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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **VAEIRA** (Rosh Chodesh) - 5767

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With the exception of the first two items, everything else in this sheet is from Efraim Goldstein's excellent parsha collection.

<http://613.org/rav/ravnotes2.html>

Rav Soloveitchik ZT'L

Notes (Volume 3)

Notice These are unapproved unedited notes [of R.Y.?] of classes given by Rav Soloveitchik... [Thanks to David Isaac for typing these notes]

Lecture delivered by Rabbi Soloveitchik on Saturday night, February 3, 1979 "Humility of Moses" We spoke last week of the "parsha" which tells the story of silence - "Hester Ponim" - G-d hides His face. Extreme despair is best described by not telling anything. Here we have an interim, a separation of approximately 60 years time. We know that Moshe accepted Yisro's offer but much we don't know. What he did. What he said. What events occurred are not revealed. But is is not important. After the matter of keeping the flock of "Kohan Midyon" (the priest of Midyon - Yisro) - there is a strange word (Chapter 3 - line 1 of Shmosh) "Vayinhag Es Hatzon Achar Hamidbar" - "And he led the sheep towards the wilderness". Instead of "Achar" it should be El Hamidbar which meant "to". Some interpret that Moshe actually kept the flock in the furthest part of Midyon - therefore "Achar" (after). This was in keeping with the principles of Abraham, namely removing one's flocks from "G'zayla" - infringement upon other peoples properties.

In the previous sentence we find: "U'Moshe Hoyo Roeh Es Tzon" (and Moshe was keeper of the sheep). The word "Hoyo" teaches us that it is not past tense but rather a participle. It is not a statement about what he did but who he was, his work, his occupation. It is a description of the person - "Moshe, the shepherd". "Vayinhag Es Hatzon" and he led the flock, "Vayovo El Haar Elokim" (and came to the mountain of G-d). This is the past tense. "It once happened." He came to Sinai - to the place where he shouldn't infringe on other people's territory. However, this is to mean, "Hu Hoyo Nohages Hatzon". He used to always come to the "Har Elokim". Thus Rashi informs us that it was always his custom to go there so that the sheep shouldn't pasture or graze in other people's place. This would be "G'zayle" - robbery as the conflict between Abraham's and Lot's shepherds. Abraham's shepherds were trained to be careful of other people's money. However, if you interpret the word "Vayinhag", it means he reached it only once in many years.

My suggestion is that the whole "posek" should be interpreted as a participle. If so how can Rashi make such a statement? It would seem that it were merely an accident his reaching the Mount.

Now the question, "Vayovo Har Elokim". If you interpret it in terms of a participle what does it mean? After all, why is it called "Har Elokim"? It did not have that connotation yet; it would only be so in the future. If the whole "posek" is a participle (many, many times) why was it necessary to bring them here to a mountain? (Certainly not much of a place for grazing.)

The answer to this we find in Sedra "Shlach" of Chumash Bamidbar - Chapter 13, line 22. It states, "Vayalu Banegev Vayovo Ad Chevron". "Vayalu" (They all come up in the south - the 12 spies) - Vayovo (and He Caleb) (singular) came to Chevron to offer prayers that the counsel of the spies should fail). Otherwise, instead of "Vayovo" (singular) it should state Vayovou (They all came to Chevron). We have to understand that here with Moshe it was identical. He was not the only shepherd of Yisro. Yisro was a rich man, had a very large flock and many workers. They were the other shepherd with whom he left the sheep constantly and would go up himself to be alone at "Har Elokim". What did he do? It was the same objective as Caleb -- to pray for his people, his brother whom he left behind in Egypt. At the beginning, he wanted to leave them, to divorce himself from them. "Now I understand! Are they worthy of liberty?" They informed the authorities knowing only too well that he was defending his brethren. "They are not worthy." This is what prevented Moshe from accepting at once! Therefore, he was praying that his brothers should rise spiritually, with dignity -- not to inform on their own people. We understand from the Holocaust the principle of informing. When the Germans formed the "Judenpolizei" some gave their lives to save their brothers, many could not rise to the occasion and informed. Moshe was startled! "A Jew should collaborate with the enemy?" So he came always to Har Elokim to pray. How long Moshe prayed, we don't know any more than Caleb. He also prayed concerning the Egyptians that tyrants should understand basic human rights. Converting people into slaves is not only immoral but this type of a society will eventually decay into ruin. He wanted to inform the Egyptian government of pragmatism. Thus, Moshe constantly made a pilgrimage to "Har Elokim".

What answer did he receive? It was silence! It was the time of "Hester Ponim" (hidden face). Hakodesh Boruch Hu has given us only the promise of hearing prayer, not answering Tefilah. This is applicable to all peoples and even to animals. Thus, no answer. What happened? Once after many years, on a routine visit -- this time something great happened. "Vayara Maloch" (An angel appeared). I would interject two words, "Pa'am Achas" (One time it happened).

When I interpret this posek the best I can, I turn to the "M'forstum" -- the commentators. There are two problems! At the very first revelation, when Moshe reached the "Har" and began to pray he saw the "Sneh" - the bush. "And an angel of G-d appeared to him in a flame in the center of the bush, etc." It tells us that an angel revealed himself, not G-d. Then it says, "And G-d saw that he turned aside to gaze, and the L-rd called to him from the midst of the bush, etc." Now, instead of angel, G-d Himself appears. What happened to cause this change, "Malach" to G-d? In fact, I'll analyze it but first want to tell a story which occurred in Europe. The Gaon of Vilna excommunicated the Chassidim of his time because of their desire to change certain vital tenets of faith. The letters urging excommunication were sent out by the Gaon of Vilna and his council to many European communities that the rabbis should sign the excommunication. There was one notable exception. Rav Rafael of Hamburg, a great halachic scholar received the letter and refused to sign. An argument commenced, a delegation was sent to him to convince him and yet he refused. Subsequently, in defending his stance, he employed the following rebuttal. When the Al-mighty sent Abraham on the mission of the Akedah of Yitzchak, who was it who sent Abraham. It was G-d Himself. When it came to the critical moment of saving Yitzchak it was the Angel who called to Abraham. The answer is that to kill a Jew only G-d can order it. To save a Jew even an angel can do it. The same applied here. "The Vilner Gaon may be an angel but in effect, excommunicating is tantamount to killing. For this I need the order from G-d!"

Also at the "Sneh" we have the same application. The first call was to liberate or save the Jews. This could be done by the "Malach". But we find directly the posek, "He (G-d) said "Do not draw nigh, remove the shoes from your feet for the place where you stand is holy." To draw too close to the "Shchina" of G-d could have been Moshe's death. Therefore, G-d had to speak. Interestingly, the Torah tells us that the "Sneh" burned but was not consumed. "HaSneh Aynenu Ukol". It should say, "Maduah HaSneh Aynenu Ukol". (Why wasn't the bush consumed?" Instead, the words are, "Maduah Lo Ivar HaSneh"? This was not just a unique event

but a great event as far as events are concerned. He attributed great significance to this. Moshe already felt intuitively that something great was happening, that which he waited for many years. If he were merely interested why the bush was not consumed, he wouldn't be so intrigued. What he saw was a fire in the middle (Mitoch) but did not spread to the periphery. This is what is meant by "Lo Ivar HaSneh". What kind of a fire is it which is limited to the center and doesn't spread to the periphery? It is restricted only to the center.

Why did G-d do this? There are two separate miracles! In order to draw Moshe, to catch his attention is "Maduah lo Ukol" -- why isn't it consumed. The second is "Lo Ivar" -- why is the fire limited to the center. Basically, it is the same answer. The "Sneh" didn't burn; it retained its characteristic. The fire was limited to a center point. The point is, why didn't the fire spread? This was a test of Moshe. If he merely asked, "Lo Ukol", why isn't it consumed, he might not receive the leadership. But, "Why doesn't it spread," shows his capability to be a leader. "If I were looking for a diplomat, for an ambassador, I wouldn't have chosen you. There are better qualified! But I am not looking for a military marshal; I need a teacher. I need someone to take a people, degraded by torture, by slavery, by humiliation and to elevate them. The time allotted is short -- merely three months. They are degraded. Some are informers. They didn't cry loudly enough! Only one man can do it. It is Moshe despite "Kvad Peh" -- slowness of speech. Moshe understood at once what G-d wanted. This represents the quality of "Yahudus" - faith. Often G-d is far away but from the distance communicates with man. When G-d told Moshe to build a "mishkan", Moshe was frightened. "Is it possible that I shall build for an abode of twenty foot square, Master of the Universe?" Shlomo Hamelech asked the same question. The founders of "Chabad" says that here we find Chassidus. G-d declares, "If I want, the Heavens cannot contain Me. But 'Im Rotze' - if it is My will, I descend from the transcendental world and compress Myself into one cubic foot of the "Kaporos" -- the cover of the Ark. This is what G-d wants to teach Moshe. In the center of circle there is no dimension. G-d can expand ad infinitum and if He wants, He occupies no space at all.

Basically, what does Torah want the Jew to do? We must imitate G-d. Why is there slavery in the world? Because humans want power, to expand - more space, more space. "Midas Hatzimtzum is how to occupy space. This is humility. Moshe said, "Osuro Noh" - let me turn aside and see the great wonder. As G-d contracts let man contract. Let man demonstrate humility, smallness - let him contract, shrink. This was the Serpent's wrong advice to Adam and Eve. "Expand like G-d!" What does G-d want? The opposite. "Contract." Sometimes ambition is good but only if guided by Divine law. In inter-human relationship absolute honesty is required. Contract yourself; do not try to grab all you can.

In Chumash Devarim - Sedra V'Zas HaBrocho, Chapter 33, line 16, there is Moshe's blessing to the tribe of Joseph, "Urtzon Shochni Sneh" (Him that dwelt in the bush). G-d who first dwelt in the bush. This was the blessing to Yosef, the most capable of the brothers, the greatest businessman and innovator. "G-d should grant him that he never forgets "Midas Hatzimtzum" -- humility. "Enjoy this world, be attractive, be successful, pass it on to your generations, but remember -- G-d does not just reside in the entire universe but in the "Sneh" -- the lowly bush. Try not only to satisfy all desires but learn humility!" Thus with Moshe! G-d could have spoken from thunder and lightning - from the entire universe, but it was not so. It was from nothing. Yes, try to improve yourself but always keep in mind the "Sneh". Now Moshe realized at once why the fire didn't spread. Now he learned humility and this is how he was appointed!

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - currently 5765]

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Va'era The Cup of Hope

As a child, I used to be fascinated by the cup of Elijah at the seder table. Would the prophet come when we opened the door after the meal? Would he be visible or invisible? Did the level of the wine gone down, however imperceptibly? The idea of the prophet who did not die, but went to heaven in a chariot of fire (II Kings 2: 11), and who would one day return to bring the good news of redemption was intensely dramatic. Only later did I discover the real significance of Elijah's cup, and found, as so often, that the truth is no less moving than the stories we learned as children.

The Mishneh in Pesachim speaks of four cups of wine. These are the basic requirements of the seder, and the community must ensure that even the poorest person has sufficient wine to drink these cups. According to the Talmud Yerushalmi, they represent the four stages of redemption at the beginning of our sedra. G-d assures Moses that despite the fact that his intervention with Pharaoh has initially made things worse, liberation will indeed come:

"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your G-d. In the Babylonian Talmud, however, there is a strange statement:

The fifth cup: over this one completes Hallel and says Hallel Hagadol (Psalm 136, 'Gives thanks to the Lord, His love endures for ever'). These are the words of Rabbi Tarfon.

Rashi is puzzled by these words. Thus far, the discussion has been about four cups, not five. He is therefore driven to the conclusion that the text is a scribal error. It should say, 'the fourth cup.'

Rambam, however, accepts the text as it stands. After drinking the four cups and completing Hallel, he writes:

One may pour a fifth cup and say over it Hallel Hagadol . . . This cup is not obligatory, unlike the four cups. Ravad (R. Avraham ibn Daud), contemporary of Rambam, takes a slightly different view. For him it is a mitzvah to drink a fifth cup. There is a difference between mitzvah and chovah. The latter is an obligation, the former an act which, though not obligatory, constitutes a positive religious deed.

Two questions arise on the views of Rambam and Ravad. The first is: why does the Mishnah speak about four cups if there are in fact five? To this the answer is straightforward: The four cups are obligatory, unlike the fifth. That is why the community must provide the poor with the means of fulfilling their obligation, but they do not have to make provision for the fifth cup, which according to Rambam is optional, and according to Ravad is desirable but not absolutely necessary.

The second question seems stronger. When G-d speaks to Moses, He uses four expressions of deliverance, not five. Hence, the four cups. Asking this question, however, takes us back to the text at the beginning of our sedra. It is then that we discover, to our surprise, that there is in fact a fifth expression of deliverance:

"And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord." The drama of the fifth cup now becomes apparent. Pesach represents the start of the great journey of Jewish history, from slavery to freedom, Egypt to the promised land. What then became of it after the destruction of the Second Temple, the failure of the Bar Kochba rebellion, the Hadrianic persecutions and the long, tragic series of events that led to the greatest exile of Jewish history? Could Jews celebrate freedom under such circumstances?

The pathos of this question is evident in the opening words of the seder: 'This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.' The very festival that spoke of liberty gained became - for almost 2,000 years - a poignant reminder of what the Jewish people had lost: freedom, a land, a home. A new phrase was born: next year. 'This year we are slaves; next year we will be free. This year we are here; next year in Israel.' The past became the future. Memory was transfigured into hope. It is not too much to call the Jewish people 'the people of hope'. What had happened once would happen again. As the prophets of exile - Jeremiah and Ezekiel -

said: there would be a second exodus. The loss was only temporary. The Divine promise was for ever.

It was in this context that the debate over the fifth cup arose. Jews could speak about the four preliminary stages of redemption - but could they celebrate the fifth: 'I will bring you to the land'? That is the debate between Rashi, Rambam and Ravad. Rashi says one should not drink a fifth cup; Rambam says one may; Ravad says one should.

Hence the extra cup at the seder table. Out of respect for Rambam and Ravad, we pour it. Out of respect for Rashi, we do not drink it. According to the sages, unresolved halakhic disputes will one day be resolved by Elijah (the word Teyku, 'Let it stand [undecided], refers to Elijah: 'The Tishbite [Elijah] will come and answer questions and problems'). Hence the fifth cup became known as 'the cup of Elijah'.

In our times, the Jewish people has returned to the land. According to one sage (the late Rabbi Menahem Kasher), we should now drink the fifth cup. Be that as it may, it is no less moving to think back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries - the age of Rashi, Rambam and Ravad - and know that in the darkest night of exile, the only question was: how far, in the present, do we celebrate hope for the future? Four fifths? Or all five? The promise G-d gave Moses at the beginning of our sedra spoke not just to that time, but to all time. Pesach kept hope alive. Hope kept the Jewish people alive.

From: Efraim Goldstein
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Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet
VAERAH 5767

Mazel Tov to Debbie and John Joseph on the marriage of Nina to Doni Zupnick
Maza Tov Steve and Carolyn Baruch on the engagement of Ari to Sarah Singer

Jerusalem Post :: Jan 16 2007

CHARITABLE GIVING :: Rabbi Berel Wein

One of the hallmarks of Jewish life is charitable giving. My colleague, Jonathan Rosenblum had an interesting column about this in last week's Friday Jerusalem Post. But I want to approach the issue from a different point of view.

The Torah emphasizes this mitzvah of charitable giving numerous times. It is one of the identifying features of Jews according to the Talmud. In our time, charitable giving has become more organized, especially in the Diaspora. Most donors never face the indigent person that their money is meant to help. For this reason, to a great extent, charitable giving has become impersonal, unemotional and eventually tiring and boring.

It may very well be that in our modern society, organizational giving is the efficient and most practical way to go. But its facelessness and blandness deprives both the giver and the recipient of the connection to each other that was part of the Torah's intent in commanding us to participate constantly in charitable giving. In my synagogue there are "collectors" who appear daily at the prayer services to collect charity. Some of these people are clearly collecting money for themselves and their families. Others may be collecting for charity funds that they maintain and distribute to the needy. Usually the amount given to these people is a small coin - a half shekel or a full shekel. But the personal interaction between the giver and the taker makes for a meaningful experience, at least to me.

Giving a greater amount to an institution no matter how worthy and no matter how large the amount of the check remains essentially an impersonal experience. One has accomplished a great mitzvah through this donation but its impersonal nature often leaves the giver with a feeling of incompleteness.

Having been a fund raiser all of my professional life - for after all this is always part of the duties of being a communal rabbi - I long ago learned that people really give money to other people. Mailings, drives, phone calls (usually annoying ones at odd times of the day) and other usual methods of fundraising all have a place in our current world of charitable giving. But they are never as successful or meaningful as personal visits and contacts.

The Talmud records for us that Rabbi Akiva was "the hand of the poor." He stretched his hand forward to receive funds to distribute to the poor. People gave to Rabbi Akiva, to his hand, knowing that he represented the poor but also knowing that they had the privilege to give to a great person - Rabbi Akiva. The most successful fundraisers I have known are people who really and truly care about the donor and his or her welfare as much as they do about the cause or recipient that will eventually benefit from the donation.

It is the personal relationship that seals the deal because, as I mentioned above, people give to people. I knew a great man who for decades was the executive vice president and leading fundraiser for one of the great institutions of Torah learning in the United States. He later moved to Israel and became a fundraiser for an Israeli educational institution. When he made his annual fundraising trip to the United States he visited all of his old clients. Everyone gave him their usual donation to his new cause, not because they were particularly enamored of this institution but because they were giving him their donation. He was their friend and therefore their giving was motivated by that personal relationship between them.

From Jonathan Rosenblum's article about who in the Jewish world gives to whom and how often and how much, it is apparent that the more impersonal the relationship between the donor and the representatives of the cause, the less is the likelihood for a donation to be offered. Basically we live in a world that is becoming more and more impersonal in many ways. The Internet and e-mail have become the favored methods of communication between people. There is nothing more impersonal than this type of communication. And the more impersonal the communication between people, the less likely charitable giving will increase relative to the improving economy and standards of living here in Israel.

Charitable giving has to be made a value in our society. Education and family practice can advance it and so can personal connections and empathy between all of the classes in our society. We are taught that "charity can save one from death" - both for the giver and for the taker.

Shabat shalom. Chodesh tov.

Weekly Parsha :: VAEIRA :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Plagues, miracles and natural disasters are all recorded for us in this week's parsha. They seem to make little impression, either on Pharaoh or even on the Jewish slaves. These events indicate how difficult it is to alter people's preconceived perceptions and mindset.

Pharaoh is not impressed by the plagues because his own professional miracle makers were able to replicate the first three plagues. He therefore attributes all of the later plagues to forces of nature or superior professional miracle-makers that Moshe has somehow employed. The Jewish people also are, relatively speaking, little impressed by the plagues. They are so despondent as to their continued condition of slavery and, in fact, to their worsening situation since the onset of the rain of plagues, that they

have little hope that the plagues or Moshe can or will deliver them from Egyptian bondage.

One of the hallmarks of a slave mentality is the feeling of hopelessness and ingrained pessimism that is engendered into the psyche of the slave. Though completely understandable as to why this should be so, it is nevertheless most counterproductive to the drive for personal freedom and emancipation that is necessary in order to eventually become a person who is free not only in body but in spirit as well. .

The commentators, notably Ibn Ezra, state that this negative mentality persisted throughout the years in the desert of Sinai and was the contributing cause why that generation of former slaves could not enter the Land of Israel. For this reason we can understand the frustrations expressed by Moshe to God as recorded at the end of the parsha of last week. He is performing miracles left and right and no one seems to pay any attention to his feats.

Eventually Moshe comes to the realization that the Lord has been teaching him a basic lesson about human behavior. Great miracles, no matter how awesome and overwhelming, do not change human behavior and beliefs in any meaningful fashion. Pharaoh will be defeated only by force that strikes home to him personally – his first born child is killed and he is also in danger of being killed. It is not the miracle of the first-born killings that impresses him. It is the fear for his own safety that the miracle engendered that causes him to free the Jews, a decision that he almost immediately regrets. Miracles may raise Jewish faith temporarily but they do not form the methodology for developing lasting faith and commitment.

After all of the miracles, the Jews are still capable of making and worshipping a golden calf and rebelling against the rule of Moshe and God. Moshe realizes that no matter how many miracles occur, faith has to be nurtured and developed and maintained from the inside and not from outside circumstances and happenings.

Study, education, loyalty, and family become the keys to faith. At times miracles are necessary for the physical survival of the Jewish people. But the spiritual survival of Jews is wholly dependent upon Jews themselves. That is what God meant when He compared the patriarchs' behavior to that of Moshe. They, to a great extent, did it on their own. Moshe learns to emulate them. So should we. Shabat shalom Chodesh tov.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vaera
For the week ending 20 January 2007 / 1 Shevat 5767
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Overview

G-d tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt. However, the Jewish People do not listen. G-d commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. G-d punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these miracles on a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh to be obstinate. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

Insights

Take it to Your Heart

“Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem, chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants in the field.” (9:20).

Translation is a risky business.

When you translate a concept into another language, you put it into a set of cultural assumptions that may well be inimical to the concept itself.

A case in point is the Hebrew concept of yirat Hashem. Literally translated yirat Hashem means “fear of G-d”. Within the cultural framework of the English language, the adjective “G-dfearing” conjures up visions of the Pilgrim Fathers, characters with names like Jebedyah and Obadyah; Amish picket fences and Shaker furniture. “G-dfearing” is not an adjective that sits well in the mouth of the modern English-speaker. It is our culture's assumption that we should be free from fear.

In the view of Judaism, however, Yirat Hashem, fearing G-d, is the beginning of wisdom.

But what does G-dfearing mean? Does it mean having the haunted look of a severe paranoid, or that getting out of bed in the morning becomes an existential challenge?

This week's parsha reveals the essence of Yirat Hashem.

In the seventh plague, the Torah describes the Egyptian reaction to the news that G-d would cause lethal hail to fall on the land. “Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem, chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants in the field.” (9:20).

Ostensibly, the opposite of “feared the word of Hashem” in the first sentence should be “And whoever did not fear the word of G-d...” Why then is the opposite of fearing Hashem called “not taking the word of G-d to heart?”

The essence of yirat Hashem is paying attention.

Try this experiment.

How many times a day do you glance at your wristwatch? Let's say you look at the time twice an hour, maybe three times. Let's assume that you get up at seven and go to bed at twelve midnight. So, on average, you look at your watch some 50 times a day - 50 times a day, seven days a week. Let's say your watch is two years old. So you've looked at your watch approximately 35,000 times.

Now, without looking, can you tell me what's written on the face of your watch? Chances are that you left something out, or got something wrong.

You can look at the same thing, day in, day out, but if you don't pay attention, you'll never really see it.

It's the same with yirat Hashem. You can know there's a G-d, believe the Torah's true, even do all the mitzvot, but never achieve an awareness of G-d.

You can think that being an angry person is a very bad thing, but unless you internalize this awareness until it becomes instinctive, you will carry on being Mr. Angry for the rest of your life.

Every day we say in the prayer, Aleinu, “... You should know this day and take to your heart that Hashem is the only G-d – in heaven above and on the earth below – there is none other.”

The essence of fearing G-d is not just “to know this day”, but also “to take it to your heart.”

Based on the Sfat Emet and other sources

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

PARSHAS VA'ERA

G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I am Hashem." (6:2)

The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh notes that the pasuk commences with the word Elokim, which describes Hashem's Name, a name that reflects Hashem's manifestation of His Middah, Attribute, of Din, Strict Justice. It concludes, however, with the name, Hashem, which denotes Middas HaRachamim, the Attribute of Mercy. The Ohr Hachaim explains that Hashem was teaching Moshe Rabbeinu that, despite outward appearances which make the shibud Mitzrayim, Egyptian bondage, appear to be the result of Din, Justice, it was not so. Appearances can be deceiving. In effect, the bondage resulted from Rachamim. How are we to

perceive mercy reflected in the terrible slave labor to which the Jewish People were subjected?

Horav Chaim Kamil, zl, cites the commentators who assert that one of the reasons that Hashem subjected the Jews to slavery was so that they would become imbued with a natural tendency towards servitude. Man, by his natural instinct, resists any form of servitude. He throws off any yoke of confinement that is placed over him. The reason is simple: servitude means that the person has no individuality, no distinctiveness, no identity of his own. This is intolerable for a human being. Everyone wants to be in charge, to be his own boss. No one is inclined to be beholden to others. Hashem sought more for the Jewish People. They were to leave Egypt in order to accept Hashem, His Torah, and the yoke of mitzvos willingly over themselves. They were to become ovdei Hashem, servants of the Almighty. This would have been an incredibly traumatic change for a nation that had not previously experienced the taste of obedience and subjugation.

Klal Yisrael obtained this attribute during the years of enslavement in Egypt. Thus, what appeared to be a consequence of Din was actually a corollary of Rachamim, as Hashem prepared the Jewish People for a life of service to the Almighty. Rav Kamil explains that this awareness could only have been comprehended through hisbonenus, penetrating analysis: By cogently asking ourselves, what does Hashem want of me that He is putting me through this ordeal of slavery? Why is He doing this? When a person uses his mind to think clearly, he derives the correct answer.

It happens all of the time. We see and we experience, but it flies over our heads, because we do not think. Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, noted that while Chazal teach us that the simple maidservant who experienced the splitting of the Red Sea perceived a greater revelation of the Shechinah than the Navi Yechezkel, she, nonetheless, remained a maidservant. She did not transform. It was not a mind-altering experience for her, because she did not think. She was not misbonein.

I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov as Keil Shakkai. (6:3)

Moshe Rabbeinu complained to Hashem that although he had been sent to bring relief to the nation, it seemed that his presence only provoked Pharaoh to make matters worse for them. Hashem was not pleased with Moshe's righteous grievance. He responded by saying that He had revealed Himself to the Avos, Patriarchs, with the Name Shakkai, referring to the manner in which He guides the world. How does the use of the name Shakkai explain to Moshe why life would have to become worse for the Jews before it would become better? Horav Avraham Pam, zl, quoted by Rabbi Sholom Smith in his English rendition of the Ateres Avraham, cites the Midrash that explains that the root of the word Shakkai is dai, enough. It describes Hashem as setting limits to the development of Creation and establishing specific laws of nature. Otherwise, had Hashem not declared Dai! Enough! at the conclusion of the Six Days of Creation, the waters would have expanded and inundated the earth. The heaven and earth would have also continued expanding. Hence, the name Shakkai represents the limits by which the universe, and everything within it, is controlled.

Rav Pam so aptly explains that there is a precise equilibrium in the world. In order for the world to function properly this equilibrium must be maintained. For example, the earth must remain at a certain distance from the sun. Otherwise, it would either be too cold or too hot, and life could not exist. Likewise, this notion applies to the various planets. Everything must remain in its specific place, or there would be a disaster. This same idea applies to a human being, who is actually an olam katan, small world, a microcosm of the universe. If any imbalance occurs in his body, in his chemical makeup, he can become deathly ill or emotionally unstable. Shakkai plays a crucial role in the life of a human being. Hashem was indicating to Moshe that He governs everything in this world and controls it with precise regulations. He controls the

world with the sod hatzimtum, the secret of exact limitations. Everything that takes place occurs with an equilibrium that is beyond human rationale. Man cannot comprehend how it was possible for the moment of redemption from Egypt to have been quickly approaching, while the slavery was becoming increasingly more difficult and painful. It could only be understood through the concept of Shakkai, in which Hashem creates a precise equilibrium which fits into the context of overall history. The Divine "computer" takes everything into account. The intensification of slavery essentially brought the redemption closer, because it would ultimately hasten the punishment of the Egyptians once they had completed the measure of sin necessary to catalyze Hashem's retribution.

Many occurrences take place in our lives for which we cannot provide a rationale. Indeed, many are troubling. A believing Jew, however, understands that there are things that he does not understand. We trust that Hashem has His reasons for everything that He does. This realization helps us to weather life's occasional storms.

"So says Hashem, 'Through this shall you know that I am Hashem.'" (7:17)

With the above pasuk, we begin to relate the Ten Plagues that neutralized Pharaoh's reluctance to send the Jews from his land. On Pesach night, these Ten Plagues play a central role in the story of yetzias Mitzrayim, the exodus from Egypt. When we think about it, we wonder why Hashem did this. Why was it necessary to plague the Egyptians in order to bring about their agreement to let the Jews leave? Hashem can do anything. He certainly could have "convinced" Pharaoh in another manner to acquiesce to the liberation of the Jews.

Horav Shabsi Yudelevitz, zl, cites the famous statement made by the Baal Haggadah, "Had not the Holy One, Blessed is He, taken our fathers out from Egypt, then we, our children, and grandchildren would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt." Certainly, the Tanna who authored this work is not suggesting that had Hashem not taken us out, we might still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Many things have happened since that day. Nations have come and gone. Egypt is no longer the same country it was at that time. What does the Tanna mean?

Had Pharaoh "agreed" of his own free-will and "kindness" of heart to let us go, had he not been broken by the plagues, we would until this very day remain beholden and subservient to him for freeing us from bondage. True, we would have left Egypt, but we would not have truly been free men. Pharaoh would still have remained our master. Therefore, the Ten Plagues were for us. They serve as an eternal testament that we owe nothing to Pharaoh. Hashem freed us from Pharaoh's bondage against Pharaoh's will. The plagues broke the shackles of Egyptian bondage, as Pharaoh was forced to his knees in obedience to Hashem.

The first makah, plague, was dam, blood. The Baal Haggadah refers to the blood as a mofeis, wonder. Mofsim - zeh ha'dam. "Wonders - this refers to blood." Why is this plague in particular called a mofeis? The Ritva explains that blood was the only plague in which the essential character of the subject transformed. Water turning into blood is a wonder. In contrast, in the other plagues, the only alteration of nature that occurred was a change in the behavior of the subject. For instance, a multitude of frogs or lice came together in one place, for one purpose. While this was certainly a miracle, it did not change the essence of the frog or lice. Water, on the other hand, was changed into blood.

Furthermore, the Ritva notes that even the water that remained in the possession of a Jew, which normally would not have turned into blood, became blood once it fell into the hands of an Egyptian. This is a mofeis. Even if a Jew and an Egyptian were to have been drinking with two straws from one cup, the Egyptian would be drinking blood, while the Jew would be drinking water. This is a mofeis.

If you refuse to release my nation. (7:27)

For, if you refuse to send out. (9:2)

"How long will you refuse to be humbled before me?" (10:3)

In his warning to Pharaoh following the plague of hailstones, Moshe Rabbeinu admonished him for his refusal to humble himself before the Almighty. Interestingly, this warning is different from the ones that preceded the previous plagues. In order to explain, let us analyze the plagues. Pharaoh defiantly declared, "Who is Hashem?" In response to his recalcitrance, Hashem sent the Ten Plagues to teach Pharaoh "Who" Hashem was. These plagues were grouped into three sets of three with the tenth plague, the killing of the Egyptian firstborn, serving as the final catalyst for the release of the Jewish People. The first two of each set of plagues were preceded by a warning encouraging Pharaoh to repent and avert the destruction, pain and misery that would result from the plagues. There was no notification prior to the third plague of each set, since this was a punishment for ignoring the first two warnings. The second plague of the first two groups was preceded by the words, "If, you refuse to release them" (Shemos 7:27, 9:2). This occurred prior to the plague of frogs and pestilence. Following the plague of hailstones, however, the warning changed. Now, Moshe declared, "How long will you refuse to be humbled before me?" What is to be derived from this change in the warning?

Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, cites the Rambam in his Iggeres HaMussar who writes: "Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is the embodiment of the yetzer hora, evil-inclination." Why does the Rambam describe Pharaoh as evil incarnate?

Chazal cite a discussion about the question concerning when the yetzer hora becomes active. Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi posits that it occurs at the time the embryo is formed within the mother's womb. Antoninus, the Caesar who was Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi's close friend, asked, "If so, why does the fetus not kick against its mother and bolt out? Obviously, this indicates that the evil-inclination becomes dominant at birth." Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi concurred with his friend's exegesis.

This position, however, seems questionable when taking into consideration the words of Chazal in Niddah 30b, "An unborn child in its mother's womb has a beacon lit over its head with which he can perceive the world from one end to another. No days in a person's existence are more blissful than those days." If the time spent in the womb offers the peak of pleasure, why would the evil-inclination want to enter an existence that is so antithetical to its very essence? The yetzer hora thrives in a negative, miserable situation, not one of bliss and pleasure. Why would it do something so atypical of its "nature"?

Rav Miller explains that, indeed, there is one impingement on the infant's blissful existence: it is confined and restricted. Anyone who is privy to modern society knows that restriction of any form is universally resented and viewed as one of today's worst ills. The desire for freedom, both personal and national, is one of the most basic and intrinsic instincts that drive mankind. As evidenced by the dialogue between Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi and Antoninus, this drive takes effect even under the most blissful circumstance, when a child is ensconced within its mother's womb.

Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, remarks that this idea is implied by the name of Pharaoh. An allusion to the meaning of the name Pharaoh is to be found in the pasuk describing the sin of the Golden Calf: "Moshe saw that the nation was paruah, exposed, for Aharon praah, had uncovered them" (Shemos 32:25). Rashi interprets this: Paruah means exposed, for the nation's evil and shame was revealed. Thus, paruah/Pharaoh denotes a breaching of the parameters of the heart, a granting free rein and open license to the evil-inclination. This is Pharaoh. It is to this exposed, unabashed evil-inclination that the Rambam refers when he says that Pharaoh embodies the essence of the evil-inclination. Man's resistance to restriction and confinement lies at the root of all sin. No one wants to be told, - "No!"

In addressing the original question, Rav Miller cites the Malbim who underscores Pharaoh's reaction to the concrete display of Hashem's Omnipotence. He explains that the purpose of the first three plagues was to demonstrate that Ani Hashem, "I am G-d," the existence of Hashem's power. The second set of plagues was to demonstrate the concept of Divine Providence. Hashem is powerful, and He controls every aspect of this universe. Now, Pharaoh was threatened. He felt that he was the undisputed ruler of Egypt. No one else could undermine him, or claim this position. Pharaoh could not deal with this. His identity as supreme ruler was being challenged, restricting the extent of his total control over the freedom of others. The third group of plagues crumbled the last vestige of Pharaoh's imaginary power, for they attested, without any room for doubt, that Hashem was the Supreme Ruler and power. Each step in the process called the Ten Plagues presented further indication to Pharaoh, the individual who challenged any form of personal limitation, that his powers were truly restricted.

During this entire process, Pharaoh refused to acknowledge the fact that he was not in control, that he did not dominate. In the beginning, Pharaoh could still render his own decision, but in the third set of plagues, this, too, was taken from him. He was now completely confused. It was at this point that he was admonished, "How long will you refuse to be humbled before me?" You have already lost everything. Do you not see that you are not what you think you are? Your mind is no longer your own. You have lost your free choice. You have been censured for refusing to acknowledge your limitations and Hashem's Omnipotence.

Pharaoh's defiance, his virulent objection to the limitation of his own power, identified him as evil incarnate. The Ten Plagues taught him how wrong he was.

We quest for freedom. Yet, we do not realize that total freedom is the greatest constraint to one's spiritual development. Restrictions allow the individual to achieve the greatest spiritual heights, as they free him from the encumbrances of egotism and physicality which are so dominant in contemporary society.

In a shmuess, ethical discourse, entitled Paleis maagal raglecha, "Measure out the circle of your activity," Horav Yosef Leib Bloch, zl, explains that the circumference of each person's circle is in proportion to his spiritual standing. The greater one's spiritual position, the smaller is his circle. A lowly, base person needs a larger circle of activity and external interests in order to achieve self-satisfaction. The spiritual void from within compels him to look elsewhere, to turn to outside sources of pleasure and fulfillment. The inner vacuum must be filled and, since the spiritual dimension is not in his area of interest, he must seek artificial sources to supply contentment. Physicality can never satisfy one's spiritual yearnings, so he is forced to seek grander and more glorious external aids to fill the inner abyss.

Meanwhile, the area of his personal circle is increasing, as his yetzer hora pressures him to broaden his "horizons." Conversely, the individual who is spiritually focused, who is a person of great spiritual stature, needs only a small field of external activity to satisfy his inner-self. His true happiness lies in satisfying his spiritual needs and giving satisfaction to Hashem through his service and mitzvah performance. His needs are small; his desires are limited. External substitutes are not needed when one's inner-self is filled with a pulsating life force of spirituality.

Hishallalu b'shem kodsho.

Glorify in His Holy Name.

The Binah Laltim explains that we become glorified by praising Hashem. The Almighty certainly does not need our praise. Rather, we become glorified when we avail ourselves of the opportunity to praise and pay homage to Him. Hishallalu, glorify (yourselves) by praising Hashem. The fact that Hashem is among us, that He is in our midst, is sufficient reason for us to be filled with pride. Everything that we possess is from Hashem. When we internalize this realization, we may take pride in our accomplishments and success, because we are acknowledging their source.

Yismach lev me'vakshei Hashem. "So that the hearts of those who seek Hashem shall be gladdened." The Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains that when one seeks and searches for an item, he does not derive satisfaction until after he has successfully obtained and acquired that object. One who is mevakeish Hashem, seeks Hashem, however, derives great pleasure from the actual search. The process catalyzes great satisfaction for him. This is Hashem's guarantee for the individual who is sincere in his quest.

What does it mean to seek Hashem? Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that those who are looking for meaning in their lives, who are thoroughly disgusted with the type of world in which they live, are called mevakshei Hashem. They seek the Almighty. Our happiness and pride emanates from the fact that we have a relationship with Hashem. This brings us joy, and this is what attracts those who seek Hashem to us. They yearn to feel what we feel. It is our obligation to share that wonderful feeling with them. This is the true meaning of Hisallalu b'shem kodsho. By priding ourselves in living a life in accordance with His Will, we encourage others to do the same.

I'zechar nishmas Yaakov Shimon ben Yisrael Tzvi z"l Mrs. Helen Pollack Mrs. Patti Pollack Rivki & Yossi Kornfeld Mendy & Raizy Pollack Yoni & Bumie Goldstein, Avi & Estee Pollack Pnina & Stephen Glassman Motti & Evy Pollack

"RavFrاند" List - Parshas Vaera Showing The Nile The Gratitude It Deserved

Parshas Vaera contains the bulk of the Ten Plagues, beginning with the plague of Blood and continuing up to the plague of Locusts. The plagues begin with G-d's command to Moshe: "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt; over their rivers, over their canals, over their ponds, and over all their gatherings of water, and they shall become blood; there shall be blood in all the land of Egypt, and in the wood and in the stones.'" [Shmos 7:19]

Rashi on this pasuk [verse] teaches that it was Aaron, rather than Moshe, was commanded to initiate this plague because the Nile protected Moshe when he was thrown into it as an infant. Therefore, Aaron initiated the plague of Blood and the plague of Frogs (in which the Nile was also smitten). The Gemara comments on this: A person should not cast stones into the well from which he has drunk.

This is the principle of Hakaras HaTov [recognizing a favor]. We learn from here that Hakaras HaTov applies even when the doer of the favor is only doing what he is supposed to do anyway. The Nile merely floated the basket. That is the nature of water. It is a law of physics that something lighter than water floats on water. The Nile thus did not go out of its way to do anything special for Moshe. It just did what it has been doing since the beginning of time.

And yet, we still learn from here that there is an obligation of Hakaras HaTov. This dispels a common practice among people. It is the nature of people to say: "Why do I need to say 'Thank you'? Why do I need to have HaKaros HaTov? -- He had to do it anyway!"

Hakaras HaTov is not measured by the benefactor's efforts. It is measured by the impact on the recipient. When someone benefits from someone else— whether the benefactor did or did not need to provide the benefit, he did or did not have to do it, whether it was or was not a bother for him, the beneficiary has a responsibility to recognize that he owes a debt of gratitude. The proof is the Nile River. It merely did what water does and yet Moshe Rabbeinu felt a sense of Hakaras HaTov.

The Egyptians Remained Stubborn Against Their Better Judgment

The plague of Dever [Pestilence] wiped out all the livestock of Egypt. However, none of the cows belonging to Jews died. Nevertheless, Pharaoh's heart was hardened. The plague did not have the desired effect.

By the next plague, that of Boils (Shechin), the pasuk says, "It will become dust over the entire land of Egypt, and it shall become a boil blossoming forth blisters upon man and upon animal throughout the land of Egypt." [Shmos 9:9]. Indeed, this is exactly what happened: "They took soot of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh and Moses threw it heavenward, and it became a boil and blisters erupting upon man and upon animal." [Shmos 9:10]. The question is "What animals? What beasts?" Weren't all the animals killed during the previous plague of Dever?

Rashi addresses this question. Rashi says that the plague of Dever only affected the animals that were out in the field. Those people "who feared the word of G-d" brought their animals inside and they were spared from the plague of Dever. Therefore, at this point in time, only the people "who feared G-d" still had animals.

But in the very next plague of Barad [Hail], Moshe again gave fair warning to the people: "Behold at this time tomorrow I shall rain a very heavy hail, such as there has never been in Egypt, from the day it was founded until now. And now send forth, gather in your livestock and everything you have in the field; all the people and animals that are found in the field and will not be gathered into the house - the hail shall descend upon them and they shall die." [Shmos 9:18-19]

The Torah continues: "Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart - he left his servants and livestock in the field." [Shmos 9:20-21]

The question cries out to us: Anyone who still had animals at this stage of the cycle of plagues was already proven to be one who feared the word of G-d. How then, can the pasuk teach that there were people who DID NOT fear the word of G-d who kept their animals out in the field during the plague of Barad?

I saw a very interesting insight on this question from Rav Elya Meir Bloch. The Torah is revealing to us a basic truth in human nature. It is true that during the fifth plague of Dever there were Egyptians who "feared the word of G-d" and brought their animals into the barns before the plague began. But by this seventh plague of Barad some of these same people stubbornly proclaimed "No! I refuse to take in my animals." The difference is that in the warning before the plague of Dever, Moshe Rabbeinu did not challenge the Egyptians to bring the animals into their houses. He did not lay down the gauntlet and say (as he does by Barad) "You want your animals alive - bring them in; you want your animals dead, leave them out!"

During the earlier plague, people with brains in their head took appropriate precautionary action. They were not fighting the yetzer hara [evil inclination] of standing up to Moshe's challenge. However, with barad, when they were threatened, as much as their logic and brains told them to take appropriate precautions, their emotions would not allow them to follow through. This is human nature. We resist orders and coercion even when deep down, we know that listening to these "orders" would be the wisest path to follow.

People are willing to lose life, limb, and property, just so they can avoid admitting "Hashem is the L-rd." (Hashem hu haElokim).

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h a a r e t z

Portion of the Week / The cup of redemption By Benjamin Lau

Last week's Torah reading ended with Moses' despair. In his distress, he sharply criticized God, "Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me?" (Exodus 5:22)

Parashat Va'era opens with God's response. God wants Moses to take a different perspective on the Israelites' suffering: "Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord" (Exod. 6:6-8).

The Israelites, suffering under their Egyptian masters, are emotionally incapable of listening to this great vision of redemption. Their harsh daily reality does not allow them to lift their heads above their immediate pain. However, Moses must be given the right direction; he must hear the message. He must lift his eyes so that he can see the distant goal, so that he will not fall into despair. According to one view expressed in the Jerusalem Talmud (Pesachim Tractate, chapter 10), these verses are the source of the four cups of wine we drink at the Passover Seder: "Why four cups? Rabbi Yohanan, quoting Rabbi Benaya: 'Because there are four forms of redemption - as it is written, "Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out.... And I will take you to me for a people...." - "I will bring you out," "and I will rid you out," "and I will redeem you," "And I will take you."'"

However, God promises a fifth form of redemption: "And I will bring you in unto the land." Someone, at some time, decided that the first four forms of redemption, symbolizing a relationship between a nation and its God based on religious faith, were sufficient, relinquishing the geographical promise of a vision of redemption to be realized in Eretz Israel.

God's promise

In these verses outlining God's promise to the Jews, there is a difference between the first four verbs of redemption and the fifth. Before we encounter the fifth, God demands of us: "... and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." This distinction can be understood as follows: God took us out of Egypt because the time for the Exodus had arrived. Even if the Israelites did not listen to Moses because they were anguished by their enslavement, and even if they only prayed in order to ameliorate their condition, God decided it was time to release them.

The Haggadah tells us that, had God not taken us out of Egypt with his "mighty hand and outstretched arm," we and all our descendants would have remained slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. The "mighty hand and outstretched arm" are generally interpreted as divine action against the Egyptians. The Prophet Ezekiel, however, sees the Exodus differently. In his view, God's mighty hand was directed against Israel: God liberated the Jews from Egypt against their will. They did not want to leave and certainly did not want God's kingdom. The four terms of redemption were activated against our will. There is a certain moment when a person must be pushed into liberty. God decided that we must be liberated, but only up to a certain point, only as far as the desert. As Ezekiel says, "But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt. Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness" (20:9-10).

We left Egypt but had not yet reached the Promised Land. We were left with the four cups on Passover that symbolize the first four terms of redemption. God awaits us but, at this stage, He will not force the fifth form of redemption upon us. The shift to the next stage of freedom depends on us; it is an expression of an inner liberation resulting from free choice. The awakening of a connection with Eretz Israel stems from an internal Jewish

awareness that the Diaspora is not our home. The Torah promises us that this awakening will be generated by an inner national spirit, not by external force. This idea may explain the unique status of the fifth cup.

In exile Jewish communities generally followed one of two traditions regarding the fifth cup. Since the time of the Babylonian Talmud, Sephardic Jews have allowed anyone who wants a fifth cup of wine to drink it and to say the traditional Hallel song of praise over it. Ashkenazic communities have refrained from drinking the fifth cup, instead placing it on the table with the idea that Prophet Elijah would one day drink it.

We could take a daring interpretative approach and argue that Sephardic Jews (such as Rabbi Judah Halevi and Nahmanides) came to live in Eretz Israel and drink the fifth cup, which symbolizes free choice, while Ashkenazic Jews maintained a greater distance but did not forget their longing for Eretz Israel.

Today we live here, on the soil of the land God wanted to give us as a "heritage." Perhaps we must reinterpret the fifth cup. Perhaps we can complete the message of redemption only by keeping our end of the bargain in the great vision - "... and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God" - only if we know the place of the individual and the nation under God's skies. Social and civic behavior stemming from this humble awareness is the condition under which we can drink the fifth cup.

THE ALTER on THE PARSHA

Shmuessen of Rav Nossan Tzvi Finkel, Zt"l, the Alter of Slabodka

Adapted from Sefer Ohr HaTzafun

Edited & Compiled by Rabbi Eliezer Grunberg Chaver Kollel Ner David

PARSHAS VA'EIRA 5767

דרך התשובה

An ideal method for motivating oneself to repent is to focus on Hashem's boundless love and constant kindness. The existence of Teshuva itself is an unparalleled gift and this realization should impel us to rectify our actions.

While we might think that there is ample basis for Hashem to provide us with the opportunity to repent, this is due to our lack of understanding of the severity of our sins. The concept of Teshuva is beyond human comprehension. After one has followed the desires of his heart and turned against his Creator, how could his slate be wiped clean? Yet, Hashem embedded the concept of Teshuva into the very fabric of creation, and he not only accepts our repentance, He even reaches out and helps us along this path. (גמ' ירושלמי מכות ב'ו')

Hashem's kindness goes much further. The posuk in Yechezkel (י"ח) says, "כי לא אחפוץ במות המת נאום ה' אלקים והשיבו וחיו" - "For I do not desire the death of the one who should die", says Hashem, "Turn back and you shall live." Hashem has mercy even on those who have sunk to a level of spiritual death. He wishes for their repentance and seeks ways to awaken them and inspire their return. As a last resort, Hashem will even inflict suffering upon a person out of compassion and desire to arouse their repentance.

The Midrash (שמו"ר כ') quotes the posuk in Mishlei (כ"ו) "שבת לגו" - "A rod for the back of fools" and says that this refers to Pharaoh and Egyptians. Despite their tremendous wickedness and all they did to the Jewish people, Hashem desired their repentance. He inflicted plague after plague, radically changing nature, trying to awaken them to Teshuva. This is the unbelievable degree of Hashem's benevolence, and Hashem expected Pharaoh and the Egyptians to appreciate it. He did not wish for them to let the Jews free due to their unbearable suffering, rather that they should recognize Hashem's greatness and the kindness he was doing for them. The Egyptians were surely deserving of death, but Hashem, in His compassion, kept offering them

opportunities to repent. In the midst of their suffering, despite their wickedness, they had the potential to recognize the mercy of Hashem. (ע' ספורנו ז'ג, ט' ט"ז)

But, Pharaoh and the Egyptians did not come to believe in Hashem and recognize His immeasurable chessed, the only regret they felt was due to their inability to tolerate the plagues. This type of regret may be short-lived. During the actual plague, Pharaoh was ready to give in and even said, "ה' הצדיק ואני ועמי הרשעים" - "Hashem is righteous and I and my people are wicked." Even after seeing such miracles and experiencing such pain, as soon as the plague ended, Pharaoh immediately returned to his evil ways. This is stated in the posuk (שמות ח'::א) "וירא פרעה, (שמות ח'::א) - "And Pharaoh saw that there was relief and he hardened his heart." This did not occur once; after each of the first five plagues, Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to listen to Hashem. Since his repentance was based solely on fear of punishment, Pharaoh's evil nature quickly reasserted itself and erased his previous resolutions.

During the final plagues, it was Hashem who, in his infinite goodness, hardened Pharaoh's heart. Knowing that Pharaoh was about to send the Jews out of Mitzrayim only due to his inability to bear any more agony, Hashem strengthened his resolve in order to give him the opportunity to repent on a higher level. Maybe through yet another and even greater plague, Pharaoh would finally recognize Hashem's greatness and unparalleled kindness. (ע' ספורנו ז'ג)

One of the greatest manifestations of Hashem's unfathomable chessed is His encouragement and assistance in bringing us to Teshuva. Understanding that our Father in Heaven loves us and is waiting for us to return despite the severity of our sins can inspire us to repent and give us the strength to continuously come closer to Him.

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Parashat Va'ayrah: A Friend of Israel
Rabbi Nachman Kahana**

"And Yehuda too will make war on Yerushalayim" (Zecharia 14,14)
The Parasha begins with HaShem's disappointment at Moshe's emotional shift at the turn of events, from elation that the time for Jewish redemption has finally arrived to the realization that his efforts only worsened an already intolerable situation.

As brought by Rashi, HaShem expresses His yearning for the forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, who unquestionably accepted all the obstacles which were imposed upon them; while Moshe became skeptical because of the downward spiral of events.

Let's take a 3500 year leap from the parasha to our times and try to imagine what HaShem's thoughts are today, as He perceives to where we, His "chosen people," have evolved.

I am not referring to the Jew who for a ham sandwich or for a Gentile companion has betrayed 150 generations of the family's adherence to Judaism; nor am I interested in the more than 50% of the declared Jews in the US who are non-Halachic, having been "converted" by reform or conservative ritual practitioners. I am distressed at what has happened within our "family" of Torah-loyal Jews.

To begin with, there is a chassidic segment which adheres to a single rabbi who died 250 years ago, with many of its members shuffling through the day mumbling "Na. Nach" etc, and writing it as graffiti whenever an empty wall beckons. Thousands of them converge yearly on the city of Uman in the Ukraine, the rabbi's

resting place, to usher in Rosh Hashana. This is the same blood drenched Ukraine which brought to the Jewish people Chmielniki and his gangs who in 1648-9 destroyed over 350 Jewish communities, the massacre at Babi Yar, John Demjanjuk (Ivan the Terrible who lived for many years in Cleveland) as well as many infamously efficient concentration camp guards. It is for a staff of very competent psychiatrists to examine why they do so when they have the opportunity to come to Eretz Yisrael, the burial place of the holiest rabbis who were ever born to our nation, and to Yerushalayim where their prayers from the Ukraine will have to come anyway before ascending to where those prayers go!

Another large chassidic segment sits by the grave of their rabbi in Brooklyn, awaiting his resurrection as the Meshiach (just as Christians in Jerusalem sit by their saviour's grave waiting for him to return. Both parties will be disappointed) and in order not to waste time, they send the rabbi halachic and personal questions for which they mysteriously receive answers. Incredible!

But the most serious deterioration in "Jewish normalcy" is being perpetrated by seemingly sane people, who neither venture to the Ukraine nor wait for a grave to suddenly open. From the exterior they look reasonably normal; but they are carriers of a terminal illness of the soul - they are very, very sick people.

They can be found in various Jewish communities, but they also have an address in Iran. They meet, after the customary kissing ceremony, with the worst enemies of the Jewish people in that country since Haman; and provide the Iranians with a justification for implementing their determination to destroy the State of Israel with its 6 million Jewish citizens.

If the problem were limited to these few demented individuals, they would not deserve more of a mention than the psychiatric patients in a hospital, but I fear that they represent a much larger segment of religious life than we realize.

Granted that only these demented few would actually make the move to Teheran, but ideologically they represent many others who are unfaithful to the God of Israel and to Am Yisrael.

Who are these "others" and where are they hiding?

There is a litmus test to find out.

My dear friends, Msrs. Howard Rhine and Vel Werblowsky, under the auspices of the OU have produced beautifully printed cards with the prayer for the soldiers of Tzahal.

Go to the leading - even non-Chassidic yeshivot - in the galut. Set up a table before the entrance door and begin distributing the cards, free of charge. In the best case you will be cursed and spat at; eventually your table will be overturned, and if by then you will not have caught on prepare a pair of crutches to help you get to the ambulance.

The supporters of Achmedinejad are only the tip of the ideological iceberg which has spread far and wide. There exists a hatred toward Medinat Yisrael in parts of the yeshiva world.

But don't be surprised because it is predicted in the Tanach.

The prophet Zecharia writes (14,14): And Yehuda too will make war on Yerushalayim"

The Ibn Ezra and Radak understand the verse in its literal sense. That there will be Jews who will aid and abet the enemies of Yerushalayim. It has come to pass in our time!

Let's go one step further.

Does your bet kneset recite the prayer for the soldiers of Tzahal, at least on Shabbat? When was the last time your rabbi spoke about Eretz Yisrael in a positive way? When was the last time your rabbi spoke about aliya to Eretz Yisrael? Who was the last rabbi in your bet kneset to have made aliya himself? Why is it that the majority of religious Jews in the USA never visited Medinat Yisrael? The Gemara in Sanhedrin 27b defines a "sonai" (one who hates his neighbor) as one who out of anger has not spoken to his neighbor for three days.

If three shabbatot pass and your bet kneset does not say the prayer for the Medina and for the gallant soldiers of Israel, the people in that bet kneset are not friends of Israel!

If your rabbi has not spoken of Israel for three weeks, he too is not a friend of Israel!

I know there are synagogues and yeshivot where Eretz Yisrael is anathema. I compare the situation to a case where a person leaves 100 million dollars to his son in a will and deposits the will with an attorney with the instructions to inform his son when the time comes. The father leaves the world, but the attorney never informs the son that he has a treasure waiting for him. So too HaShem left us a heritage beyond money, called Eretz Yisrael. Yet many rabbis and roshei yeshivot do not inform their congregations and students of their rightful heritage.

It is a very sad situation, when a parent, after investing untold efforts in rearing children, discovers that some have misdirected his teachings to the detriment of the larger family. I fear that this is HaShem's "feeling" when, after performing the greatest chesed and miracle in the last 2000 years for the Jewish nation, finds some of His children denying what He has done for them.

I have just returned from a four day conference of rabbanim from all over the country, dedicated to the halachic implications of the last war in Lebanon.

At one of the sessions, Harav Yitzchak Grossman of Migdal Ha'aymek, one of Israel's most successful rabbis who has "returned to the fold" thousands of ba'alei teshuva, showed a film of his hosting several hundred reserve paratroopers before they entered the battle. He gave each one a shekel with which they were made shlichim (agents) to perform the mitzva of charity when they returned from the battle. And in this merit they will all return safely and healthy.

The film shows how a few weeks later they returned to Rabbi Grossman's yeshiva at 2:00 AM; dirty, disheveled after marching many kilometers out of Lebanon. They entered one by one; and the film shows how each one kissed and embraced the Rav. You see battle weary Jewish soldiers, each carrying 50-60 kilos on his back, caressing this great rabbi in love, like children to a father. Each was like an angel who HaShem had sent to save the Jewish people.

There was not a dry eye in the room. The 500 people viewing the film were so moved at what they were seeing. But I was crying for an additional reason.

I was thinking from where I had come, and in gratitude was thanking HaShem for permitting me to escape the suffocating, oppressive environment of the galut education based on negativism, and an unwillingness to recognize the great miracles of HaShem. Because this recognition would require accepting the demanding responsibility to return to Eretz Yisrael and participating in the final redemption of our people.

What I have written above is essentially a warning. The Torah and our historical experience teach that when HaShem exhibits disappointment towards a generation or at a leader, it does not remain in the realm of the theoretical - punishment ensues and people are hurt.

I suggest that the leading rabbis and roshei yeshiva in the galut meet and formulate an agenda for the religious world there, to leave the galut to the Gentiles and return in mass to Eretz Yisrael to strengthen Torah learning here; which will hasten the final redemption.

Shabbat Shalom

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion Judging Scholars Favorably Psalm 125: Judging Scholars Favorably

This brief "song of ascents" speaks of God's special protection of His people. Like the ring of mountains protecting Jerusalem, God guards and watches over us. The chapter concludes with a short prayer:

"May God benefit those who are good and upright in their hearts. But those who turn to their crooked ways - God will lead them away, together with the doers of iniquity. May there be peace upon Israel." [Ps. 125:4-5]

Making Others Crooked

The above translation is not completely faithful to the original Hebrew. The word ha-matim ('those who turn') is in the Hif'il (causative) tense. This verb form indicates that the evil are turning others to their crooked ways. Who are their victims? Clearly, those mentioned in the previous verse - "those who are good and upright in their hearts."

According to the Talmud, they do not so much mislead the righteous as ascribe to them their own unscrupulous traits.

"Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: whoever makes derogatory remarks about Torah scholars after their death will be cast into Gehinnom. Even at a time when 'there is peace upon Israel,' 'God will lead them away with the doers of iniquity.'" [Brachot 19a]

Belittling others is wrong, and belittling Torah scholars is worse. But does it warrant such a harsh verdict?

Respecting Scholars

The Torah's command, "Judge your neighbor fairly" [Lev. 19:15], is not only for those who work officially as judges. We are all judges; we are constantly passing judgment on other people. It is an important ethical principle that we should look for the best in others and give them the benefit of the doubt [Avot 1:6].

Judging favorably is especially important with regard to Torah scholars. The Sages wrote that one who ridicules his rabbis will find it difficult to repent. What makes this particular offense so hard to correct? Maimonides gave a very simple and practical reason: if one does not respect his rabbis and teachers, from whom will he be able to learn? [Hilchot Teshuva 4:2] Such a person is left without any ethical moorings. He has no role models to respect and emulate, no moral teachings that he truly identifies with. As the Talmud cautions, he is doomed to share the lot of 'doers of iniquity.'

Respecting their Teachings

Interestingly, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explained the verse as referring to one who denigrates scholars posthumously. This reading of the verse apparently stems from the similarity between the words ha-matim ('those who turn') and mitatan ('their death bier').

The emphasis on honoring scholars even after their passing indicates that we should respect not only the scholars themselves, but also that which carries on after their death - their sayings and teachings. This idea is already mentioned by Maimonides in his Guide to Perplexed [3:14]: the trait of giving the benefit of the doubt also applies to the writings of the sages. Even that which appears to be illogical or inaccurate, deeper examination will uncover profound and inspiring ideas. With this attitude of intellectual humility, the holy words of these truly wise men will illuminate our lives.

The psalm concludes with a short prayer, "May there be peace upon Israel." The inclusion of this phrase becomes clearer in light of the Talmudic exegesis on the verse. There are difficult periods for the Jewish people - times when corruption and immorality are rampant, times when the destructive influences of materialism and hedonism take their toll. And there are times of peace - times when the spiritual level of the people is strong. But an individual who has grown accustomed to belittling Torah scholars and their teachings will always be subject to moral decay. Even when there is peace in Israel, even when the people enjoy an elevated moral state, his lot will be with the crooked and the incorrigible.

[adapted from Ein Ayah vol. I pp. 94-95]

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: RavKookList@gmail.com

WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5767

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt; Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights

A discussion of Halachic topics. For final rulings, consult your Rav

VISITING GRAVES OF TZADIKKIM: HOW and WHY?

The ancient custom of visiting and davening at graves of tzaddikim during times of tribulation has many sources in Talmudic literature.(1) Indeed, Shulchan Aruch records in several places that it is appropriate to do so on certain public fast days in general(2) and on Tishah b'Av after midday in particular.(3) Erev Rosh Hashanah, too, is a day when it has become customary to visit graves.(4) But what is the reason for this? How does it help us?(5) The Talmud(6) gives two explanations: 1) To serve as a reminder of man's mortality so that one will repent while he still can; 2) To ask the dead to pray for mercy on our behalf. A practical difference between these two reasons, says the Talmud, is whether or not it is appropriate to visit graves of non-Jews [when there are no Jewish graves near by], since even a non-Jew's grave reminds man of his mortality. Nowadays, however, when non-Jews mark their graves with religious symbols, it is no longer appropriate to visit non-Jewish graves even if there are no Jewish graves in the area. (7)

The second reason quoted in the Talmud - to ask the dead to pray for mercy on our behalf - demands clarification. Many people assume that this means that we are allowed to pray to the dead to ask them to help us. This is a serious mistake and strictly forbidden. One who prays with this intent transgresses the Biblical command(8) "You shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence."(9) It may also be a violation of the Biblical command against "one who consults the dead."(10)

If so, what does the Talmud mean when it says that we "ask the dead to beg for mercy on our behalf"? We find two schools of thought concerning this matter:

Some(11) hold that it means that it is permitted to speak directly to the dead to ask them to daven to Hashem on our behalf. This is similar to the prayers that we find throughout Selichos which are addressed to the angels. Although the angels - who are merely God's messengers - do not possess the ability to do anything of their own accord, still we may ask them to "deliver" our prayers to Hashem. So, too, it is permitted to address the dead directly and ask them to intercede on our behalf at the Heavenly Throne.

Others(12) strongly disagree and maintain that this, too, is strictly forbidden. In their opinion, addressing a dead person is a violation of "consulting the dead." What the Talmud means by "asking the dead to pray for mercy on our behalf" is that we daven directly to Hashem that in the merit of the dead He should have mercy on us. We visit the graves only to remind Hashem of the merits of the holy tzaddikim who are interred there.

The practical halachah is as follows. Most of the classical poskim (13) rule in accordance with the second view. Mishnah Berurah(14) also clearly writes: We visit graves because a cemetery where tzaddikim are interred is a place where prayers are more readily answered. But one should not place his trust in the dead. He should just ask Hashem to have mercy on him in the merit of the tzaddikim who are interred here.

But other poskim rule that it is permitted to talk to the dead [or to angels] to intercede on our behalf. In a lengthy responsum, Minchas Elazar(15) proves from a host of sources throughout the Talmud and Zohar that not only is this permitted but it is a mitzvah to do so.

But as we said before, all opinions - without exception - agree that it is strictly forbidden to daven directly to a dead person [or to an angel] so that they should help us. The most that is permitted [according to the lenient views] is to ask them to act as our

emissaries to Hashem, so that Hashem will look favorably and mercifully upon us.

THE VISIT: PROPER CONDUCT

Upon entering a cemetery, the blessing of asher yatzar eschem badin is recited.(16) The full text is found in many siddurim. This blessing is recited only once within any thirty-day period.(17)

Before visiting at a grave, one should wash his hands.(18)

Upon reaching the grave, one should place his left hand on the marker.(19)

It is forbidden, though, to lean on it.(20)

One should be careful not to step on any grave.(21)

The same grave should not be visited twice in one day.(22)

Within four amos [6-8 feet] of a grave(23):

The tzitzis strings should be concealed.(24)

Levity, eating, drinking, greeting a friend or engaging in business is prohibited.(25)

Learning, davening or reciting a blessing is prohibited.(26) Many poskim, however, hold that it is permitted to recite Tehillim(27) or the burial Kaddish.(28)

LEAVING A CEMETERY

Before taking leave of a grave it is customary to put a stone or some grass on the marker.(29)

Upon leaving the cemetery, it is customary to take some soil and grass from the ground and throw it over one's shoulder.(30) There are many different reasons for this custom. On Shabbos, Yom Tov and Chol ha-Moed this may not be done.(31)

After leaving a cemetery and before entering one's home(32) or another person's home,(33) one should wash his hands three times from a vessel, alternating between the right and left hands.(34) There are different customs concerning the method of washing(35):

The water should drain into the ground and not collect in a puddle.

After washing, any water that remains in the vessel is poured out.

The vessel is turned upside down and placed on the ground, not handed to the next person.(36)

Some let their hands air dry and do not use a towel.(37)

Some wash their face as well.(38)

FOOTNOTES:

1 Yosef cried at his mother's grave before going to Egypt (Sefer ha-Yashar); Before being exiled, the Jewish people wept at Ke'ver Rachel (Rashi, Vayechi 48:7); Kalev prayed at Me'oras ha-Machpeilah before confronting the spies (Sotah 34b). See also Ta'anis 23b.

2 O.C. 579:3.

3 Rama O.C. 559:10.

4 Rama O.C. 581:4. Some go on erev Yom Kippur as well (Rama O.C. 605:1) while others oppose going on that day; Elef ha-Magen 605:39 quoting Yaavetz; Divrei Yoel 99:4.

5 Our discussion focuses on visiting graves on fast days and at other times of strife. This is not to be confused with the custom of visiting graves of parents and other relatives (on their yahrtzeits or other occasions), whose primary purpose is to elevate the soul of the deceased and to give it "pleasure."

6 Ta'anis 16a.

7 Mishnah Berurah 579:14. See also Kaf ha-Chayim 559:81.

8 Shemos 20:3.

9 See Sefer ha-Ikarim (ma'amar 2), quoted in Gesher ha-Chayim 2:26.

10 Devarim 18:11. See Eliyahu Rabbah 581:4.

11 See Shelah (quoted by Elef ha-Magen 581:113), Pri Megadim O.C. 581:16 and Maharam Shick O.C. 293.

12 The source for this view among the Rishonim is Teshuvos Rav Chaim Paltiel (quoted by the Bach and Shach Y.D. 179:15) and Maharil, Hilchos Ta'anis (quoted by Be'er Heitev O.C. 581:17). See Igros Moshe O.C. 5:43-6 for an explanation of this view.

13 Including the Be'er Heitev, Chayei Adam, Mateh Efrayim and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch.

14 581:27.

15 1:68. See also Gesher ha-Chayim 2:26 and Minchas Yitzchak 8:53.

16 O.C. 224:12. This blessing is recited only in an area where there are at least two graves.

- 17 Mishnah Berurah 224:17.
 18 Mishnah Berurah 4:42.
 19 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 128:13. See there also for the text that should be recited at that time.
 20 Shach Y.D. 363:3.
 21 Taz Y.D. 363:1.
 22 Mishnah Berurah 581:27.
 23 Note that according to the Ari z"l (quoted by Mishnah Berurah 559:41), one should never go within four amos of a grave [except at interment]. In Igeres ha-Gra he writes that one should never enter a cemetery at all, and especially not women. [It is commonly accepted that a woman who is a niddah does not go to a cemetery at all (Mishnah Berurah 88:7). Under extenuating circumstances a rabbi should be consulted; see Beis Baruch on Chayei Adam 3:38.]
 24 Mishnah Berurah 23:3. Tefillin, too, must be concealed.
 25 Y.D. 368:1; Rama Y.D. 343:2.
 26 Y.D. 367:3; 368:1.
 27 Birkei Yosef Y.D. 344:17.
 28 Geshet ha-Chayim 1:16-4.
 29 Be'er Heitev O.C. 224:8.
 30 Y.D. 376:4. Some do this only after an interment.
 31 O.C. 547:12.
 32 Kaf ha-Chayim 4:80.
 33 Mishnah Berurah 4:43. It is permitted, however, to enter a shul or another public place before washing; Harav M. Feinstein (Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 58).
 34 Mishnah Berurah 4:39.
 35 Some of these customs do not have a halachic source; they are based on Kabbalistic writings and customs.
 36 Rav Akiva Eiger (Y.D. 376:4). See Zichron Meir, pg. 450.
 37 Several poskim write that this does not apply during the cold winter months when the hands will become chapped; see Kaf ha-Chayim 4:78.
 38 Mishnah Berurah 4:42.

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Tevilat Keilim

**Guest Writer: Rabbi Michael Zylberman
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The Mishnah in the end of Avodah Zarah (75b) instructs us that when we acquire utensils that have absorbed the taste of non-kosher food, the forbidden tastes must be purged from the utensils through hagalah, immersion in boiling water, or libun, scorching with fire. However, if we obtain utensils from a non-Jew, they require tevilat keilim, immersion in a mikvah, even if the utensils are new and have never been used. The majority opinion among rishonim, supported by the Talmudic passage that quotes a Biblical source, contends that tevilat keilim is a Biblical imperative. In general, whether an obligation has a Biblical or rabbinic source affects how we resolve doubts in halacha, as the operative principle is safeik d'oraita l'chumrah, safeik d'rabanon l'kula: we rule stringently in cases of Biblical law and leniently in cases of rabbinic law. Regarding tevilat keilim, the Talmud (ibid.) does not resolve the question of whether the utensil of a non-Jew that a Jew holds as collateral requires tevilah. Tosafot (s.v. ei mishum) rules that since the Talmud does not issue a definitive ruling on the matter, one should perform tevilah on such a utensil, albeit without a bracha. This is consistent with Tosafot's opinion (s.v. mayim) that tevilat keilim is a Biblical obligation. Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 120:9) codifies the opinion of Tosafot and also records (120:14) that a minor's testimony that tevilat keilim was performed is inadmissible, for, as Beir Hagolah there explains, we do not accept a minor's testimony regarding questions of Biblical law.

Materials

The Torah lists six types of metals that require purification when acquired from non-Jews: gold, silver, copper, iron, tin, and lead. Tiferet Yisrael (Yevakesh Da'at, Introduction to Taharot 44) quotes the Vilna Gaon as

holding that the only metals that can contract ritual impurity are these six metals that are explicitly mentioned in the Torah. Tiferet Yisrael argues that other metals as well are subject to ritual impurity. Most poskim assume that whatever metals can contract ritual impurity require tevilat keilim.

The Talmud (ibid.) records in the name of Rav Ashi that glass utensils require tevilat keilim (presumably rabbinically) because glass resembles metal in that it can be reconstituted after breaking. Tosafot (Shabbat 16b s.v. Rav Ashi) note an apparent contradiction in the position of Rav Ashi. While in Avodah Zarah he holds that glass utensils require tevilat keilim because of their resemblance to metal, in Shabbat he holds that glass resembles earthenware and therefore cannot contract ritual impurity. [Meiri (Avodah Zarah) records that this difficulty led to an erroneous practice of not reciting a bracha on the tevilah of glass.] Ritva (Shabbat 16b s.v. Rav Ashi) answers that the ambiguous status of glass led Rav Ashi to his seemingly contradictory opinions. Regarding tevilat keilim he adopts a stringent position that requires tevilah. However, regarding ritual impurity, since our general orientation is to minimize the amount of tumah in the world, Rav Ashi equates glass with earthenware.

The question of whether plastic utensils require tevilah hinges on whether Rav Ashi's gezeirah applies only to glass or to any material that can be reconstituted after it breaks. While Minchat Yitzchak (3:76-78) requires tevilah for plastic, the consensus opinion among poskim distinguishes between glass and plastic (Chazon Ish, Rav Moshe Feinstein, and Rav Eliahu Henkin, quoted in Sefer Tevilat Keilim, Chapter 11, footnote 115). It is interesting to note that even though Rav Moshe Feinstein does not require tevilah for plastic, he writes that the rationale of Rav Ashi should apply to aluminum utensils, as aluminum can be reconstituted. Thus, even if one otherwise would assume like the Vilna Gaon quoted above that the Torah's list of metals is exhaustive, aluminum should require tevilah mid'erabanan (Iggerot Moshe Y.D. 3:22).

Functions

The Talmud indicates that the only vessels that serve as kelei seudah, utensils used with a meal, are subject to tevilah. In explicating this principle, Shulchan Aruch (120:4) rules in accordance with a Hagaot Semak that tripods are exempt from tevilah because they do not come in direct contact with food, while grills require tevilah because food is roasted directly on them. Similarly, Shulchan Aruch quotes an opinion that a knife used exclusively for shechitah need not be tveiled. This assumes that only utensils that come in contact with food in an edible state require tevilah, and slaughtered meat is generally not consumed until it is cooked. Rama codifies the opinion of Issur V'heter (58:84-85) that an iron implement used to puncture holes in matzoh does not require tevilah. Rama does however quote an opinion that a knife used for shechitah should be tveiled and he recommends doing so without reciting a bracha.

The extent of Rama's stringency is the subject of a dispute between Taz and Shach. Taz assumes that Rama's recommendation to tveil the knife without a bracha presumes that tevilah may be required even for utensils that do not come in contact with edible food, and therefore applies to the matzoh hole punchers as well. Shach, though, distinguishes between the two, claiming that while in theory a shechitah knife could also be used for normal cutting of food, and therefore might require tevilah, the hole punchers have no conceivable use for food in an edible state. A practical difference between the opinions of Taz and Shach may be metal cookie cutters (assuming that people do not eat unbaked cookie dough). As cookie cutters are never employed with edible food, Shach would exempt them from tevilah totally, whereas Taz would suggest performing tevilah without a bracha. Sefer Tevilat Keilim (11:23) rules in accordance with Taz's opinion. Sefer Tevilat Keilim (1:4) rules that a serving utensil requires tevilah even if it is lined with paper or aluminum foil such that it never directly touches food. He does, however, record that R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach exempted the old-style Israeli milk pitchers from tevilah since their primary usage involved placing a bag of milk inside them. Along these lines some poskim suggest that a blech does not require tevilah because food is not normally placed directly on it. (If the food is not in a separate utensil it is generally at least wrapped in aluminum foil. This might also justify not subjecting refrigerators and refrigerator shelves as well as oven ranges to tevilah. See Sefer Tevilat Keilim 1:10, 11:4). Rabbi Hershel Schachter has noted that a blech should be analogous to a cookie platter that is always covered with a protective layer of paper, which, according to Darchei Teshuvah requires tevilah.

Disposable Utensils

The technology of the twentieth century presented poskim with new questions regarding applications of tevilat keilim. Do disposable utensils,

such as aluminum foil pans, require tevilah? Rambam (Hilchot Keilim 5:7) rules that utensils that are used and then disposed of cannot contract ritual impurity. If the aforementioned equation between ritual impurity and tevilat keilim stands, disposable utensils should be exempt from tevilah. This is the conclusion of Shu"t Minchat Yitzchak (5:32:1) and Shu"t Chelkat Ya'akov (4:115).

R. Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe Y.D. 3:23), based on an inference in a Rambam (Hilchot Keilim 2:1), appears to take a more nuanced position. If the utensil in question will generally not withstand more than two or three uses, then even if a person uses it repeatedly, it does not require tevilah. If, however, the utensil is sturdy enough to be used repeatedly, but people tend to dispose of it after a single use because of its cost, tevilah must be performed.

A similar question arises with food that comes in a glass jar or bottle. The consensus of poskim is that one need not pour out the contents of the vessel and perform tevilah; one may remove the contents in normal fashion as he sees fit. Shu"t Chelkat Yaa'kov (2:57) reasons that the buyer never intended to acquire the jar, as doing so would necessitate violating the requirement of tevilat keilim. R. Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe Y.D. 2:40) and R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (quoted in Sefer Tevilat Keilim Chapter 4 footnote 14) suggest that when one purchases food in a glass utensil the utensil's identity is subsumed under that of the food and therefore it does not need tevilah. R. Feinstein even suggests that one may reuse the utensil after removing its initial contents without performing tevilah. The Jew's decision to reuse the utensil is what makes it a utensil from the perspective of halacha, and halacha therefore views it as utensil fashioned by a Jew. (See Sefer Tevilat Keilim 4:13 for a presentation of those who dispute this novel ruling.

Electrical Appliances

Yad Efrayim (gloss to Yoreh Deah 120:5) quotes Shu"t Shev Ya'akov 31 (in our printing it is misattributed to Shu"t Shevut Ya'akov) who posits that a heavy utensil that is permanently attached to the ground does not require tevilah, as it cannot contract ritual impurity. Shu"t Minchat Yitzchak (4:114:4) rejects this leniency outright, dismissing this application of the equation to ritual impurity. Shu"t Chelkat Ya'akov (1:116) assumes that an electrical appliance that only works when plugged in to a current is the halachic equivalent of a utensil permanently attached to the ground. He writes regarding this that if one is concerned that dipping an electrical appliance into water will ruin the appliance he may rely on the Shev Ya'akov and not perform tevilah. Shu"t Shevet Halevi (2:57:3) writes that even if one were to assume like the Shev Ya'akov, an electrical appliance does not have the status of a utensil attached to the ground.

Most poskim assume that electrical appliances do require tevilah (see Sefer Tevilat Keilim Chapter 11 footnote 46). Experience has shown that under most circumstances immersing electrical appliances in water does not harm them so long as they are left out to dry for a week prior to usage. R. Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe Y.D. 1:57-58) writes regarding the old-fashioned electric urns that the part with the wiring (the bottom of the urn) need not be immersed. Since water is not placed in that section it is not considered part of the vessel.

Ohr Somayach :: The Weekly Daf :: Ta'anit 9 - 15 For the week ending 20 January 2007 / 1 Shevat 5767 by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach Till the Last Jew Gets Home

In Eretz Yisrael Jews begin praying for rain by saying "Vetain tal u'matar livracha" in the ninth blessing of the shmone esrei on the seventh of the month of Cheshvan.

Why on this date and not Succot time when rain is already needed?

On Succot itself we don't pray for rain because the answer to such a prayer would prevent us from dwelling in the succah, and would be interpreted as a sign that Hashem rejects our efforts to serve him by fulfilling that mitzvah. But why don't we begin as soon as Succot is over?

Rabban Gamliel explains that we delay our prayer for rain in consideration for the Jew who has come to Jerusalem from the most distant point in Eretz Yisrael to fulfill the mitzvah of a pilgrimage to the Beit Hamikdash. We are concerned that he should be able to return home without getting caught in the rain. Since such a journey to a point near the Euphrates River could take up to fifteen days, we wait that amount of time before praying for rain.

This consideration would seem to be limited to the time when we had a Beit Hamikdash to which we were commanded to make a pilgrimage three times a year on the Festivals. But no distinction is made by the Talmud or the commentaries between then and now.

One of those commentaries, Rabbeinu Nissim ben Reuven (Ran), offers an interesting explanation.

This practice extends even into the period after the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash because it was the custom of Jews to continue coming to Jerusalem during the Festivals. (He even notes that in his time - about six hundred years ago - they were still doing so.) Out of consideration for these Jews who were perpetuating the spirit of the Beit Hamikdash pilgrimage, the prayer continued to be delayed so that they too could arrive home without getting caught in the rain.

Anyone who lives in Eretz Yisrael, especially Jerusalem, can testify that this custom of visiting Jerusalem and the site where the Beit Hamikdash stood on the Festivals is still very widely practiced. (Ta'anit 10a)

The Heavenly Sign

The fast days legislated by our Sages in a season when there is no rain begin in the month of Cheshvan and end with the month of Nissan. The reason for not fasting beyond Nissan, says the mishna, is that rain which falls (in Eretz Yisrael) after the month of Nissan is the sign of a heavenly curse since it is counterproductive at such a late date.

As a source for this, the mishna cites the confrontation the Prophet Shmuel had with the Israelites after they demanded a king to rule them in his place. To demonstrate to them that Heaven disapproved of the manner in which they had made this demand he declared: "Today is the time of the wheat harvest and I shall call to Hashem and He shall deliver thunder and rain; thus shall you know and see how great is the evil in the eyes of Hashem which you have done to demand a king." (Samuel I 12:17)

Although the surface reading of our mishna would indicate that anytime rain falls after Nissan it is a cursed sign, the commentaries cite a statement in the Jerusalem Talmud (1:8) to the effect that this is so only if no rain had fallen previously; only then is rain after Nissan a blessing rather than a curse.

This distinction, points out Tosefot Yom Tov in his commentary on the mishna, is evident in the text of this mishna as it appears in the standard editions of the Mishnayot. In contrast to the text - "Nissan has passed and rain falls" - which appears in the standard editions of the Talmud, the text there reads "if Nissan has passed and rain has not fallen." Although both texts refer to rainfall after Nissan, the Mishnayot text indicates, like the Jerusalem Talmud, that the problem is only when rain has not previously fallen. As a parallel, Tosefot Yom Tov cites the mishna in Masechta Moed Katan (3:3) which distinguishes between plants which were watered before a holiday and those that weren't, in regard to the benefit they will derive from being watered during the intermediate days of the holiday.

We may suggest that there is even a hint in the biblical text to this distinction. The passage following Shmuel's statement (12:18) relates that the prophet called to Hashem "and Hashem delivered thunder and rain on that day." The stress on "that day" seems to signal that no rain had fallen before that day, and that is why it was considered a sign of Heavenly disfavor, which would not have been the case if rain had fallen before "that day." (Ta'anit 12b)

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"Doing Business" with Heaven Ta'anit 9a

The Midrash tells this most inspiring story about "doing business" with Heaven.

A wealthy Jew was blessed each year with a bumper crop of one thousand kur (a large measure) from which he dutifully separated 100 kur in accordance with the Torah command to tithe. On his deathbed he called his son and urged him to faithfully continue this pattern of tithing. The son did so the first year following his father's passing. The next year the field again produced its great bounty but this time the son couldn't bring himself to give away ten percent as a tithe. The result was that the field produced only a hundred kur. His relatives thus explained to him what had happened:

"When you inherited the field you were the landowner and G-d was the priestly recipient Who could designate to whom it should be given. Now that you failed to tithe, G-d is the landowner and you are the priestly beneficiary receiving only ten percent of what the field used to produce."

Tosefot cites this Midrash in regard to what Rabbi Yochanan states as an explanation of the double language used by the Torah (Devarim 14:22) in commanding a Jew to tithe: "Tithe, you shall tithe all the crops which your field produces each year." The letters of the Hebrew word assair can be read to mean "tithe" or "become wealthy", so that the above passage can be read as "tithe in order to become prosperous".

This Divine promise of reward for tithing is not limited to agricultural produce. Our Sages saw in the word all used in this passage an indication that it extends to tithing monies gained in business and any other income.

What the Sages Say

"Whoever takes upon himself to fast (when it is not required and when he is not physically fit to do so) is considered a sinner. This is based on the fact that if the Torah refers to the nazir who abstains from wine as a sinner, how much more so does this apply to one who abstains from all food and drink."
The Sage Shmuel -Ta'anit 11a

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