

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

Shabbos Parshas Va'eira 5773

In My Opinion :: Rabbi Berel Wein PASSPORTS

My Israeli passport has run its course, all of its pages are full with the entry and exit stamps so lovingly applied at Ben Gurion airport, and therefore I am forced to obtain a new passport. In the process of applying for this new passport I took time to leaf through the pages of my previous passport. In so doing a flood of memories overcame me.

I remembered trips that I took, places that I visited, loved ones who accompanied me and projects undertaken that were fulfilled and unfulfilled. In short, an entire decade of my life flashed before my eyes and came to the forefront of my memory. I never previously thought of passports as being an emotional document but I found my review of the pages of my now full passport to be a deeply moving event.

Passports somehow serve as a review of one's life and not merely of one's travels. I have found it to be interesting that passports are a relatively recent creation of civilization. In previous times people traveled across national borders freely and without documentation, visas or governmental permission. In our current more advanced and civilized world such freedom of movement is completely unthinkable.

In the more dictatorial governments of our time even internal passports for travel within one's own country was and still is required. In Israel today little can be accomplished without a teudat zehut, which is in reality a form of an internal passport control. Life has become more complicated and big brother nosier.

In the Torah we also read of such a memory-jogging passport. Our teacher Moshe, at the beginning of his final oration to the people of Israel, reviews with them the stops that the Jewish people made during their forty year sojourn in the Sinai Desert. Rashi points out that it is comparable to a father reviewing the past with his son – here you took ill, here we had problems, here we had this particular experience, etc.

Places and localities always occasion with them memories. A new generation arose that no longer had access in its own memory bank of the experiences of the desert. And thus Moshe, perforce, provides a passport for the Jewish people, so to speak, a memory document, long before the world required or created such information.

It is no exaggeration to state that the pages of the collective passport of the Jewish people are full – there are really no empty pages left to be stamped and recorded. We have been all over the world in our millennia-long exile. Knowing Jewish history, even in an elementary and rudimentary form, will provide one with an interesting national passport that can jog memory and concentrate vision. For without memory – national and personal memory – there can be no future vision and purposeful commitment to a better future. The old passport is the tool by which can obtain one's new passport. Leafing through the smudged pages of the old passport will enlighten one as to the value and necessity of the unmarked new passport one is about to receive.

I believe that entry to Heaven, so to speak, also requires a valid passport. In effect we renew that passport annually during the High Holy Days, the Days of Judgment and Mercy. The concept of a passport is therefore not really one of civil law and secular governmental control. It has, like everything else in human existence, a religious and Godly element to it. It is meant to remind us of where we have been, of what has happened to us, of our successes and disappointments and most importantly to remind us that we are all but travelers in this life of ours.

There is a wonderful Chasidic story about a famed scholar who came to a village and was invited by someone who he believed to be a pillar of the community to stay at his home. The scholar was shocked to see the ramshackle condition of the home, the meager food served and the straw covered floor that was to be his bed. He asked his host: "How can you live like this?" The man answered: "This is only my temporary home. I own a great palace with all luxuries but since I am traveling, as you are, I have to make do with this. My palace is in Heaven, my permanent home, but here

we are all but travelers and as such, travelers have to make do with whatever accommodations are provided for us." Passports remind us that we are all but travelers.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein VAIERA

Pharaoh and Egypt sustain a slew of plagues and misfortunes as they are vividly recorded in this week's parsha. There are those among the Egyptian leadership who waver and realize that Egypt is lost if it does not allow the Jews to be freed from slavery and to leave Egypt. But Pharaoh is still not convinced. His heart is not only hardened but it is unalterably predisposed to refuse the requests of Moshe.

The Talmud teaches us that "even when standing at the gates of Hell, wicked people will remain unrepentant." Admitting error, changing one's predisposition on important matters, and reversing course – these are very difficult challenges for people to deal with. Our ego gets in the way of our sense of reality. It prevents us from dealing wisely and practically with circumstances as they are now, not as they once were, nor as what we wish them to be.

Power always brings with it an inflation of ego. Pharaoh cannot change course because doing so would deflate his ego and weaken his perceived power base. His strength, his power, is really his ultimate weakness. The great Pharaoh cannot admit his past mistakes for then he would no longer feel himself to be the great Pharaoh.

He is the victim of his own position and the power that comes with it. Ordinary people, even his own advisors, can admit to error and change course and policies. Not so the great Pharaoh, who deems himself to be a god and above all other humans in his realm. The more arrogant and prideful a person is, the less likely it is that he or she will allow reality to alter preconceived ideas and policies. Pharaoh is trapped in the web of his own making.

Moshe's observation of the folly of Pharaoh and of his personality flaw constitutes a great personal lesson and plays a significant part in the development of Moshe as the greatest teacher and leader of Israel. Witnessing Pharaoh's arrogance and display of egocentric behavior drives Moshe to become the exact opposite type of person – the most humble of all human beings.

The Torah records for us instances when Moshe admits error and reverses decisions previously enunciated. Moshe's humility is legendary and his sense of real and practical judgment, of circumstances and of the Jewish people for good or for better, is the hallmark of his leadership of Israel for the next forty years. Once ego is tempered and dealt with, true personal growth and concern for national welfare will undoubtedly follow.

The contrast between Pharaoh and Moshe can therefore not be any clearer. Unlikely as it may sound, the meek and modest will in the long run always triumph over the arrogant and prideful. This is a life lesson that the Torah and Judaism impart to us in a repetitive fashion. We all should learn from Pharaoh's faulty personality and behavior. And we should all certainly attempt to emulate the character and nobility of the trait of modesty and humility as exhibited by our great teacher and leader, Moshe.

Shabat shalom

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vaera

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by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Name Calling

“...but with My Name ‘Hashem’ I did not make Myself known to them...” (6:3)

I write this less than a month after the passing of our beloved Rosh Yeshiva Rav Mendel Weinbach, zatzal.

Of all the qualities that distinguished Rav Mendel none was stronger than his mesirut nefesh – self-sacrifice – for his students and his staff.

A case in point. Rabbi Mordechai Perlman relates that during the difficult birth of one of his children, Rav Mendel came to visit him in the hospital in the early hours of the morning. He saw that Rabbi Perlman was saying Tehillim in a desperate fashion. Rav Mendel said to him, "Mordechai, did you have breakfast yet?" Rabbi Perlman replied in the negative. Rav Mendel said, "Go and get some breakfast. You're saying Tehillim out of desperation – and that's not good. You go and get some breakfast and I'll carry on with the Tehillim." And so he did, until a beautiful new life entered the world.

A member of the Ohr Somayach staff could not get his daughter into one of the 'Ivy League' girls' schools in Jerusalem because they had no family or contacts to vouch for them. Despite numerous phone calls and the passing of months, the girl still had no school. The beginning of the semester came and went. Two days into the semester the girl was still sitting at home, sinking not-too-slowly into depression. On the morning of the third day, Rav Mendel appeared at the family's home and said to the girl, "Come, let's go to school." Together they went to the school that had rejected her and Rav Mendel sat her down in the classroom and proceeded to sit in the chair next to her and would not leave until the school agreed to take her.

Moshe Rabbeinu had ten names: Moshe, Yered, Chaver, Yekutiel, Avigdor, Avi Socho, Avi Zanuach, Tuvia, Shemaya, and Halevi. Of all these names the only one that G-d used was Moshe, the name he was given by Pharaoh's daughter, Batya.

Why, of all Moshe's names, did G-d use the one name given to Moshe by an Egyptian princess? What was so special about this name?

The name Moshe comes from the word meaning 'to be drawn', for Moshe was drawn from the water by Batya. When Batya took Moshe out of the river she was flouting her father's will. Pharaoh's order was to kill all the Jewish male babies to stifle their savior. By rescuing Moshe, Batya was putting her life in grave danger. Because Batya risked her life to save Moshe, that quality was embedded in Moshe's personality and in his soul. It was this quality of self-sacrifice that typified Moshe more than all his other qualities, and for this reason Moshe was the only name that G-d would call him.

This is what made Moshe the quintessential leader of the Jewish People. For more than any other trait, a leader of the Jewish People needs self-sacrifice to care and worry over each one of his flock.

Another question – but with the same answer:

Of all the places that Moshe's mother, Yocheved, could have chosen to hide Moshe, why did she choose the river? Why not in a tunnel? Why not hide him in a barn, or any of the other numerous possible hiding places? Why did Yocheved choose to hide Moshe in the river?

Yocheved hoped that by putting Moshe into the river, the astrological signs would show that the savior of the Jews had been cast into the Nile, and Pharaoh would abandon the massacre of the baby boys. Yocheved was right. The Egyptian astrologers told Pharaoh the Jewish savior had been dispatched into the Nile and Pharaoh ordered the killing of the first born male children to cease.

It was not an easy thing for Yocheved to put her son into a wicker basket and abandon him to the eddies of the Nile. Before she placed Moshe into the water, Yocheved made a little canopy over the basket and said in sadness, "Who knows if I will ever see my son's 'chupa' (marriage canopy)?" Certainly there were safer places for a baby than a makeshift basket adrift in a river.

However, Yocheved chose a hiding place that may have not been the safest because it meant that she could save the lives of other Jewish children.

From two sides of the same event the quality of self-sacrifice was instilled into Moshe. By his real mother when she put him into the river, and also by his adopted mother when she drew him out from the river. If any quality

epitomizes the essence of leadership, it is the ability to forget oneself and give up everything for the good of the people.

And so it was with Rav Mendel, zatzal.

Based on the Midrash Shemot Rabba 1:24, 1:29; Rabbi Chaim Shmuelewitz, Rabbi C. Z. Senter

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas VA'ERA

And I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm... I shall take you to Me for a people... and you shall know that I am Hashem Your G-d, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt. (6:6,7)

The nature of a person is to entreat the Almighty when he is confronted with adversity. At the times in which a person requires a salvation of sorts, he immediately turns to Hashem with tears of supplication. He runs to the righteous Torah leaders - both to those who are alive, and to those who have passed on to their eternal reward. He tumults and weeps, recites countless perakim, chapters, of Tehillim, and beats his chest until, finally, Hashem responds, "Yes!" His tzarah, trouble, is over.

Let us take an example and be more specific. A family member is stricken with a terrible illness. Hashem sends a good agent, a wonderful doctor, who is able to arrest the disease and provide a healthy prognosis for the patient. In another situation, a person is teetering on financial ruin. Without an infusion of a large sum of money, he will be in serious trouble. Suddenly, out of nowhere, he receives a gift from a kindhearted person - the exact amount required to extricate him from his financial woes. There is also the family that is plagued with a child who is seriously at risk. Nobody has succeeded in reaching him - until, out of the blue, someone is able to get through to the child and turn his life around.

In all of the above scenarios, shortly after salvation has been achieved, the beneficiary slowly seems to forget the real Source of his "pardon." He no longer recognizes that it was Hashem Who intervened; he believes that the solution to his problem was "natural"; it was a great doctor, an astute rebbe, a wonderful philanthropist. They forget that it was all Hashem. Without the Almighty - nothing would have happened.

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, quotes an exposition to explain an enigmatic phrase which we recite nightly during Tefillas Maariv: V'haseir Satan milfaneinu u'mei'achareinu, "And remove the Satan from before us and after us." It is understandable that we must contend with Satan's guile prior to executing a mitzvah or a good deed, but what can Satan do after we have already completed the mitzvah, after we have carried out the act of kindness? What is done is done. He explains that we remember Hashem and reach out to Him before the mitzvah which we hope will catalyze His salvation. We need His help. We know that, without Him, we have no chance of subduing the yetzer hora/Satan. After we have successfully completed our service to Him; after we have emerged from adversity with our feet on the ground; now that we have health, we are financially sound, our family is in order; do we remember Hashem, or do we say, "Nature took its course. It was the doctor, the philanthropist, the rabbi."? It was not them. When we do not think of Hashem as the true and only Source of our salvation, we fall right into Satan's tentacles.

This idea is emphasized by the Torah. Even after the Jewish People had been redeemed from Egypt, they were to remember that their Savior was none other than Hashem. We must continue to transit this truth throughout the generations and reiterate it constantly: Our only source of salvation is the Almighty. While this injunction is addressed to the collective nation, Rav Gamliel observes that it applies to each individual Jew as well. We each have our personal yetzias Mitzrayim, exodus from Egypt. For some, it is called "illness"; others see it as a financial crisis; yet others view it through the lens of tzaar gidul banim, the pain associated with raising children. In any event, we all confront personal adversity in life for which we pray, and Hashem listens rendering a positive response. Yet, shortly after we have experienced our personal deliverance from distress, we often

forget that it was Hashem Who unshackled us from misery. Gratitude is a lifelong endeavor. Once we owe, we may not forget, because life as we presently experience it would have been drastically altered had Hashem not responded favorably to our entreaty.

Once a chasid of Horav Yochanan, zl, m'Karlin came before the tzaddik and asked that he pray for his son who was ill. The Rebbe sent the chasid to a specific physician. After visiting the doctor with his son, he returned to the Rebbe with the declaration that his son was fine. Not even a hint of disease was in his system.

The Rebbe looked deeply into his chasid's eyes and said, "Do not say it that way, as if there was never anything amiss with your son's health. There was something wrong. Your son was gravely ill. Hashem intervened and healed him. Therefore, the doctor saw nothing wrong. You went to the doctor to discover that Hashem had healed your son. Do not make the mistake of thinking that the original diagnosis was incorrect!"

We pay gratitude to Hashem. The issue is how much and for how long. Regrettably, we quickly forget that it was Hashem, Who provided us with the answer to our problem. This is normal and, unfortunately, predictable for a human being. This does not, however, make it right.

But they did not heed Moshe, because of shortness of breath, and hard work. (6:9)

One would expect that a man overwhelmed with misery would listen to anyone who would give him a respite from his pain. Any sign of hope would be greatly appreciated. Why did the Jews not listen to Moshe Rabbeinu? They were burdened by slavery and pain. They sought redemption from the purgatory of the Egyptian exile. The commentators explain that their rejection of Moshe had nothing to do with their level of emunah, faith. Their debilitating physical and emotional straits stimulated their rejection of Moshe. Moshe, however, blamed his speech impediment for his inability to reach them. What requires elucidation is why the people's inexorable faith in Hashem did not "kick in" to enable them to transcend their adversity. Faith conquers pain, misery and troubles. Yet, Klal Yisrael was so overwhelmed with their burdens that their faith was no longer sufficient to carry them through the challenge. Why?

I think the answer lies in the words, v'lo sham, "but they did not heed/listen." One who does not hear does not think. One who skips step one - "listening," -- neither thinks issues through thoroughly nor develops the thought processes that would affect his actions positively. An entire pagan world was quite aware of Egypt's downfall at the hands of their Jewish slaves, yet only one person came to the wilderness to join them to pay homage to Hashem: Yisro. Why? Because Vayishma Yisro, "Yisro heard," He understood that the Splitting of the Red Sea was Hashem's medium for conveying a message. Thus, he listened and incorporated this lesson into his lifestyle. One who thinks without first listening might agree with the consequences for a given action, but he is likely to feel that they do not apply to him. When no one is listening, the message has no "address."

I recently read a story which I will share with the readers. It was written by a popular, observant writer, a ben Torah of the highest order. Exactly why he wrote about a secular, intermarried Holocaust survivor, I am not sure. My issue with the narrative is concerning its intended message. If it was correct, why did the survivor not alter his lifestyle and become a frum, observant, Jew?

A well-known secular thinker, a man of profound spirit and culture, who had distinguished himself through his powerful innovative ideas, was incarcerated in the Auschwitz death camp. This man was a gifted writer, who had completed a thesis which elaborated his ideas and expounded on his profound philosophy. When he was taken prisoner, he hid the manuscript on his person, hoping that he would not be caught. This was before the days of computer whereby one can save thousands of pages of text with the pressing of a single button. In those days, if something was lost, it was gone forever.

The Nazis had a simple perspective concerning the life of a Jew: it was meaningless. We were accidents of birth and had no right to live. Therefore, the dehumanizing process began in earnest as soon as the

Jewish prisoners were "welcomed" into the confines of Auschwitz. Here, each individual was a number; his status, emotions, personal philosophy, regardless how brilliant, were of no value. He existed by the whim of the Nazi. He was of no value to the human race.

While the Nazi's took much from this particular man, they could not deny him his ability to think, to cogitate, to question, to probe. He still had his manuscript. It was his life, because, in reality, in his notes he wrote down his perspective on life. It was how he lived. The low point of his internment was the day the Nazis discovered his manuscript. It was forcibly removed from beneath his shirt and torn to shreds. For him, life ended when the product of his toil and determination, his countless hours of deep thinking and reflection, was taken from him. Without his manuscript, he was worthless. The viva d'vivre which kept him alive had been extinguished. His ability to think had been expropriated from him. The concentration camp became for him what it had already become for most of his friends: a place to die.

He was given a new uniform, "compliments" of another inmate who no longer had use for it. As he donned the striped rag, which was the Nazis perverted idea of prison garb, he resigned himself to a nightmarish existence, devoid of hope and lacking meaning. Without his precious manuscript, he had very little to which to look forward.

As he was straightening out the garment, he noticed something in his pocket. He discovered a piece of paper which had probably been left by its most recent wearer. He opened up the folded scrap of paper; with some difficulty, he was able to decipher a Hebrew sentence. The words that had been jotted down appeared to be more of a scribble than handwriting. Written on the paper was Judaism's most famous seminal phrase: Shma Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echod, "Hear, O' Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One." It suddenly dawned on him: Hashem is in control. He guides us through the purgatory on earth and He will never forsake us - regardless of where we may be found. He now had his meaning in life. He had just located his lost manuscript!

This was the end of the story. Everybody lived happily ever after. The Jewish prisoner continued his assimilated lifestyle, taking a new wife following his liberation. Regrettably, she was not of the Jewish faith. She was nice woman, but she was not Jewish. As long as he had his manuscript, what had gone wrong? Was this really the message of the paper? If it was, how could he go on living a life of abandon?

The answer lies in the fact that he focused on the wrong words of the verse. He ignored the "Hear O' Yisrael" which meant: "Listen. Open up your ears. I am talking to you! Yes, this message is for you. Hashem is G-d; Hashem is One." It is a powerful message, but only if one is thinking and listening. Otherwise, he will not get the message.

Pesach night is a very special night. It is when we teach our children the story of the Exodus, employing a question and answer format for telling the story of yetzias Mitzrayim. When a question is asked, it involves the question in the answer. V'higadeta l'vincha leimor, "And you must tell your children" - leimor, "saying". What does the leimor add? The Meor Vashemesh explains that we must tell it to our children in such a manner that they will one day also be able to tell it to their children. Teach it so that leimor, they will say it over. How does this take place? We must make them listen, be part of the experience; ask questions and listen to the answers. The message is for them to impart to the next generation, but, if they do not listen, it cannot be leimor.

We think that kotzer ruach and avodah Kashah are the end of the world, that adversity, moments of hester Panim, when the Divine Presence conceals Himself from us, makes it impossible to continue on, to maintain hope for the future. We err. Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, explains that, specifically within these periods of extreme darkness, a great light is concealed. During these moments of obscurity, Hashem's greatest kindness becomes revealed. Yes, during moments of what seems like adversity, misery, pain and tragedy, we are able to discern Hashem's great and boundless love for us.

Rav Shimshon explains this with a powerful analogy. A father can manifest his love for his child in one of two ways: he can give the child a candy; or he can discipline him. The great, deep love that the father feels

for his child achieves expression when he slaps him, rather than when he gives him a lollipop. Anyone can give a child a candy, but only his father can discipline him. In order to discipline the child, the one who is meting out the discipline must love the subject with all his heart and soul. It must be a labor of love. One can give a lollipop to anyone. It is not an indication of love.

The beauty of Hashem's chesed is revealed specifically during times of hester Panim. When He hits us, we see His love, His care, His desire to see us improve. Rav Shimshon observes that when one places a pot of boiling water on the stove and removes the lid, the water boils to a certain point. It never increases its temperature beyond a predetermined number of degrees, according to the Fahrenheit scale. If, however, the lid is attached, the heat of the water increases immeasurably. Indeed, no one knows how hot it can get. External heat has its parameters. There are no limits to internal heat. Likewise, when the "lid" is on Hashem's Presence, when there is hester Panim, there is no limit to what might be achieved.

Nobody seeks adversity. It is, after all, antagonistic to what one wants to accomplish. On the other hand, adversity is what makes us grow; it is what makes us who we are. One will not maximize his potential -- he will not even realize what that potential is -- unless he has traveled the road through ill fortune. The greater the challenge, the more difficult the struggle, the more prodigious the sense of success and triumph. Positive adversity is a dynamic that is intrinsic to the human condition. It is a "good thing."

Surely, at one time or another, we have all been humiliated, reprovved unnecessarily, demoralized. It may not - and it is not - pleasant, but it is, nonetheless, a positive phenomenon. It increases our determination, allowing us to achieve success under circumstances in which we would otherwise never have realized that we were capable of achieving. Failure is a part of life; no one always wins. Indeed, true winners do not always win. What distinguishes a true winner is his resilience and fortitude, his ability to bounce back after defeat - and win. He never loses confidence; he always goes for the gold. Victory may be elusive at first, but, without trying, one will never know if he could have made it.

During the Holocaust, simple people accomplished superhuman feats of heroism, but then again, they were not really simple people. They thought they were simple, until the moment of need surfaced and they rose to the occasion. A Jewish woman who lived in the Warsaw Ghetto was in dire need of the services of a doctor. She had contracted a serious infection which, if not treated, could prove to be fatal. She left the ghetto to see a non-Jewish doctor. After the doctor, who was female, diagnosed and treated the infection, the woman was prepared to leave. The doctor implored her to stay. "You cannot go back to the ghetto where you will certainly die," the doctor said. "Stay here in my home, and I will tend to your needs. I will protect you."

The Jewish woman replied, "I would take my chances and stay here with you, but I cannot abandon my family. There are thirteen people in my family who are waiting for me to return."

"Bring them all here! I will hide your entire family in my attic." She did exactly that. For twenty-three months, until the end of the war, thirteen members of this Jewess' family were hidden with her in the doctor's attic. The doctor provided food, a degree of comfort and abundant hope.

A few years ago, two hundred descendants from that Jewish family celebrated a milestone event in America. In tribute and profound gratitude to the doctor whose heroic efforts facilitated this event, they went to Warsaw to bring her to America to share in their family simchah.

From where did a person who was not even Jewish obtain the incredible fortitude and courage to undertake to hide, protect and sustain a large family of Jews for almost two years? To be caught meant certain death. Every day must have been a traumatic experience. Why did she do it? How did she do it? When there is hester Panim, with the increasing darkness and gloom, a Heavenly light like no other begins to illuminate in the least expected areas. This overwhelming, unusual light penetrates the darkness in a manner that otherwise would never have occurred.

Hashem shall distinguish between the livestock of Yisrael and the livestock of Egypt and not a thing that belongs to Bnei Yisrael will die...

Pharaoh sent and behold, of the livestock of Yisrael, not even one had died - yet Pharaoh's heart became stubborn. (9:4,7)

Moshe Rabbeinu warned Pharaoh concerning the upcoming plague of dever, an epidemic that would strike and kill their livestock. He added that no animal belonging to a Jew would die. This would clearly be a miracle, since the animals of both Egyptian and Jewish ownership mingled together in the pasture, drinking the same water and breathing the same air. The Egyptian animals died, but the animals belonging to the Jews did not - exactly as foretold by Moshe. Despite what was undeniably a miracle, Pharaoh continued his stubborn refusal to allow the Jews to leave Egypt. Why would Pharaoh act this way? Did the plague not take place exactly as Moshe foretold? The mere fact that nary a single animal belonging to a Jew was lost was the strongest indication that Pharaoh was waging a losing battle. Why was he being so obstinate?

The Malbim notes the phrase, v'hinei lo meis m'mikneh Yisrael ad echad, "Of the livestock of Yisrael not even one died." He says that the phrase ad echad, means "up to one," which implies that one did die. We find this phrase in two other instances in Tanach. When the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea, the Torah writes, lo nishaar bahem ad echad, "There remained not one of them" (Shemos 14:28). This implies that one Egyptian did live. Chazal teach that Pharaoh survived the Red Sea. Also, the phrase is used again in Navi, (Shoftim 4:16) concerning Sisra's defeat. Chazal teach that one did survive, Sisra, the general made it.

Therefore, concerning the plague of dever and its effect on Jewish livestock, when the Torah writes lo meis m'mikneh Yisrael ad echad, "that one did die," it is a reference to the livestock of Shlomis bas Divri, whose husband was an Egyptian. While the livestock may have been assimilated with the Jewish livestock, her husband was not Jewish; thus, her livestock died. Pharaoh, however, did not see it this way. He considered Shlomis' livestock to be of Jewish ownership. Therefore, in his eyes, Moshe was "wrong." Pharaoh could continue sinning. He had a reason to be stubborn. This demonstrates the obtuseness of the wicked. They see what they want to see. They embrace any excuse to continue their evil.

Whoever feared the word of Hashem... chased his servants and his livestock into the houses. (9:20)

Chazal derive an important principle from the Torah's depiction of the "G-d-fearing" Egyptian: The best of snakes should have its head smashed. In other words, a snake is a snake, regardless of how "good" it may be. It cannot be trusted. The Torah distinguishes between the Egyptians who listened to the warning of Moshe Rabbeinu concerning the upcoming plague which would overrun the country and those that did not listen. Those who listened brought their livestock indoors, while those who ignored the warning left their animals outside. To their chagrin, these recalcitrant Egyptians lost their animals. Later on, when Pharaoh was about to pursue the Jews who had left Egypt, he was able to obtain animals from the G-d-fearing Egyptians. We derive from here that an Egyptian remains evil, regardless of his supposed fear of G-d. Evil remains evil, no matter how it is coated.

Let us attempt to digest this statement. Once the Egyptian becomes G-d-fearing, his serpentine character should disappear. The two simply do not mesh together. Yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, and evil are antithetical to one another. How is one considered G-d-fearing, yet act like an Egyptian, with hatred and malice towards the helpless Jewish slaves? Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, explains that Chazal are teaching us that unless one's entire mahus, essence, is altered, unless he undergoes an extreme makeover, his yiraas Shomayim will not have any impact on him. If he remains a nachash, his yiraas Shomayim is worthless.

True fear of G-d is internal. It is not something one "puts on" to make an impression. The entire person is changed. A yarei Shomayim is no longer the same person he once was. One who continues with his nachash, snakelike behavior, is not really G-d-fearing.

Furthermore, let us analyze the superhuman effect of the G-d-fearing Egyptian in response to the dilemma which confronted him. The entire country ignored Moshe: some because they gave no credence to his warning; others because they were afraid of what their neighbor might say.

They would rather lose their animals than be viewed as sympathizers, fools, and spineless people. To listen to Moshe meant standing up for one's beliefs, challenging Pharaoh, going against popular opinion. It took incredible strength to go against the country's political and pagan current, to defy Pharaoh and his cohorts in order to listen instead to Moshe.

The yarei Shomayim did just that. He acted in a bold manner that was filled with courage and fortitude, regardless of public backlash. This is in what he believed, and he would act on his beliefs, regardless of the consequences. This sounds good! It sounds like a truly wonderful, morally upright man of incredibly strong character! Yet, since the yiraas Shomayim remained outside of his essence, it had not changed him; therefore, he still retained his base Egyptian character. His fear of G-d was a one-time deal; it was not reflective of his essence. Therefore, later, when Pharaoh needed animals to pursue the Jews, he turned to the G-d-fearing Egyptians to supply the war effort. An Egyptian remains an Egyptian - much like a snake remains a snake.

Va'ani Tefillah

V'yacheid levaveinu l'ahavah u'l'yirah es Shemecha.

Unite our hearts to love and fear Your Name.

Levaveinu in the plural-like form alludes to two hearts or the "double" heart. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that the heart can have a dual relationship with Hashem. Some people can love Hashem, although they do not actually fear Him. The case in question would be an individual who loves Torah study, is inspired by its intellectual dialectic, yet this does not prevent him from executing a sin. He is simply not afraid. Love of Hashem and fear of Hashem do not necessarily mesh together. The heart might be a small organ, but it is large enough that these two attributes do not always work in tandem.

The combination of yiraas Shomayim and ahavas Hashem can only be achieved through Torah study. Without Torah learning, any feelings concerning Jewish tradition and practice that one has for the Jewish way of life do not represent love or fear of Hashem. They are nothing more than nostalgic sentiments. Real connection can be realized only through the Torah. Real mitzvah performance can be executed only if one learns, so that he knows and understands what he is doing. By learning Torah, one develops an appreciation of Hashem. The Almighty becomes an entity that is real. Otherwise, He is an idea, a concept - even a conscience, but "ideas" neither promote love, nor do they prevent sin.

l'zechar mishmash R' 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

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Va'eira
Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h

Stages

Over the course of the past several years, we have had some marvelous opportunities to visit places where I had once lived. My wife and I had moved away from some of these communities ten or twenty years ago, and in one case, forty years ago.

It was delightful to become reacquainted with old friends, and even to renew some long-forgotten friendships.

On the other hand, it was difficult to deal with the changes that we observed in the people we once knew so well. Naturally, the years have taken their toll, and they all showed physical signs of having aged. Even more remarkable were the changes in their personalities and character, which in some cases were quite profound. More than once, I found myself asking, "Is this the same person that I once knew?"

Typically, these deep changes were not even noticed by their peers, by those who were living with them all along. This is because people don't change overnight. They change gradually over time. It was the interval of

many long years that enabled me to be aware, and yes, sometimes quite troubled, by these differences.

Our Sages were aware of the stage-like progression from infancy to maturity to senility, and ultimately, to death. Judah Ben Tema anticipated the insights of modern psychologists by teaching in Ethics of the Fathers (5:25) that "...five years old is the age to begin studying Scripture; ten for Mishna; thirteen for the obligation of the commandments... eighteen for marriage; twenty for seeking a livelihood... fifty for giving counsel... ninety for a bent back... at one hundred, one is as if he were dead and gone from the world."

In our own times, it was the famous psychologist Erik Erikson (who, despite his Scandinavian name, was Jewish) who taught us in his book, *Childhood and Society*, that when we go through the stages of life, we must master specific developmental tasks at each point, and only then can we truly mature.

Stages are not only typical of the development of individuals. Nations too must go through a system of stages as they grow and mature. This lesson is taught to us in the opening verses of this week's Torah portion, Va'era. The Almighty commands Moses to tell the Jewish people that they will be going through at least four distinct stages in their progress from slavery to freedom. "... I will take you out... I will rescue you... I will redeem you... and I will take you as My people..." (Exodus 6:6-7). Some even add, "I will bring you into the land..." (ibid. 8)

These are the four "expressions of redemption," to which the four cups of wine that we drink at the Passover seder correspond. Commentators from ancient times to this day have seen in these four expressions four distinct stages through which a nation must pass if it is going to transcend its chaotic beginnings and become a cohesive cultural entity.

Representative of this school of interpretation is the analysis given by Rabbi Mayer Simcha of Dvinsk in his masterful work, *Meshech Chochma*. For Rabbi Mayer Simcha, a nation can only reach its full potential if it first becomes distinct and separate from its surroundings. Hence, the Almighty's first promise is that He will "take us out". Then it must demonstrate that it is worthy of "rescue" by developing a model of internal cooperation and self-protection. From there, it must develop a self-concept of freedom by being "redeemed" and no longer identifying with the persecutor. And finally, it must develop national pride, common morals, and a sense of destiny. That is what it means to be "taken as My people."

If, as some insist, there is that fifth stage, then it is only after mastering the four initial tasks that there is hope for the Almighty to "bring us into the land".

In a homiletic tour-de-force, Rabbi Mayer Simcha goes on to show that the sequence of the Passover seder ritual symbolically parallels the four stages necessary for the formation of a nation. And he demonstrates that these four stages correspond to the sequence of the spiritual and religious development of the individual. For an adequate description of this latter insight, dear reader, I refer you to the standard edition of Rabbi Mayer Simcha's commentary at the beginning of this week's Torah portion.

In today's "now generation" there is a tendency to expect instant change and very swift growth. Our Torah portion, indeed our entire tradition, teaches us that those expectations are unrealistic. One can only reach psychological maturity by proceeding through a serial progression of painful life experiences. Achieving spiritual perfection demands a journey through the kinds of stages outlined by those books of our tradition that describe the process, the most famous of which is Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato's *Messilat Yesharim* (The Path of the Just).

In my own rabbinic work, I have so often had to insist on patience to those newcomers to our tradition who wanted to integrate into Orthodox Jewish society too quickly. In my teaching of young rabbis, I find myself stressing to them that they must think in terms of stages when undergoing religious growth. In fact, the one book that I recommend to those working with the newly religious is Rabbi Isadore Epstein's *Step by Step* in the Jewish Religion, which is sadly neglected, but available online in limited numbers, at a very reasonable price.

There is a lesson here for all of us. If our interest is politics, then we must recognize that nations develop and grow by slow changes, often only over

centuries. If psychology is our concern, then we must be aware of the need to thoroughly master each developmental task that life presents to us before we can attempt to advanced levels of maturity. And if religion and spirituality are the center of our lives, then we must learn the lesson of the "four expressions for redemption" and make sure that we advance "step by step in the Jewish religion."

**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org
Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Of Lice and Men

Throughout all Egypt the dust turned into lice. But when the magicians tried to produce lice by their secret arts, they could not. The lice attacked men and animals alike. The magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of G-d.' But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen. (Ex. 8:13-15)

Too little attention has been paid to the use of humour in the Torah. Its most important form is the use of satire to mock the pretensions of human beings who think they can emulate G-d. One thing makes G-d laugh – the sight of humanity attempting to defy heaven:

The kings of the earth take their stand,
And the rulers gather together against the Lord and His anointed one.
"Let us break our chains," they say,
"and throw off their fetters."
He who sits in heaven laughs,
G-d scoffs at them. (Psalm 2: 2-4)

There is a marvellous example in the story of the Tower of Babel. The people in the plain of Shinar decide to build a city with a tower that "will reach heaven." This is an act of defiance against the divinely given order of nature ("The heavens are the heavens of G-d: the earth He has given to the children of men"). The Torah then says, "But G-d came down to see the city and the tower . . ." Down on earth, the builders thought their tower would reach heaven. From the vantage point of heaven, however, it was so miniscule that G-d had to "come down" to see it.

Satire is essential to understanding at least some of the plagues. The Egyptians worshipped a multiplicity of gods, most of whom represented forces of nature. By their "secret arts" the magicians believed that they could control these forces. Magic is the equivalent in an era of myth to technology in an age of science. A civilization that believes it can manipulate the gods, believes likewise that it can exercise coercion over human beings. In such a culture, the concept of freedom is unknown.

The plagues were not merely intended to punish Pharaoh and his people for their mistreatment of the Israelites, but also to show them the powerlessness of the gods in which they believed ("I will perform acts of judgement against all the gods of Egypt: I am G-d", Ex.12:12). This explains the first and last of the nine plagues prior to the killing of the firstborn. The first involved the Nile. The ninth was the plague of darkness. The Nile was worshipped as the source of fertility in an otherwise desert region. The sun was seen as the greatest of the gods, Re, whose child Pharaoh was considered to be. Darkness meant the eclipse of the sun, showing that even the greatest of the Egyptian gods could do nothing in the face of the true G-d.

What is at stake in this confrontation is the difference between myth – in which the gods are mere powers, to be tamed, propitiated or manipulated – and biblical monotheism in which ethics (justice, compassion, human dignity) constitute the meeting-point of G-d and mankind. That is the key to the first two plagues, both of which refer back to the beginning of Egyptian persecution of the Israelites: the killing of male children at birth, first through the midwives (though, thanks to Shifra and Puah's moral sense, this was foiled) then by throwing them into the Nile to drown. That is why, in the first plague, the river waters turn to blood. The significance of the second, frogs, would have been immediately apparent to the Egyptians. Heqt, the frog-goddess, represented the midwife who assisted

women in labour. Both plagues are coded messages meaning: "If you use the river and midwives – both normally associated with life – to bring about death, those same forces will turn against you." An immensely significant message is taking shape: Reality has an ethical structure. If used for evil ends, the powers of nature will turn against man, so that what he does will be done to him in turn. There is justice in history.

The response of the Egyptians to these first two plagues is to see them within their own frame of reference. Plagues, for them, are forms of magic, not miracles. To Pharaoh's "magicians", Moses and Aaron are people like themselves who practice "secret arts". So they replicate them: they show that they too can turn water into blood and generate a horde of frogs. The irony here is very close to the surface. So intent are the Egyptian magicians on proving that they can do what Moses and Aaron have done, that they entirely fail to realise that far from making matters better for the Egyptians, they are making them worse: more blood, more frogs.

This brings us to the third plague, lice. One of the purposes of this plague is to produce an effect which the magicians cannot replicate. They try. They fail. Immediately they conclude, "This is the finger of G-d".

This is the first appearance in the Torah of an idea, surprisingly persistent in religious thinking even today, called "the god of the gaps". This holds that a miracle is something for which we cannot yet find a scientific explanation. Science is natural; religion is supernatural. An "act of G-d" is something we cannot account for rationally. What magicians (or technocrats) cannot reproduce must be the result of Divine intervention. This leads inevitably to the conclusion that religion and science are opposed. The more we can explain scientifically or control technologically, the less need we have for faith. As the scope of science expands, the place of G-d progressively diminishes to vanishing point.

What the Torah is intimating is that this is a pagan mode of thought, not a Jewish one. The Egyptians admitted that Moses and Aaron were genuine prophets when they performed wonders beyond the scope of their own magic. But this is not why we believe in Moses and Aaron. On this, Maimonides is unequivocal:

Israel did not believe in Moses our teacher because of the signs he performed. When faith is predicated on signs, a lurking doubt always remains that these signs may have been performed with the aid of occult arts and witchcraft. All the signs Moses performed in the wilderness, he did because they were necessary, not to authenticate his status as a prophet . . . When we needed food, he brought down manna. When the people were thirsty, he cleaved the rock. When Korach's supporters denied his authority, the earth swallowed them up. So too with all the other signs. What then were our grounds for believing in him? The revelation at Sinai, in which we saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears . . . (Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah 8:1).

The primary way in which we encounter G-d is not through miracles but through His word – the revelation – Torah – which is the Jewish people's constitution as a nation under the sovereignty of G-d. To be sure, G-d is in the events which, seeming to defy nature, we call miracles. But He is also in nature itself. Science does not displace G-d: it reveals, in ever more intricate and wondrous ways, the design within nature itself. Far from diminishing our religious sense, science (rightly understood) should enlarge it, teaching us to see "How great are Your works, O G-d; You have made them all with wisdom." Above all, G-d is to be found in the voice heard at Sinai, teaching us how to construct a society that will be the opposite of Egypt: in which the few do not enslave the many, nor are strangers mistreated.

The best argument against the world of ancient Egypt was Divine humour. The cultic priests and magicians who thought they could control the sun and the Nile discovered that they could not even produce a louse. Pharaohs like Ramses II demonstrated their godlike status by creating monumental architecture: the great temples, palaces and pyramids whose immensity seemed to betoken divine grandeur (the Gemara explains that Egyptian magic could not function on very small things). G-d mocks them by revealing His presence in the tiniest of creatures (T. S. Eliot: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust").

What the Egyptian magicians (and their latter-day successors) did not understand is that power over nature is not an end in itself but solely the means to ethical ends. The lice were G-d's joke at the expense of the magicians who believed that because they controlled the forces of nature, they were the masters of human destiny. They were wrong. Faith is not merely belief in the supernatural. It is the ability to hear the call of the Author of Being, to be free in such a way as to respect the freedom and dignity of others.

To read more writings and teachings from the Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, please visit www.chiefrabbi.org.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vaera *Looking At Part Of The Picture*

There is a direct link between the beginning of Parshas Vaera and the end of Parshas Shmos. At the end of Shmos, Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon finally appear in front of Pharaoh. They present Hashem's demand "Send out My people that they may celebrate for Me in the wilderness." [Shmos 5:1]

Pharaoh's reaction is not only that he will not send out the Jews, but that he is determined to make their lives more miserable. While in the past, Pharaoh had provided the slaves with straw for use to make the bricks, from now on, they would need to keep up the same quota of bricks while gathering their own straw. Therefore, Moshe's first visit to Pharaoh's palace seemed to be counter-productive.

The people criticized Moshe and told him in no uncertain terms that he made matters worse. Moshe was taken aback by this setback. He questioned G-d about the efficacy of his mission. This is the conclusion of Chapter 5, the end of Parshas Shmos.

Chapter 6 begins: "Hashem said to Moshe: 'Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh, for through a strong hand will he send them out, and through a strong hand will he drive them from his land.'" [Shmos 6:1]. According to Chazal, the Almighty is upset with Moshe Rabbeinu for blaming Him for "making the situation worse".

The Jewish people had an extremely natural and understandable reaction. We as human beings are bound by time and space. Our perspective on life is extremely narrow. We see the here and now, and nothing beyond that. It is the equivalent of going up to a beautiful picture and getting so close to it that you only get a skewed view of what the picture is all about. The only way to appreciate a picture is to stand back and take it all in.

This is perhaps what the Talmud means [Brochos 10a] when it makes a play on words with the pasuk "There is no G-d (Tzur -- literally Rock) like our G-d" (Ayn Tzur K'elokein) [Shmuel I 2:2] and interprets, "There is no Artist (Tzayar) like our G-d". G-d is in the midst of painting a mural, but not one that goes from wall to wall, but rather a mural that goes from the beginning of time to the end of time. Often we are like someone who goes up close to a small section of the "mural" and tries to make sense of what the "Artist" is seeking to convey.

This is what happened with the Jews in Egypt after Moshe's first encounter with Pharaoh upon his return to Egypt. The hopes and spirit of Klal Yisrael were raised, only to be dashed a short time later. Not only did their situation not improve – it got worse! They were staring at a moment in time – a snapshot – and they failed to see the larger picture.

In effect, the Jewish people were asking that age-old most troubling question: Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? There is really no complete earthly answer to the question, but part of the answer is that we are just looking at a moment in time and we fail to see the whole picture. Therefore we question.

The Medrash says that for man to try to understand the ways of Divine Providence is in the category of becoming confused between "the bandage and the misfortune". Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi points out that the characteristic of the Almighty is not like that of one who is flesh and blood: A surgeon cuts with a scalpel, but he heals with stitches and bandages and medicine. The surgeon does not heal with the instrument with which he cuts. The Almighty, however, brings the cure with the very instrument He uses to bring the plague, as we find by Yosef: He was sold

into slavery because of his dreams (as the brothers say: "Here comes the dreamer") and he was elevated to royalty through dreams (by virtue of his being able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams).

If we would stop in the middle of the story of the righteous Yosef, we would come to the conclusion that dreams were his downfall. But, as the Medrash points out, because of dreams he came to rule over Egypt. The seeming cause of the problem was the greatest source of healing.

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva, zt"l, heard the following thought from Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, the Slabodka Rosh Yeshiva, zt"l: Imagine what it was like to live through the Spanish Inquisition. Imagine what it was like to be a Jew on Tisha B'Av in 1492. Spanish Jews were given the choice: Convert to Christianity or leave the country penniless. Thousands and thousands of Jews got up and left Spain penniless rather than convert to Christianity.

After all that the Jews did for Spanish society (the Finance Minister gave a large portion of his own money to finance the Government of Ferdinand and Isabella), what Spain did to the Jews was a horrible injustice. What would the Jews of that era be thinking? What would you and I be thinking if we were Jews in that era? We would be thinking: "Spain is going to get it! The Almighty will pay them back before our very eyes!"

Instead, on that very day — Tisha B'Av 1492 – Columbus set sail and came across the greatest bonanza that any country had discovered in the last 500 years! The discovery of the New World and all the raw materials made Spain a great, wealthy, and powerful country – the super power of the world in those days! It was not until almost 100 years later – beyond the lifetime of any of the Jewish exiles – that the Spanish Armada was defeated. The exiles never saw that. They went to their graves thinking: "This is Torah and this is her reward? Is this the Justice of the Almighty that Spain should hit this great windfall on the very day they throw us out?"

Yet the irony is "that with which He smites, He heals." The irony is that the country of Spain did for the Jewish people one of the greatest favors that has ever been done for them – they discovered America! For 300 years, more or less, Jews could come to America. When there was no place to go prior to and after the Holocaust, America was the haven for thousands and thousands of Jews. America was the haven for thousands of Jews who left Russia at the turn of the century, rather than put up with the pogroms of Czarist Russia. America saved a great portion of Klal Yisrael. Who did that? The Spanish Government did it, acting as the instrument of the Master of the World. But that took 400 years! From 1492 until the late 1800s was four hundred years! Imagine going to your grave thinking there is no justice in this world, because nobody lives for 400 years.

This is the lesson of Hashgocha. There is no Tzur [G-d] like our G-d. There is no Tzayar [Artist] like our G-d. It is still a work in progress. History is still being written.

Klal Yisrael complained to Moshe Rabbeinu: "You made the situation worse! Now we need to suffer even more!" They failed to realize the increased suffering (making bricks without straw) saved them 190 years of decreed slavery. Rather than having to be in Egypt for 400 years, they only had to be there for 210 years. What a favor that really turned out to be! But there are many Jews who went to their graves without ever realizing that because they looked at the picture from up close and they could not see the full span of history.

The lesson of Egypt and the lesson of Spain and the lesson – one day, G-d willing, we may begin to understand what the Holocaust was all about – is that this is the way the Almighty works. We have to wait. It is very difficult for us, especially when one suffers; but one day, IY"H, everything will begin to make sense.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky
The TorahWeb Foundation
Rising Above Time

The significance of the name of Hashem plays a central role throughout the events of yetzias Mitzrayim. Parshas Vaera begins with Hashem telling us that unlike His relationship with the avos which was expressed through the names of Keil and Shakai, Hashem will now be known by the shem havaya that we are not allowed to pronounce. Although a true understanding of the meaning of this description of Hashem is obviously not within our grasp, we can get a glimpse of the role this particular name has in the events of yetzias Mitzrayim.

The shem havaya refers to Hashem being haya hoveh v'yeheye - He was, is, and will always be. This name highlights that Hashem is not bound by the limits of time. As human beings we focus on the present which is the only reality for us at the moment. It is this focus that can distance us from Hashem. The Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva explains that the sound of the shofar is the vehicle that wakes us up from slumber. Those who must be awoken are described by the Rambam as "hashochachim es ha'emes b'havlei hazeman - those that forget the truth because they are preoccupied with the frivolities of time."

One can become locked into the reality of the present for two different reasons. The fleeting pleasures of this world can lead one to believe that it is only instant gratification that matters. Conversely, one can be suffering so profoundly that it is difficult to see past the moment. This was the state of mind of the Jewish People as the situation in Mitzrayim deteriorated. They couldn't even hear the words of Moshe. As the events of yetzias Mitzrayim unfolded, they would have to leave their world of the present and realize that Hashem Who is above time can provide them a glorious future notwithstanding the bleak present.

A person who lives only in the present loses sight of his destiny as he doesn't focus on where he came from. "Mosay yagi'uh ma'asay l'ma'aseh avosai - when will my actions reach the level of the actions of my forefathers." One who sees himself as a link in the chain beginning with our avos sets standards for himself that are fitting for descendants of such giants. Throughout the events of yetzias Mitzrayim, Hashem reminds the Jewish People that they are the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Although they are right now in a lowly state of slavery, they are descended from great people and they too can emulate their illustrious ancestors.

How do we prevent ourselves from succumbing to the "havlei hazeman - the frivolities of time"? Only through connecting to Hashem whose very name represents One above time can we avoid the pitfalls of living our lives only for the moment. In Koheles we are taught, "mah yisron la'adam bechol amalo she'ya'amol tachas hashemesh - what worth is there for a man for all of his work under the sun?" Although a seemingly depressing thought, Chazal drew tremendous inspiration from this observation of Shlomo Hamelech. Under the sun has no lasting worth. However, the work performed above the sun, spiritual pursuits of Torah and mitzvos, last forever. The sun symbolizes time as days and years are measured by its travels. Efforts "under the sun," those that are bound by time, are the havlei hazeman that Shlomo Hamelech and the Rambam describe as worthless. Those who toil "above the sun," in the realm of Hashem, are connected to the Source of Eternity.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Va'eira: "Who Brings You Forth"

HaMotzi

Most blessings recited over food refer to God as the Creator. Thus we say: Borei p'ri ha-eitz ('Creator of fruits of the tree'), Borei p'ri ha-adamah ('Creator of fruits of the ground'), Borei p'ri ha-gafen ('Creator of fruits of the vine'), and so on.

The blessing for bread, however, does not fit this pattern. Before eating bread, we say HaMotzi - 'Who brings forth bread from the earth.' Why do we not acknowledge God as the Creator of bread, as we do with other blessings?

The wording of this blessing appears to quote God's announcement to Moses:

"You will know that I am the Eternal your God, Who brings you forth (HaMotzi) from under the subjugation of the Egyptians." (Ex. 6:7)

Is there some connection between bread and the Exodus from Egypt?

The Special Function of Bread

The earth contains a wide variety of nutrients and elements. Through various processes, these elements are formed into foods suitable for human consumption. With regard to foods that are not essential for human life, we cannot say that these elements attain their ultimate purpose when they are transformed into food. They fulfilled certain functions while still in the ground. We cannot positively state that now, as a fruit or vegetable, they are more important for the functioning of the world.

Bread, on the other hand, is the staff of life. Bread is necessary for our physical and mental development. "A child does not know how to call 'Father' and 'Mother' until eating grain" (Berachot 40b). Due to its importance in sustaining life, bread differs from other foods. The elements used to make bread have attained a significant role which they lacked while they were still buried inside the earth.

The words of HaMotzi blessing - "Who brings forth bread from the earth" - reflect this aspect of bread. The act of 'bringing out' draws our attention to two stages: the elements' preliminary state in the ground, and their final state as bread, suitable for supporting humanity. Other blessings focus on the original creation of fruits and vegetables. HaMotzi, on the other hand, stresses the value these elements have acquired by leaving the earth and becoming life-sustaining bread.

What does this have to do with the Exodus from Egypt?

The elements which are used to make bread started as part of the overall environment (the earth), and were then separated for their special function. So too, the Jewish people started out as part of humanity. Their unique character and holiness were revealed when God took them out of Egypt. "I am the Eternal your God, Who brings you forth from under the subjugation of the Egyptians." Like the blessing over bread, God's declaration emphasizes two contrasting qualities: the connection of the Jewish people to the rest of the world; and their separation from it, for the sake of their special mission.

(Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. II, p. 286)

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

Weekly Halacha

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Contemporary Kitchen Issues

The following questions were posed to Rabbi Shmuel Fuerst, Dayan of Agudath Israel in Chicago at a kashruth symposium in Detroit on December 30, 2012. Some of the answers below have been edited and modified to reflect the position of the Vaad Harabbonim of Greater Detroit.

May a housewife have a non-Jewish cleaning lady clean her kitchen if no frum person is at home?

It is never a good idea to allow a person who does not keep kosher—Jewish or not—to have free access to your kitchen. It is quite common for a cleaning lady to bring her own non-kosher food into your kitchen and use your oven or microwave to warm it up, or use your kosher utensils to stir or serve her non-kosher food. Even if the cleaning lady does not bring her own food into your home, there remains the likelihood that she will prepare something for herself in your kitchen in a manner which will render your oven, pots, pans or dishes non-kosher. Mixing meat and milk together, transgressing the laws of bishul akum or gaining access to unsealed meat and fish are just some of the things that could go wrong when a kitchen is accessed by an individual who is not knowledgeable or

reliable concerning kashrus. Whenever possible, such a person should not be left in your kitchen unsupervised.

In the event that this truly cannot be avoided, there are a number of safeguards that can be instituted to lessen the likelihood of making your kitchen non-kosher. First and foremost, the cleaning lady must be told in no uncertain terms that she may not bring any of her own food into the house, nor may she cook, bake or warm any food in the kitchen—not for herself or for anyone else. The slightest infraction of this rule will result in her immediate dismissal. Secondly, all unsealed food which cannot be clearly identified as kosher, e.g., meat, chicken, skinned fish, cheese or wine, should either be resealed or stored under lock and key. Thirdly, the microwave oven should be sealed with a tamper proof seal. In addition, one of the following two procedures must be implemented:

1. A neighbor or a relative must drop in at random times throughout the day to check up on the cleaning lady. The cleaning lady should be told in advance that someone will be checking up on her.
2. A video camera must be installed to monitor the kitchen area. The cleaning lady should be told that a camera is operating at all times. The tape should be periodically reviewed to verify that no cooking, baking or warming has taken place anywhere in the kitchen and that no outside food has been brought in.

In the event that the above precautions were not followed and a cleaning lady was left alone in the kitchen without any supervision, a Rav should be consulted to decide the status of the kitchen appliances, pots and pans, and dishes. Depending on the exact circumstances, the Rav may decide that nothing at all needs to be done and everything in the kitchen remains kosher, or he may decide that the ovens must be koshered, and that the pots and dishes—or at least some of them—may not be used for 24 hours.

A related question arises when a wife needs to step out for a few hours, but does not wish to leave her kitchen unsupervised while the cleaning lady is working there. May she ask her husband to remain at home to supervise the cleaning lady? Depending on the circumstances, that may entail a gross violation of the laws of yichud or other restrictions pertaining to modesty and purity. Cases such as these, ostensibly commonplace and innocuous, do, in fact, have to be carefully weighed and balanced and, if necessary, presented to a Rav for a ruling.

If a microwave was mistakenly used for both meat and dairy dishes, what could be done?

It is forbidden to use the same microwave to warm or cook both dairy and meat if both the dairy and meat dishes are uncovered. It is strongly recommended not to use the same microwave for meat and dairy even if one is careful to keep all of the food covered while being cooked or warmed. One should make every effort to get two separate microwave ovens and designate one for meat and the other for dairy.

In the event that uncovered dairy food was heated in a meat microwave or vice-versa, the microwave is considered not-kosher, especially if there was a substantial amount of liquid in the food being warmed. Whether or not the microwave can be koshered is a subject of debate among contemporary poskim: Some hold that it can be koshered using a modified hagalah procedure, which entails scrubbing the roof, walls and turntable of the microwave clean, waiting twenty-four hours, placing a cup of water inside the microwave and heating it for 5-10 minutes until thick steam fills the oven. If the food being warmed touched the turntable directly (without a plate or napkin in between) then the turntable should be koshered through hagalah in hot water. Other poskim, however, are wary of koshering a microwave using this procedure. The practical halachah will depend on the specific details of the case which should be presented to a Rav for a ruling.

If an item is labeled DE, may it be eaten in a fleischig meal?

An item which is labeled DE means that pareve food was processed on hot equipment that was previously used for dairy and no koshering took place between the dairy run and the pareve run. [Sometimes, DE means that the

pareve product was processed on dairy equipment which was not totally clean of dairy residue.] There is no way for the consumer to tell whether or not the dairy equipment was ben yomo at the time the pareve food was processed or not. Therefore, we are careful not to eat any DE products together with meat or chicken, since it is forbidden l'chatchilah to eat meat or chicken together with pareve foods that were processed in hot ben yomo dairy equipment. It is, however, permitted to eat DE products after eating meat or chicken, even during the same meal, and even without cleaning one's mouth in between.

If onions cut with a clean meaty knife are ground in a food processor, does the food processor become meaty?

The answer to this question is a matter of dispute. Some poskim hold that the "absorbed meaty taste" that was transferred into the onion from the meaty knife is further transferred into the blades of the food processor, thus rendering the blades of the food processor meaty. Other poskim disagree and maintain that the taste cannot be transferred further and the food processor remains pareve. Although l'chatchilah one should avoid this problem by taking care to cut onions with a pareve knife or by designating a food processor for meaty items only, when necessary, one may rely on the lenient poskim who rule that the processor does not lose its pareve status.

Which stringency is more important to observe—the stringency of eating only chalav Yisrael products, or the stringency of eating only pas Yisrael products?

Eating only chalav yisrael products and avoiding chalav stam is more important. Pas palter, as opposed to pas Yisrael which is baked by a Jew, refers to bread and other baked goods that are kosher but were baked in a non-Jewish bakery. Pas palter is permitted to be eaten according to the Shulchan Aruch and most major poskim. While it is certainly meritorius to partake of pas Yisrael only, it is only a chumrah, above and beyond the strict letter of the law. The permissibility of drinking chalav stam, on the other hand, which is milk that was milked by non-Jews without Jewish supervision but under government regulation, is a subject hotly debated among the poskim. While there are prominent poskim who allow drinking chalav stam in the United States and one is permitted to rely on their ruling, the vast majority of the poskim do not agree with this leniency. According to the majority opinion, therefore, chalav stam is not merely a chumrah but is strictly forbidden.

What's a more important stringency – to avoid chadash or chalav stam?

Avoiding chalav stam is more important, even though chadash is a biblical prohibition while chalav akum is not. Whether or not chadash is forbidden nowadays, when the fields are owned by non-Jews and we are not dwelling in Eretz Yisrael, is a long-standing dispute among the early authorities, with no clear consensus reached. On the contrary, most European Jews did not consider chadash to be a problem, as it became customary to follow the more lenient opinions concerning Chadash nowadays. Those who are lenient in chadash, therefore, are following a well-established tradition, based on the opinion of early, classic poskim. The leniency to drink chalav stam, on the other hand, is different. There is no long-standing tradition to permit it, as chalav stam was not available in Europe. It was always assumed and accepted by all poskim that unless a Jew was present at the milking, the milk is forbidden to drink. It was only recently, in the United States, where some prominent poskim ruled that we may rely on government regulation to permit milk that was not supervised by a Jew. This controversial ruling does not have the same halachic power as a ruling based on a centuries-old tradition, and thus it is a more important stringency to keep.

Should a seven-year-old child be made to wait six hours between meat and dairy?

He or she should not be made to wait six hours but the child should be taught that this is the correct thing to do. The parents must judge whether or not the child is ready—physically and emotionally—to understand and

undertake this halachah. The education process should be gradual and steady, conforming to the development and temperament of the child. Once he or she is nine or ten years old, then the child should be ready to accept and understand that this is what the halachah demands of him.

What procedure should be followed when baking an uncovered pareve liquid cake batter or dough in a meaty or dairy oven?

The oven should be thoroughly cleaned from any meat particles and residue, preferably with a potent cleanser. The oven should then be heated to its highest setting for an hour and the racks should be lined with a fresh piece of foil. The oven is now ready to be used and anything baked in it will be considered pareve. While some people are more stringent and wait 24 hours before using the oven for pareve, this is not required.

An open bottle of non-mevushal wine was left on the fridge door, and a non-Jew opened the door and cleaned the fridge. Is the wine permitted?

When leaving a non-Jew alone in a house, all non-mevushal wine should be sealed. If the bottle is unsealed, it should be put away under lock and key.

B'diavad, however, we do not prohibit drinking the wine from the unsealed bottle unless we have reason to believe that the cleaning woman either drank from the bottle directly, poured herself a drink from the bottle into a glass, touched the wine itself (not merely the bottle), or picked up the bottle, uncorked it and shook the wine. If we have no reason to believe that any of the above occurred, we do not prohibit the wine.

If a sealed or unsealed bottle of wine was left in the refrigerator door, and the non-Jewish cleaning woman opened the door of the refrigerator but did not remove the bottle of wine from its place, the wine may be drunk.

All of the above halachos apply to non-mevushal grape juice as well.

Note: Contemporary poskim are divided as to whether or not the mevushal wines and grape juices on the market today are exempt from the halachos of stam yeinam or not. In the United States it is customary to rely on the more lenient views.

Is Challah taken from dough made out of six pounds of flour that will be used half for challah and half for cinnamon buns? Is the brachah recited?

Challah should be taken but the blessing over the mitzvah should be omitted. Although the original dough contained six pounds of flour which is sufficient to require hafrashas challah with a blessing, in this case it is questionable whether or not the divided dough—which will be used for two different types of baked goods and will not be combined—is considered as one dough or as two separate pieces of dough, each one containing only 3 pounds of flour. Since the halachah remains unresolved, we fulfill the mitzvah but we do not recite the blessing.

Is a kosher pizza store required to double tape pizza being delivered by a non-Jew?

It is strongly recommended that they do so, and the kashrus agency supervising that establishment should insist on this procedure taking place. B'diavad, if unsealed pizza was delivered by a non-Jew (or a Jew who does not keep kosher), there are several circumstances which will permit the pizza to be eaten. A Rav should be consulted.

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Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com

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Vaeira - Avoiding the Appearance of Idolatry in Prayer
Rabbi Asher Meir

When Pharaoh begs Moshe to stop the hail, Moshe agrees: “When I leave the city, I will extend my hands towards HaShem; the claps [of thunder]

will cease, and the hail will be no more.” (Shemot 9:29). Rashi explains that Moshe was unable to pray in the city, because it was filled with idols. It is inappropriate to pray even to HaShem in a place where idolatry is practiced.

We find many halachot which reflect this principle. For instance, the Rema in Darkhei Moshe writes that a Beit Knesset shouldn't have wall hangings which show idolatrous themes; and that a person shouldn't bow in his prayers if at that moment a non-Jew passes wearing a cross (Orach Chaim 90:4 - Even though an ornamental cross is not an object of idolatry, as the Rema points out in Yoreh Deah 141:1). And candles which were originally made for a place of pagan worship, even those which are permissible for private use, can not be used in Beit Knesset (Orach Chaim 154:11).

When we avoid praying near objects of idolatry, it is another way of showing our contempt. But a closely parallel law of prayer shows instead our sense of awe. The Shulchan Arukh (OC 90:24) rules that one may not pray behind his Rebbe.

The Tosafot on Berachot 27b explain that one might think that the student was praying to his Rebbe.

The Zohar explains that it is precisely because the awe of the Torah scholar is so great that it is in danger of diminishing the awe of the Creator. “A person should never pray behind his Rebbe. As it is written, ‘HaShem your G-d, Him shall you fear’ – the extra Him [‘et’ in Hebrew] to include the requirement to fear one’s Rebbe like the fear of the Shechina, which is itself the fear of the student towards the Rebbe [since we are all disciples of G-d]. Therefore, during prayers one shouldn't put that awe before himself but rather the awe of the Holy One blessed be He alone.” (Zohar Chayei Sarah, I:132b). The awe of the student towards the Rebbe, who connects him with HaShem through teaching him HaShem’s Torah, is really an aspect of the fear of HaShem, but we must still be careful to distinguish this from the awe of HaShem alone.

This principle has a most remarkable extension. The Rema writes that it is forbidden to kiss one’s children in shul, to emphasize that “there is no love like the love of HaShem”. Into which of the above categories does this rule fall? Is kissing children forbidden because our love of them is so mundane that it is unworthy expressing it in the place of HaShem’s worship? Or is it forbidden because our love of them is so exalted that it could possibly compete with love of G-d?

The glosses of the Vilna Gaon refer us to the passage we just cited from the Zohar. The implication seems to be that the love of parents for their children is a very lofty and spiritual love indeed. Just as the awe of Torah scholars is nourished by the awe of HaShem, so our love for our children is nourished by our love of HaShem.

We should all fulfill this important halakha, and as we refrain from kissing our children in shul, we recall that we are not refraining because love for children is unimportant, but on the contrary exactly because of the great stature and elevation of this love.

Rabbi Asher Meir is the author of the book *Meaning in Mitzvot*, distributed by Feldheim. The book provides insights into the inner meaning of our daily practices, following the order of the 221 chapters of the *Kitzur Shulchan Arukh*.

A Special Shabbos Meal on Rosh Chodesh

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:

My mother always prepared a special kugel when Rosh Chodesh fell on Shabbos. Is there a halachic basis for this custom?

Question #2:

Do I fulfill the mitzvah of celebrating Rosh Chodesh by eating a fleishig sandwich at my desk?

Introduction:

This Shabbos, Parshas Va'eira falls on Rosh Chodesh. The questions that we will discuss this week are:

- (1) Is celebrating Rosh Chodesh with a festive meal required according to halacha?
- (2) Did Chazal require this observance, or was it a custom that developed?

(3) How does one observe this on Shabbos, when we already eat special meals in honor of Shabbos?

Answer:

The practice of having a festive family meal on Rosh Chodesh is already mentioned in Tanach, where we see that Dovid excused himself from attending Shaul HaMelech's table because his family was having a celebration, and we furthermore see that his absence at Shaul's table would be noticed on Rosh Chodesh (Shmuel I, 20:18, 29). This teaches that there is a reason to celebrate on Rosh Chodesh, although we do not know from this event whether this practice is required or simply a common custom. By the way, this section of the book of Shmuel is read as the Haftarah when Shabbos falls out on Erev Rosh Chodesh, and, in addition, many Sefardim read its first and last verses after reading the Haftarah for Shabbos Rosh Chodesh when Rosh Chodesh falls on Shabbos and Sunday (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 425:2).

How much of a meal?

The Gemara rules that one is not required to eat a meal containing bread on Rosh Chodesh (Berachos 49b). On the other hand, Rosh Chodesh is considered a minor Yom Tov on which it is forbidden to fast (Taanis 17b), some authorities even contending that this prohibition is *min haTorah* (Shitah LaRan, Shabbos 24a s.v. Im Timtzah Lomar, quoting Rabbeinu Yonasan; Chayei Adam, Klal 118:2, as he understood the Rambam; see also Magen Avraham 418). We will discuss shortly whether one is required to serve something special in honor of Rosh Chodesh.

Why do we have this special meal?

The Kolbo (#43) mentions two reasons for having an especially festive meal in honor of Rosh Chodesh:

(1) Since Rosh Chodesh is a day of atonement, we honor it, which in turn accomplishes that it atones in an even greater way.

This idea is extended in later sources, who explain that not only should one serve something special on Rosh Chodesh to note its elevated status, but that the meal itself should be served in an honored way sitting properly at a table, as one eats the Shabbos and Yom Tov meals (Kaf Hachayim 419:5).

This allows us to answer one of our original questions:

"Is it sufficient for me to fulfill the mitzvah of celebrating Rosh Chodesh by eating a fleishig sandwich at my desk in work?"

According to the Kaf Hachayim, this is not the proper way to observe Rosh Chodesh.

Dressing for Rosh Chodesh

The Kaf Hachayim mentions other halachos that result from this sense of *kovod* Rosh Chodesh. He mentions authorities who rule that one should wear some of one's finer clothes on Rosh Chodesh. I remember prominent Jews who wore their Shabbos hats on Rosh Chodesh but otherwise dressed in regular weekday clothing (see Maasei Rav, Hilchos Rosh Chodesh #151).

Other Reasons for Celebrating Rosh Chodesh

(2) The Kolbo mentions a second reason for having a festive meal on Rosh Chodesh. Celebrating Rosh Chodesh reminds people to recite tefillas *musaf* (quoted in the name of the Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer).

(3) The Elyah Rabbah provides a third reason why we add to our meal on Rosh Chodesh, but I need to supply some background before quoting his explanation.

Seudas Ibur Hachodesh

Before our calendar was created by Hillel Hanasi, the system of whether a month was twenty-nine days long or thirty depended on witnesses testifying before a specially-appointed Beis Din that they had seen the new moon. When the Beis Din accepted testimony on the thirtieth of the month that witnesses had seen the new moon, the Beis Din followed an elaborate procedure to declare that day to be Rosh Chodesh, thus making the previous month only twenty-nine days long. However, when witnesses did

not arrive on time, the month was thirty days long, and the next day, the thirty-first as counted from the previous month, automatically became Rosh Chodesh.

It was important for people to find out which day had become Rosh Chodesh. To call attention to this when the month was thirty days, the Beis Din sat down to a special and noteworthy meal attended by ten or more people, whose entire purpose was to alert people that the previous month was a day longer. This special meal, the *Seudas Ibur Hachodesh*, has the halachic status of a *seudas mitzvah*, a meal celebrated for the sake of a mitzvah, similar to the meal of a *siyum*, *bris milah* or *pidyon haben*.

The *Seudas Ibur Hachodesh* had many extraordinary features specifically to attract attention. For example, the attendees were required to arrive at the hall many hours before the meal was actually served. In addition, the participants were required to travel through the streets in the middle of the night when the streets were usually quiet, and to make much noise during the meal, presumably by singing *zemiros*; all in order that people should realize which day was Rosh Chodesh (Sanhedrin 70b).

The Rishonim dispute exactly when the invitees arrived at the hall, and when the meal was eaten. According to Rashi, the participants ascended to the meal when it was still day on the 30th, but did not eat the meal until sometime during the night of the 31st, and then deliberately left the room before the night was over when the streets were usually deserted. Thus, there was noise at night during the meal, and the exiting of the hall into the completely quiet streets in the wee hours of the morning also aroused attention.

The Rambam (Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh 3:7) explains what happened somewhat differently. In his opinion, the attendees arrived at the social hall at around dawn of the morning of the thirty-first day, a rather bizarre time to begin a *simcha*, and also a usually very quiet time, but the festive meal did not begin until many hours later. I presume that, since they had a *minyan* of attendees, they first davened, which itself would add something atypical to the proceedings, since they were not davening in *shul*.

Commemorating the Seudas Halbur

The Elyah Rabbah explains that the reason why we eat something special on Rosh Chodesh is to commemorate the *Seudas Ibur Hachodesh*. This reason is somewhat curious because the contemporary practice is to eat something special every Rosh Chodesh, whether or not the previous month was twenty-nine or thirty days, whereas the *Seudas Ibur Hachodesh* was observed only when the previous month contained thirty days. In other words, our festive meal is to remind us of the practice of the *Seudas Ibur Hachodesh*, but it is not a reenactment. Thus, we observe none of the halachos of the *Seudas Ibur Hachodesh*, a factor no doubt appreciated by the attendees, the housewives, and, particularly, the neighbors.

A Curious Menu

Since the *Seudas Ibur Hachodesh* was meant to attract attention, one would think that its menu would also be atypical, and indeed it was, but in a bizarre way. The menu for this meal was permitted to contain only two items: bread and beans. The participants were not permitted to eat anything else at this meal, and certainly not permitted to serve any meat or drink any wine (Sanhedrin 70b).

This is a very strange menu, particularly for a meal that is halachically a *seudas mitzvah*, which we are normally required to celebrate with a very nice meal. After all, the observance of a *seudas mitzvah* during the Nine Days permits one to eat meat and drink wine in order to observe the mitzvah appropriately. Why was the menu for the *Seudas Ibur Hachodesh* restricted to bread and beans, which is a bare-bones minimum meal (see Bava Metziah 49a)?

Several reasons are suggested for this restriction. Some propose that each person brought his own meal with him, and limiting the meal to bread and beans allowed even a pauper to participate. Remember that the *dayanim* who were members of the special Beis Din were chosen not on the basis of their financial means but for their halachic acumen, and Talmidei Chachamim may not be the wealthiest individuals.

Others contend that the meal was kept meager so that the participants would observe this meal only for its intended purpose -- that of promulgating which day was Rosh Chodesh. (Both of these reasons are mentioned by the Yad Ramah ad locum.)

Must I eat something special on Rosh Chodesh?

Now that we have explained the reason why we eat something special in honor of Rosh Chodesh, we will discuss whether this is a takanah that Chazal established, or it is simply a minhag.

The Tur understands that Chazal established that one should eat something special in honor of Rosh Chodesh, and cites four corroborating proofs. The Beis Yosef, the primary commentary to the Tur, deflects the Tur's evidence, noting that the sources do not necessarily demonstrate that it is obligatory to eat something particular in honor of Rosh Chodesh. In fact, some earlier authorities imply that indeed Chazal never required celebrating Rosh Chodesh with food (Rambam, as explained by Aruch LaNer, Sanhedrin 70b).

These are the Tur's proofs:

1. The Gemara Yerushalmi (Megillah 1:4) mentions that when the seudas Rosh Chodesh or the seudas Purim fall on Shabbos, one should postpone these festivities to Sunday. Since the seudas Rosh Chodesh is compared to the seudas Purim, which is a mitzvah, the Tur reasons that the seudas Rosh Chodesh is also a mitzvah.

In response, the Beis Yosef notes that the Ran explains that the Yerushalmi is not referring to a meal in honor of Rosh Chodesh, but refers specifically to the Seudas Ibur Hachodesh discussed above, and that this source does not require eating something extraordinary in honor of Rosh Chodesh. According to the Ran, the Yerushalmi is ruling that should the thirtieth day of the month fall on Friday in a month that is thirty days, the Seudas Ibur Hachodesh is not conducted on Shabbos, although it is the night of the thirty-first day, but instead on Motza'ei Shabbos, the night following.

2. The Tur cites as a second source the pasuk that says, "On the day of your celebration, and on your festivals and on your new moons, you shall blast the trumpets over your burnt-offerings and over your feast peace-offerings; and they shall be homage for you before your G-d; I am Hashem, your G-d" (Bamidar 10:10). Since the Torah mentions Rosh Chodesh together with the festivals, this indicates that there is a mitzvah to serve festive meals on Rosh Chodesh just as there is on Yom Tov.

The Beis Yosef responds that this does not demonstrate that one must eat something special on Rosh Chodesh, but at most alludes to such a practice.

3. The third source of the Tur is the fact that Dovid HaMelech excused himself from Shaul's presence because he had a family celebration to observe, and the day was Rosh Chodesh. The Beis Yosef retorts that this does not indicate that one is required to have a family celebration on Rosh Chodesh, but it may have been completely coincidental that Dovid's family gathered that day or, alternatively, they used it as an excuse for such family get-togethers. Furthermore, the pasuk is not proof that such a celebration indeed occurred, but merely that Dovid presented it as an excuse. Still, the Beis Yosef notes, this is evidence that a practice of special family get-togethers in honor of Rosh Chodesh must have been fairly common.

4. As additional support that one should serve a special meal on Rosh Chodesh, the Tur cites a Midrash (Pesikta d'Rav Kahana) that states: "A person's sustenance is established from Rosh Hashanah until Rosh Hashanah, aside from what he spends for Shabbosos, Yomim Tovim, Roshei Chodoshim, Chol Hamo'eid, and what the children take to school (for tuition)." Of course, this source again does not prove that such a celebration is mandated, but merely suggested. Furthermore, one could perhaps rally evidence against this proof since the Gemara (Beitzah 16a), a more authoritative source than the Midrash, omits mention of Rosh Chodesh when it cites this same idea. Thus, perhaps the Gemara implies that there is no requirement to eat something special on behalf of Rosh Chodesh. To this, the Beis Yosef explains that Rosh Chodesh expenditures are included in those of the Yomim Tovim mentioned in the Gemara, and therefore there is no evidence that the Gemara disputes the position of the Midrash.

Notwithstanding his criticism of the Tur's sources, the Beis Yosef nonetheless cites other authorities who agree with the Tur, and in Shulchan Aruch mentions a mitzvah of adding to one's meals on Rosh Chodesh, using the same terminology as did the Tur. Others rule that although there is no requirement to eat bread on Rosh Chodesh, it is praiseworthy to eat a nice meal in its honor and drink appropriately (Darchei Moshe 418, quoting Or Zarua).

Other Sources

Aside from the Tur's four sources, there are at least two other sources in Chazal that refer to eating special foods in honor of Rosh Chodesh. One Gemara records a custom that Torah scholars gathered on Rosh Chodesh to eat grapes together (Yerushalmi Berachos 6:4).

In addition, Mesechta Sofrim (19:9) mentions that the elders of the Jewish people, their disciples and other prominent leaders gathered after mincha on Rosh Chodesh for a festive event that lasted until sunset, and required wine -- after which they recited special berachos, prayers and praises in honor of the occasion.

Can this celebration be the above-mentioned Seudas Ibur Hachodesh? Since neither the timing nor the menu of this celebration fulfill that of the Seudas Ibur Hachodesh, this obviously refers to a different celebration.

What do we eat on Rosh Chodesh?

The Shulchan Aruch rules that one should eat something extra on Rosh Chodesh, yet we have demonstrated that Chazal did not require eating bread and making a full meal. If that is true, exactly how does one celebrate this Rosh Chodesh meal?

The Elyah Zuta explains that the proper practice is to add an extra course on Rosh Chodesh to whatever one would usually serve: On Shabbos an extra course that one would usually not serve on Shabbos, and on a weekday an extra course that would otherwise not be served. This is indeed the most common practice used to celebrate Rosh Chodesh. For example, Rav Nissim Karelitz of Benei Beraq eats fish for his main course on weekdays, but on Rosh Chodesh he substitutes meat for the fish course. On Shabbos, a common custom is to add an additional kugel, which is called the Rosh Chodesh kugel.

Someone who is poor is not required to spend significantly in honor of Rosh Chodesh, but instead should simply serve a fruit with his regular meal (Ben Ish Chai, Parshas Vayikra II #10). Fortunately, it is rare that we evidence this level of poverty today -- someone for whom purchasing an apple is an unusual expense.

Notwithstanding the Elyah Zuta's ruling and the common practice of adding a special side dish when Rosh Chodesh falls on Shabbos, there would seem to be a halachic problem with this practice. According to the Tur, the Yerushalmi ruled that when Rosh Chodesh falls on Shabbos, one should postpone the Rosh Chodesh celebration until after Shabbos. According to this approach, adding an extra kugel to the Shabbos menu is not the proper approach to fulfill the custom. Indeed, we find several halachic authorities who follow this Yerushalmi literally. Some suggest that one should lengthen the third Shabbos meal into the night in honor of Rosh Chodesh (Magen Avraham 419:1), whereas others recommend serving an elaborate Melavah Malkah (Siddur Yaavetz, cited by Shaar Hatziyun 419:5 and Kaf Hachayim 419:3). Still others quote the Yerushalmi that the meal should be postponed until Sunday (Ben Ish Chai, Vayikra II #10).

Conclusion:

Nevertheless, the prevalent custom is to add a side dish to the Shabbos meal in honor of Rosh Chodesh. Some contend that since the Ran understood that the Yerushalmi is referring to the Seudas Ibur Hachodesh (see above, the Beis Yosef's refutation of the Tur's first proof), there is no requirement to postpone the Rosh Chodesh treat to after Shabbos, and therefore our custom fits all the Talmudic sources beautifully. Proof to this approach is rallied from the Zohar, which implies that Rosh Chodesh should be celebrated together with the Shabbos meal (Nezirus Shimshon 419).

The Holier Rosh Chodesh

It is interesting to note that the mussaf text of Shabbos Rosh Chodesh does not simply combine the elements of the Shabbos mussaf and that of the weekday Rosh Chodesh mussaf. Rather, aspects of its structure and components are much closer to the mussaf of Yom Tov than they are to the

mussaf of either Shabbos or Rosh Chodesh. (I have written a more detailed article about this phenomenon, which I hope to distribute on the next Shabbos Rosh Chodesh. Someone please remember to remind me.) Thus it appears that the sum is greater than its parts – that the two special occasions of Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh combine together to create a special kedusha that neither can create on its own.

Please address all comments and requests to Hamelaket@gmail.com