us; "the people of Israel multiplied because of her." (6) A further example of her remarkable efforts at saving lives is her brave refusal to obey Pharaoh's commands to kill the newborn baby boys. Instead, along with her mother, she did not kill the babies, in fact they assisted the mothers in giving birth to healthy children, and provided them with food and water. Thus we have seen that Miriam's greatness lay in her incredible kindness, and particularly

with regard to the most fundamental gift, that of life. This is why the life-giving waters of the Be'er Miriam (the well of Miriam) were in her merit. Because she risked so much to provide life to others, she was rewarded with her desire being fulfilled through the miraculous supply of water that sustained the Jewish people in the desert for forty years. Indeed this is not the only occasion where Miriam's reward for saving lives is measure for measure. The Torah tells us her reward for saving the babies that Pharaoh had told her to kill. "God benefited the midwives - and the people increased and became very strong. And it was because the midwives feared God that He made them houses." (7) Yocheved and Miriam risked their lives to save Jewish baby boys from being murdered by the Egyptians. God rewarded them by making them 'houses' - Rashi explains that they merited to be the mothers of the lines of Priests, Levites and Kings. Rav Moshe Feinstein asks that if their main reward was these 'houses' then why does the clause, "and the people increased and became very strong" interrupt the description of their reward - since the 'houses' were the benefit described, it would seem that they should follow immediately afterwards and the Torah should have said, "God benefited the midwives and made them houses"? He answers that their main reward was not the houses but rather the increase of the people since their true desire and joy was no more than the expansion of the Jewish population. Consequently after the verse states that God benefited them it immediately mentions the resultant expansion of the Jewish people - that was their main reward, the houses were merely a secondary bonus for their great yiras shamayim (fear of God).(8) We can now return to the other notable aspect of Miriam that we mentioned - the fact that her name alludes to the bitter state of affairs into which she was born. It seems that the Torah is further indicating Miriam's greatness in her love of life. She was born into the most horrific situation and she could easily have given up on her own life and certainly on those of the people around her. She could have seen all the events around her, including her parents' separation in order to prevent more murders, and felt that life was of no value and there was no hope. Instead she recognized the inherent value of life and kept faith in God that He would save the Jewish people from their dire situation. It was this persistent optimism that caused her parents to remarry, and the resultant birth of the Jewish people's savior, Moses. This teaches us a lesson that is very pertinent to modern society. There is an increasingly popular perception that it is wrong to bring 'too many' children into a world that is full of pain and suffering. According to the proponents of this outlook, life is not something that is of intrinsic value rather it is dependent on the 'life satisfaction' that a living being can derive. Given the numerous challenges that face the world such as the dire economic situation, these people believe that it is morally wrong to bring yet another mouth to feed into life. Needless to say, this view is diametrically opposed to the Torah approach epitomized by Miriam. She saw life as indeed being inherently valuable. Accordingly, the most horrific situations did not justify giving up on bring more life into the world, and on sustaining the already living. May we learn from Miriam's incredible appreciation for the value of life and emulate her achievements in bringing life to the world.

NOTES 1. Yalkut Shimoni, Shemos, 165. 2. Taanit, 9a. 3. Kli Yakar quoted by the Anaf Yosef, Taanit, 9a. Of course the Manna and Clouds of Glory also provided for the needs of the people, but the Kli Yakar explains that water is the most important of all needs. A person can survive without food for several weeks, but he cannot last without water more than a few days. 4. Sotah, 12a; Shemot Rabbah, 1:17. 5. Divrei HaYamim 1,2:19. 6. Shemos Rabbah, 1:17. 7. Shemos, 1:20-21. 8. Darash Moshe, Parsha Shemos. Published: December 30, 2012

article on haftaros attached

Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>
12/30/12 (4 days ago)

What does this have to do with this week's parsha? You'll have to read the article to find out.

What is Unusual about this week's Haftarah? By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff
Question #1: What daily practice results from the mitzvah of reciting the Haftarah?

Question #2: What unusual fact about this week's Haftarah inspired me to discuss this topic?

Before addressing these questions; let's first understand several basic facts about the Haftarah reading that graces our davening on Shabbos, Yom Tov and fast days.

The Word Haftarah I remember as a child assuming that the word haftarah was pronounced half-Torah because it was always much shorter than the Torah reading. Unfortunately, I occasionally hear adults mispronounce the word this way, too.

Although there are several interpretations of the word haftarah, it is usually understood to mean completing, as in "completing the reading of the Torah" (Levush, Orach Chayim 284:1).

Haftarah History Early sources present two completely different reasons for the origin of the mitzvah to read the Haftarah.

Reason #1: Some early sources report that, in ancient times, a Haftarah was recited towards the end of Shacharis every day of the year. At the point of davening when we recite Uva Letziyon, they would take out a sefer Navi and read about ten verses together with their Aramaic translation, the common Jewish parlance at the time. Then they recited the two main pesukim of kedushah with their Aramaic translation. In those days, all men used to study Torah for several hours after davening before beginning to pursue their daily livelihoods. The Navi was recited to guarantee that people fulfilled the daily requirement to study some Biblical part of the Torah, in addition to the daily requirement of studying both Mishnah and Gemara (Teshuvos HaGeonim #55).

Why did this Practice End? This daily practice of incorporating some "Haftarah" reading ended when people needed to spend more time earning a living (Teshuvos HaGeonim #55). To ensure that this practice of studying some Tanach daily at the end of davening would not be forgotten, they still recited the two verses of kedushah, a practice mentioned in the Gemara (Sotah 49a), which we will discuss shortly. Around the recital of these two verses developed the prayer we say daily that begins with the pasuk "Uva Letzion."

Although the daily "Haftarah" ceased at this time, on Shabbos and Yom Tov, when people do not work, the Haftarah readings continued. As a result, there is no need to mention Uva Letzion immediately after Krias Hatorah on Shabbos and Yom Tov, since that is when we recite the Haftarah, and, for this reason, Uva Letzion is postponed until Mincha (Shibbolei HaLeket #44).

A Second Reason for Haftarah Others cite a completely different historical basis for reciting the Haftarah: At one time in antiquity, the gentile government prohibited the public reading of the Torah, but did not forbid reading Navi in public. (According to Tosafos Yom Tov [Megillah 3:4 s.v. Likisdran], this was one of the decrees of Antiochus prior to the events of the Chanukah miracle.) Therefore, in lieu of Krias HaTorah, Jewish communities began reading selections from Navi that were similar to the Torah portion that should have been read that day (Abudraham). Although the gentiles eventually rescinded the prohibition against the public reading of the Torah, the practice of reading the Haftarah continued even after the reinstatement of the Torah reading. At that time, it was instituted that the person reading the Haftarah first receive an aliyah to the Torah, what we call mafkir (Megillah 23a), in order to emphasize that Navi is not equal to the Torah in kedusha or in authority.

It is interesting to note that, although the second reason is quoted frequently by halachic commentaries (from the Bach, Orach Chayim 284, onwards), I found the first reason in much earlier sources. While the earliest source I found mentioning the second approach was the Abudraham, who lived in the early Fourteenth Century, the earliest source for the first approach is found in writings of the Geonim, well over a thousand years ago. Personally, I suspect that both historical reasons are accurate: Initially, the Haftarah was instituted when the Jews were banned from reading the Torah in public as a reminder of this mitzvah. After that ukase was rescinded and the mitzvah of Krias Hatorah was reinstated, Jews continued the practice of reading Navi and even extended it as a daily practice to encourage people to study the Written Torah every day. When this daily practice infringed on people's ability to earn a living, they limited it to non-workdays.

Preparing the Haftarah Chazal required every man to read the weekly Torah reading twice with its explanation. The Hebrew initials of this mitzvah, Shnayim Mikra Ve'echad Targum, spell this week's parsha, Shemos. Although this mitzvah does not apply to the Haftarah, which means that Chazal did not require every individual to review the Haftarah in advance, the person reading Haftarah for the public must be properly prepared.

Rules of Reading Chazal established several rules for reading the Haftarah. As I mentioned above, the person who reads the Haftarah first receives an aliyah to the Torah. However, if a minyan has no Sefer Torah and therefore no Krias Hatorah,

the tzibbur may read the weekly Haftarah without the berachos (Rama, Orach Chayim 284:1).

Skip Ahead While reading the Navi portion for the Haftarah, one may choose to skip a small section and continue reading from verses a little further on. However, one may not go back and read a verse or verses earlier in the sefer (Megillah 24a). Another rule: One may not read a Haftarah from two different books of Navi, such as beginning in Yeshayahu and finishing with a selection from Yirmiyahu, because skipping around confuses people (Rashi, ad loc.).

We should, however, note that some communities have a custom of adding a pasuk or two from a different Navi at the end of the Haftarah when there is a confluence of special occasions – such as, when Shabbos or Sunday is Rosh Chodesh or when there is a chosson in shul and the week’s Haftarah has special significance. (This practice is discussed by the Terumas Hadeshen #20 and quoted by the Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 144, and Magen Avraham 284:1.)

What is a Book? In order to apply this last rule correctly, we must understand how we define a “book” of Kisvei Hakodesh. Chazal list a total of 24 Sifrei Kodesh:

- (1) Five of the Chumash;
 - (2) Eight of Navi (Yehoshua, Shoftim, Shmuel, Melachim, Yeshayahu, Yirmiyahu, Yechezkel, and Trei Asar);
 - (3) Eleven of Kesuvim (Tehillim, Mishlei, Iyov, the five Megillos, Daniel, Ezra/Nechemyah [counted as one sefer, as I will explain] and Divrei Hayamim.)
- This division has several halachic ramifications. For example, it is forbidden to write parts of these books -- each book of Tanach must be written as a complete sefer (Gittin 60a). Originally, all books of Tanach were written only as scrolls, although later it became common to handwrite them on pages of parchment and bind them together as books (Terumas Hadeshen #20; cf.; however, Levush, Orach Chayim 284:1, who implies that he disputes the halachic acceptability of the latter practice.).

Shmuel Beis; Melachim Beis; and Divrei Hayamim Beis Note that Chazal did not divide Shmuel, Melachim or Divrei Hayamim into two books. The modern division of Shmuel, Melachim, and Divrei Hayamim into two separate books is probably of non-Jewish origin, just as the division of each of the Kisvei Hakodesh into chapters was originally introduced by non-Jewish printers. Furthermore, what we have as two books of Ezra and Nechemyah are actually one book, called Ezra.

I have read that Jews first used the modern versions of sefer, chapter, and verse, in order to locate and identify pesukim during disputations with priests who insisted on referring to pesukim by “Chapter and Verse.” Scribes, and later publishers, mimicked the system until they became part of our method of locating all Biblical verses.

Whether or not this is the reason that we use these methods of identifying pesukim, halachically, Shmuel and Melachim each consist of only one book. Just as sofrim still write each of these seforim as one sefer, so printers should publish each as one volume. Because of this, it is theoretically permitted to begin a Haftarah toward the end of Shmuel I and continue it at the beginning of Shmuel II.

In a similar vein, the twelve “books” of Trei Asar are considered one book. Therefore, following the rule I mentioned earlier, one may begin a Haftarah from an earlier book of Trei Asar and continue it in a later one, as we actually do a few times a year. However, one may not read an earlier section of Trei Asar after reading a later one (Megillah 24a). Because of confusion caused by printers, unsuspecting readers sometimes recite the Haftarah in an inappropriate order. This most commonly occurs on Shabbos Shuva, which begins in Hoshea, one of the twelve books that comprise Trei Asar, and then continues with either Yoel or Micha. However, because of the confusing way the printers present these passages in many Chumashim, some people recite Micha and then Yoel. This practice is problematic because the order goes from the end of the sefer to the beginning, which the Gemara forbids. (See Shu’t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:174, who also prohibits skipping from Hoshea to Micha, ruling instead that one should always read Hoshea and then Yoel while omitting Micha.)

Sefer Aftarta What is a Sefer Aftarta, literally, a Haftarah book?

Until the advent of the printing press, all books were copied by hand -- a long, arduous, and expensive process. Books were rare and costly. Yet, every shul was required to read the Haftarah every Shabbos, and, since each book of Tanach is written as a complete sefer, every shul needed to own all the eight Nevi’im as scrolls or manuscript books. Owning a full set of handwritten Navi was beyond the means of many communities and shuls, and would have been an obstacle to fulfilling the takanah of reading the Haftarah every week.

Due to this concern, Chazal ruled that keeping Torah study alive among Jews superseded the prohibition against writing a partial sefer of Tanach. This takanah was based on the pasuk, eis laasos Lashem, heifeiru sorasecha, which Chazal interpreted as meaning: It is a time when we must make special arrangements for

the sake of Hashem, for otherwise, the observance of Torah will be abandoned (Tehillim 119:126). Consequently, Chazal permitted writing a manuscript that contains only the haftaros, but no other parts of the Navi. Since this one scroll contained only a fraction of the Nevi’im, it resulted in a huge money savings and enabled many poorer communities to read the Haftarah regularly (Gittin 60a).

The Printed Word Later authorities debate whether it is appropriate to rely on the heter of using a Sefer Aftarta after the invention of the printing press and the ready availability of full printed editions of each sefer Navi. The Magen Avraham (284:1) contends that one should no longer use a Sefer Aftarta for reading Navi and that it is preferable to use a printed sefer that contains the entire particular Navi, whereas the Aruch Hashulchan and others maintain that use of a handwritten Sefer Aftarta is preferred to a printed book. Because of this dispute, many communities strive to acquire eight handwritten sifrei Navi, which is in any case a halachic preference (Mishnah Berurah).

What Should I Read? What determines which Haftarah is recited each week?

Chazal established specific Haftaros for some Shabbosos and Yomim Tovim (Megillah 29b- 31b). Sometimes, the Haftarah relates not to the parsha, but to the season, such as during the Three Weeks and on the seven consecutive Shabbosos following Tisha B’Av. We also find that some places had a custom on a Shabbos ufruf of reading the Haftarah from Yeshayahu that concludes, “And as a chosson rejoices with his kallah, so shall Hashem rejoice with you” (Terumas Hadeshen #20).

On most Shabbosos, when there was no requirement to read a specific section of Navi, each community would choose a selection of Navi reminiscent of the parsha. Indeed, if one looks at old Chumashim and books of community minhagim, one finds many variant practices. However, our Chumashim usually mention selections of Navi that have become generally accepted, while occasionally recording varying customs of different communities. Particularly, Sephardic and Ashkenazic practices often vary from one another, especially regarding minor variances, such as exactly where to begin or end the Haftarah, or whether to skip certain verses.

Every Three Years Today, the universal practice is to complete the entire Torah reading every year. However, in the times of the Gemara and for many centuries afterward, some communities read much smaller sections of the Torah every week and completed the Torah reading only every three years. This practice is still mentioned by the traveler, Binyomin of Tudela, who witnessed it in a community in Egypt seven hundred years after the Gemara.

Those communities also divided the Haftarah into three-year cycles by reciting a Haftarah that corresponded to their shorter readings. I have seen photographs of old manuscript Haftarah books based on the three-year system, where each sub-parsha has the name of the first words of the week’s portion. In the selection I saw, Parshas Vaeschanan was divided into three parts named Parshas Vaeschanan, Parshas Az Yavdil Moshe, and Parshas Shema Yisroel, in the latter two instances identifying the first words of the customary reading that week in that locale.

How is Parshas Shemos Unique? Now is the time to address one of the questions I raised above: “What is unusual about this week’s Haftarah that gave me a reason to write about this topic this week?” On no other Shabbos am I aware of as many different choices for the Haftarah reading. The Abudraham, who lists different customs regarding what to read on each week’s Haftarah, cites three alternate haftaros for Parshas Shemos, none of which is the standard Haftarah read by Ashkenazic communities. The Abudraham’s three selections are one from each of the three major seforim of Nevi’im Acharonim: Yeshayahu, Yirmiyahu and Yechezkel. The reading from Yechezkel that he quotes, Ben Adom Hoda es Yerushalayim (Yechezkel 16:1- 14), is customarily read on this day among communities originating from parts of Yemen or Iraq. The Rambam also mentions this particular Haftarah as this week’s reading, which probably provides the source for the Yemenite communities who read it. Other Yemenite communities read a Haftarah from a later part of Yechezkel (Chapter 20), which mentions that Hashem made Himself known to the Jewish people in Mitzrayim and that the Jews should not assimilate and follow idolatrous Egyptian practices.

Thus, together with standard Ashkenazic practice, we have already listed five different selections read for Haftarah this week, more than any I am aware of for any other Shabbos. What do Ashkenazim read? To the best of my knowledge, all Ashkenazic communities nowadays read Haba’im Yashreish Yaakov, from the Book of Yeshayahu (27:6 - 28:23). Why do we read this Haftarah? Rashi, in his commentary to the first words of the Haftarah, notes that the first words mentioned by Yeshayahu refer to the Bnei Yisroel going down to Mitzrayim, similar to the first words of this week’s Torah reading. Thus, although the rest of the Haftarah has little connection to the parsha, this beginning allusion was sufficient to make this particular Haftarah the choice for this week.

What do Sephardim read? Most Sephardic communities read the beginning of the book of Yirmiyahu, Divrei Yirmiyahu, a Haftarah that is very familiar to Ashkenazim, because it is read on the first of the Three Weeks.

Since this Haftarah discusses the impending attack of the Babylonians on Israel, it seems extremely appropriate to the Three Weeks; but why do Sephardim read it on parshas Shemos? Some note that several analogies between Moshe and Yirmiyahu surface in the parsha and Haftarah. Both Yirmiyahu and Moshe are beginning their prophecy careers reluctantly, and just as Yirmiyahu says that he is unable to speak, as he is little more than a child, so Moshe claims that he cannot speak, due to physical impediment.

I must admit that I am baffled why it has become more commonly accepted to read either of these two haftaros: Habaim Yashreish Yaakov or Divrei Yirmiyahu, rather than Yechezkel Chapter 20, whose relationship to the topic of the parsha is more obvious.

Conclusion: We thus see that recital of the weekly Haftarah is an ancient custom and should be treated with respect. Although an individual has no requirement to prepare the Haftarah reading, one should pay attention to it: after all, the entire purpose of its reading is to study some of the Written Torah.

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Dedicated in memory of Joseph Y. Nadler, z"l, Yosef ben Yechezkel Tzvi

PARASHAT SHEMOT

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT"l

Riding Upon Materialism

Translated by Kaeren Fish

"Moshe took his wife and his sons, and he set them upon the donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt." (Shemot 4:20)

"This was the special donkey which Avraham had saddled (in order to travel) to the binding of Yitzchak, and it is the same one upon which the Mashiach is destined to appear, as it is written, 'A poor man, riding upon a donkey' (Zekharia 9:9)." (Rashi, ad loc)

According to some opinions in the midrash, this donkey was one of the creations which God made during the twilight of the sixth day, just prior to Shabbat.

What is the significance of this donkey (chamor)? The idea certainly cannot be meant literally – a donkey that is thousands of years old, having once belonged to Avraham and enduring until the final redemption. The plain meaning of the midrash, as the kabbalists explain, is the idea of riding upon materialism (chomriut). Materialism must not rule over a person; the spirit, rather, must rule over the material.

There are many kinds of revolutionaries. The revolution waged in the former Soviet Union against Communism was not about spirituality; it was not a war of the spirit. It was waged first and foremost against a material background: people had had enough of the difficult economic situation, the food shortages, the lack of freedoms, etc.

However, Chazal speak of three revolutionaries, all of whom wage a spiritual campaign: Avraham, Moshe, and the Mashiach. Avraham "rides upon materialism"; he is wholly focused on spirituality, and his revolution is a spiritual one. Moshe follows his example; he, too, rides atop the material world – and likewise Mashiach.

A person's body is material. A person must rule over his body and determine its nature. This is a difficult task: riding the material – ruling and controlling it – is a task which is actually above nature, and was therefore created at twilight, the time when several supernatural creations came into existence.

The Maharal writes that the material world is symbolized by water. Water has no form of its own; it changes according to the vessel into which it is poured. A person must not be like water; he must not change with every breeze and trend. Rather, his spirit must give his body its character, in order that the body will be stable and not something that is constantly changing.

Marx built his philosophy on the material, layer upon layer. This is not our way. For us, revolutions must arise for spiritual reasons. The spirit must rule over the material – both in the general sense, for the nation as a whole, and in the individual sense, for each and every person. We must rule over materialism (chomriut); like Avraham, Moshe and the Mashiach, we must "ride the chamor."