

**Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet**  
**Shabbos Vaeira**  
**שבת פרשת וארא**

**מברכים חדש שבת**

**In My Opinion :: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
**Jeremiah Journalism**

I recently read an article published in Commentary magazine about what was dubbed "Jeremiah journalism." Though I feel that this title and description was eminently unfair to one of the great prophets of Israel, it has become accepted in the general world. Jeremiah foretold the coming destruction of the First Temple and of the kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem, and somehow he has become the template for pessimistic and depressing news and predictions.

We are all certainly aware that in our current media crazed world it is bad news, tawdry events and dire predictions that sell newspapers and journals. One can read through any of the daily newspapers here in Israel and scarcely find any encouraging word.

They are filled with vituperative if not even vicious criticism of everything and everyone that is a public figure here in our lovely little country. I am reminded of Menachem Begin's quip that the last government in Israel that Haaretz had a good word to say about it was the British Mandate.

Now as I gaze out my window at the snow still piled up at my gate and the fallen trees and branches that block the sidewalks throughout Rechavia one week after the end of the storm, I am also hard pressed to think positively about the municipal government's services to the citizens of Jerusalem. But this is an extraordinary circumstance and my annoyance at the powers that be is bound to be short lived and not a chronic case of depression and foreboding about the future of the Holy City.

The tendency to always see the glass as being half empty is a staple of current journalism. There apparently is no end to books and articles written by experts and savants predicting the decline of the West, the impending economic implosion, the destruction of our very planet because of climate change - in short, according to them, we are entering an apocalypse of unprecedented proportions.

In reviewing the newspapers and magazines as well as the books of learned experts published between 1950 and 1980 it is obvious that the Soviet Union would triumph in the Cold War and that we should adjust ourselves to living in that brave new world of Marxist paradise. But the experts were wrong, as they oftentimes are.

The glass then was half full and not half empty but the media found that viewpoint too bland and naïve to be worthy of publicity or acceptance. Bad news is news; good news and optimism is not worthy of concentrated journalistic attention. We read about dysfunctional families, deranged people, the families of terrorists and the trauma that they suffer. But, almost nary a word is devoted to the stable family, the volunteer helpers, the honest and hard-working civil servants, the true religious leaders, and to hopes for a brighter future for all of us.

Good tidings are to be ignored or given short shrift by our media experts. The only cheerful news on the radio are the commercial advertisements that guarantee us eternal joy if we will only purchase their advertised products.

And when it comes to the State of Israel the news must always be uniformly bad and the predictions regarding its future consistently dire. If Israel doesn't capitulate to European demands, to Palestinian requests, to UN resolutions, etc. it will somehow be diminished if not even destroyed.

Who says so? Why is this narrative never refuted? Great people predicted that the state would not survive fifteen years. Others gave it fifty years. Their predictions were given wide publicity and wide circulation. But the Lord, so to speak, has obviously thought otherwise. Yet the dire predictions of these scholars are still repeated and held to be true in certain sections of Israeli and world Jewish societies.

The Israeli shekel is stronger, again so to speak, than the American dollar. Yet this is always interpreted negatively and not positively. The Jewish population is expanding in Israel yet it is only the demographic threat of the Arabs that is emphasized, this in spite of the decline in the rate of Arab births in the Land of Israel. It is very often here that ideology drives news reporting and not the facts themselves.

The Left has never come to terms with its failures and wrongheaded, if well-meaning, ideas and programs. The media therefore prefers to frighten rather than encourage, deny rather than admit error and bias. The spate of negative books just recently published by former Israeli officials about the impending doom facing Israel if their recommendations and advice is not followed is Jeremiah journalism at its worst. The Bible and Jewish tradition is much more optimistic about our future.

Shabat shalom

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**Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
**Vaeira**

The Lord, so to speak, bemoans to Moshe the lack of faith exhibited by him and the Jewish people during the moments of crisis in their encounter with Pharaoh and their Egyptian taskmasters. God points out that the previous generations of the founders of the Jewish people never wavered in their faith and belief that God's covenant would be fulfilled, no matter how harsh the circumstances of their lives were.

And now when the process of redemption from Egyptian slavery is already underway, whenever there is a hitch or a delay or an apparent reversal, the complaint immediately arises against God and against Moshe as well. Now the Torah itself clearly makes allowances for this behavior due to the bone-crushing physical work imposed on the Jewish slaves by their Egyptian taskmasters.

It is difficult to be optimistic when one's back is being whipped. Nevertheless, the Lord's reproof of Moshe and of Israel is recorded for us in strong terms in the opening verses of this week's Torah reading. God, so to speak, is pointing out to Moshe the existence of a generational disconnect. The previous generations were strong in belief and faith and possessed patience and fortitude in the face of all difficulties.

Moshe's generation and in fact many Jewish generations throughout history demand action and that action must be immediate. Their faith is conditioned upon seeing and experiencing immediate results and the changed society and world that they desire. Otherwise they are prepared to abandon ship. That is what the prophet means when he chides Israel by saying that "your goodness and faith resemble the clouds of the morning that soon burn off when the sun rises."

Faith to be effective has to also be long-lasting. Since mortality limits our vision and naturally makes us impatient it is often difficult for us to see the big picture and witness the unfolding of a long-range historical process. Our generation, unlike those of our predecessors - even our immediate predecessors - has rightly been dubbed the "now generation." Instant gratification is not only demanded but is expected and when it does not happen our faith is sorely tested, if not even diminished.

Patience and faith is the essence of God's message to Moshe. Part of Moshe's leadership task will now be to instill this sense of patience and long lasting faith within the psyche and soul of the Jewish people. This daunting task will take forty years of constant challenges and withering experiences before it will see results and accomplishments. At the end of the forty year period - forty years after the Exodus from Egypt - Moshe will proclaim that the Jewish people have finally attained an understanding heart and an appreciation of the historical journey upon which the Lord has sent them.

Both patience and faith are difficult traits to acquire and they remain very fragile even after they have been acquired. But in all areas of human life - marriage, children, professional occupations, business and commerce, government and politics, diplomacy and conflict - patience and faith are the necessary tools to achieve success. That is the message that God communicates to Moshe and to Israel in all of its generations and circumstances in this week's parsha.

Shabat shalom

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vaera**  
**For the week ending 28 December 2013 / 25 Tevet 5774**

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)

### Insights

*Fame, I'm Gonna Live Forever*

*"And the staff of Aharon swallowed their staffs." (7:12)*

When Aharon's staff swallowed the staffs of the magicians and remained as slim as before, Pharaoh started to fear that the staff would "swallow him and his throne."

If the staff would swallow him, why would he be concerned that his throne would be swallowed? Is his throne more than his own life? Not only that, why would he care? He wouldn't be around to see the staff swallowing his throne anywhere.

Maybe we can answer this with a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley:

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read,  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look upon my works ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

A Jew works his whole life for Olam Haba, the World-to-Come. Someone who doesn't believe in a World-to-Come has to come to terms with the frightening finality of his earthly existence. How does he cope with this? By trying to create artifacts of his brief walk in this life. His hope is that he will achieve a kind of eternity because others will remember his name. He was the man who painted such-and-such; who dreamed up the world's most advanced mousetrap; who murdered the world's most famous pop star as he emerged from his limo. As the words of a famous (for how long?) pop song would have it, "Fame, I'm gonna live forever."

To Pharaoh there was one thing worse than dying — that his throne, his fame, everything that he would leave in this world would die with him.

Source: Midrash Rabba

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Va'era

*Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h*

### "Work and Will"

There was a time in my life when I was fascinated by the works of the great psychoanalytic thinkers. Chief among them, of course, was Sigmund Freud, whose attitude towards his Jewish origins piqued my curiosity.

Although Freud's work has now fallen out of fashion, he unquestionably had some profound things to say about humanity. There is one remark of his that has remained with me over the years. He said, "Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness." He considered the ability to love and the ability to work the two criteria of mental health.

There was a lesser-known psychoanalyst, a disciple of Freud, whose writings also fascinated me. His name was Otto Rank, and he disagreed with his mentor in many ways. He left "love" out of the formula for the healthy personality. Instead, he inserted his concept of "the will." For him, our ability to work productively and to express our will creatively were the cornerstones of our humanness.

Rank wrote entire volumes about the nature of man's will, and of its importance. In simplified terms, the will is the directive intention by which we get things done in life. In his words, "It is a positive guiding organization of the self which utilizes creativity" to accomplish one's objectives.

In a much more recent time in my life, I have come to ponder the nature of spirituality. I have become convinced that ability to engage in meaningful work and the capacity to exercise one's will creatively are two essential components of spirituality.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Va'era (Exodus 6:2-9:35), we read about the first stages of the redemption of the Children of Israel from bondage in

Egypt. We learn that freedom from slavery does not come easily. A measure of spiritual preparedness must first be achieved.

Were the Jewish people spiritually ready for redemption? When we read last week's parsha we were inclined to believe that they may very well have been ready. "Aaron repeated all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses... and the people were convinced... they bowed low in homage" (Exodus 4:30-31).

This week, however, we learn that that level of spiritual readiness was short lived. "But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, because their spirits were crushed [literally, 'out of shortness of breath'] and their bondage cruel [literally, 'out of difficult labor']" (Exodus 6:9).

Two factors stood in their way. "Their spirits were crushed." In Otto Rank's terms, their "will" was crippled. They could not dream, they could not plan, and they could not utilize their creativity. In no way could they "get things done" in their lives. A person without will is a person paralyzed. Such a person cannot transition from slavery to freedom.

Their "bondage was cruel." Freud was correct that productive work was one of the "cornerstones of humanness". Meaningful work nourishes the soul. But the work that the Jews were forced to do in Egypt was far from meaningful. Besides being physically tortuous, it was purposeless. Our Sages teach us that the labor that Egypt forced the Jews to do was not only unbearably strenuous; it was belittling and demeaning. Such work is poison for the soul, and a poisoned soul is not ready for redemption.

Pharaoh knew all too well how to thwart the initiative of his slaves, how to assure that they would take no effective steps to attain their freedom. "Let heavier work be laid upon the men; let them keep at it and not pay attention to deceitful promises" (Exodus 5:9).

Denied the access to their creative will and deprived of the rewards of meaningful work, the Jews were spiritually handicapped. They could not hear the words spoken to them by Moses—not because their hearing was impaired, but because they were spiritually deaf. Moses had his work cut out for him, and only with Divine assistance could he hope to advance his people to the point where they would be ready to hear the clarion call of incipient redemption.

There is a lesson here for all of us. We too are deaf to God's redemptive messages. Our spiritual condition is woefully inadequate to prepare us to hear higher callings.

Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzatto puts it so well in the second chapter of his Mesillat Yesharim: "This is, in fact, one of the cunning artifices of the evil inclination, who always imposes upon men such strenuous tasks that they have no time left to note whether they are drifting. He knows that, if they were to pay the least attention to their conduct, they would at once reconsider what they were doing... This ingenuity is somewhat like that of Pharaoh... for Pharaoh's purpose was not only to prevent the Israelites from having any leisure to make plans or take counsel against him, but to deprive them also of the very opportunity to reflect."

Nowadays, it is as if each of us has an "inner Pharaoh" whose malicious intent it is to entrap us into a lifestyle where we not only overwork, but where our work is unfulfilling and, therefore, spiritually unrewarding. This "inner Pharaoh" is also shrewd enough to know how to stunt that creative human will that is such an essential component of spirituality.

Mankind's struggle against "crushed spirits" and "cruel burdens" is a historical struggle, one that is certainly relevant in our times. There are obstacles to finding and defining a work-life that is meaningful. There are impediments to our ability to exercise our creative wills. But we must use whatever tools are at our disposal to lift those cruel burdens and free our crushed spirits. Those tools include introspective reflection, contemplation of pertinent religious texts, conversation with like-minded friends, and dialogue with experienced spiritual mentors.

There are many practical lessons to be garnered from the story of the Exodus. Passover is, of course, the occasion on the calendar for reflecting upon that story. But at this wintry time of year, with the springtime Passover festival still long months away, a careful reading of the weekly Torah portion will serve to motivate us to strive to learn those lessons.

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Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

### Overcoming Setbacks

At first, Moses' mission seemed to be successful. He had feared that the people would not believe in him, but God had given him signs to perform, and his

brother Aaron to speak on his behalf. Moses “performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.” (Ex. 4: 30-31?)

But then things start to go wrong, and continue going wrong. Moses’ first appearance before Pharaoh is disastrous. Pharaoh refuses to recognise God. He rejects Moses’ request to let the people travel into the wilderness. He makes life worse for the Israelites. They must still make the same quota of bricks, but now they must also gather their own straw. The people turn against Moses and Aaron: “May the Lord look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us” (Ex. 5: 21).

Moses and Aaron return to Pharaoh to renew their request. They perform a sign – they turn a staff into a snake – but Pharaoh is unimpressed. His own magicians can do likewise. Next they bring the first of the plagues, but again Pharaoh is unmoved. He will not let the Israelites go. And so it goes, nine times. Moses does everything in his power and finds that nothing makes a difference. The Israelites are still slaves.

We sense the pressure Moses is under. After his first setback, at the end of last week’s parsha, he turns to God and bitterly complains: “Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all” (Ex. 5: 22-23).

In this week’s parsha, even though God has reassured him that he will eventually succeed, he replies, “If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?” (Ex. 6: 12).

There is an enduring message here. Leadership, even of the very highest order, is often marked by failure. The first Impressionists had to arrange their own exhibition because their work was rejected by the Paris salons. The first performance of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* caused a riot, with the audience booing throughout. Van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime despite the fact that his brother Theo was an art dealer.

So it is with leaders. Lincoln faced countless setbacks during the civil war. He was a deeply divisive figure, hated by many in his lifetime. Gandhi failed in his dream of uniting Muslims and Hindus together in a single nation. Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison, accused of treason and regarded as a violent agitator. Churchill was regarded as a spent force in politics by the 1930s, and even after his heroic leadership during the Second World War was voted out of office at the first General Election after the war was over. Only in retrospect do heroes seem heroic and the many setbacks they faced reveal themselves as stepping stones on the road to victory.

In every field, high, low, sacred or secular, leaders are tested not by their successes but by their failures. It can sometimes be easy to succeed. The conditions may be favourable. The economic, political or personal climate is good. When there is an economic boom, most businesses flourish. In the first months after a general election, the successful leader carries with him or her the charisma of victory. In the first year, most marriages are happy. It takes no special skill to succeed in good times.

But then the climate changes. Eventually it always does. That is when many businesses, and politicians, and marriages fail. There are times when even the greatest people stumble. At such moments, character is tested. The great human beings are not those who never fail. They are those who survive failure, who keep on going, who refuse to be defeated, who never give up or give in. They keep trying. They learn from every mistake. They treat failure as a learning experience. And from every refusal to be defeated, they become stronger, wiser and more determined. That is the story of Moses’ life in last week’s parsha and in this.

Jim Collins, one of the great writers on leadership, puts it well:

The signature of the truly great versus the merely successful is not the absence of difficulty, but the ability to come back from setbacks, even cataclysmic catastrophes, stronger than before... The path out of darkness begins with those exasperatingly persistent individuals who are constitutionally incapable of capitulation. It's one thing to suffer a staggering defeat... and entirely another to give up on the values and aspirations that make the protracted struggle worthwhile. Failure is not so much a physical state as a state of mind; success is falling down, and getting up one more time, without end.[1]

Rabbi Yitzhak Hutner once wrote a powerful letter to a disciple who had become discouraged by his repeated failure to master Talmudic learning:

A failing many of us suffer is that when we focus on the high attainments of great people, we discuss how they are complete in this or that area, while omitting mention of the inner struggles that had previously raged within them.

A listener would get the impression that these individuals sprang from the hand of their creator in a state of perfection . . .

The result of this feeling is that when an ambitious young man of spirit and enthusiasm meets obstacles, falls and slumps, he imagines himself as unworthy of being “planted in the house of God” . . .

Know, however, my dear friend, that your soul is rooted not in the tranquillity of the good inclination, but in the battle of the good inclination . . . The English expression, “Lose a battle and win the war,” applies. Certainly you have stumbled and will stumble again, and in many battles you will fall lame. I promise you, though, that after those losing campaigns you will emerge from the war with laurels of victory on your head . . . The wisest of men said, “A righteous man falls seven times, but rises again” (Proverbs 24:16). Fools believe the intent of the verse is to teach us that the righteous man falls seven times and, despite this, he rises. But the knowledgeable are aware that the essence of the righteous man’s rising again is because of his seven falls.[2]

Rabbi Hutner’s point is that greatness cannot be achieved without failure. There are heights you cannot climb without first having fallen.

For many years, I kept on my desk a quote from Calvin Coolidge, sent by a friend who knew how easy it is to be discouraged. It said, “Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.” I would only add, “And seyata diShmaya, the help of Heaven.” God never loses faith in us even if we sometimes lose faith in ourselves.

The supreme role model is Moses who, despite all the setbacks chronicled in last week’s parsha and this, eventually became the man of whom it was said that he was “a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his energy unabated” (Deut. 34: 7).

Defeats, delays and disappointments hurt. They hurt even for Moses. So if there are times when we too feel discouraged and demoralised, it is important to remember that even the greatest people failed. What made them great is that they kept going. The road to success passes through many valleys of failure. There is no other way.

[1] Jim Collins, *How the mighty fall: and why some companies never give in*, New York, Harper Collins, 2009, 123.

[2] R. Yitzhak Hutner, *Iggerot u-Ketavim*, 1998, no. 128, 217-18.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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## **Drasha Parshas Vaera by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

### ***Raise the Baton!***

In this week’s portion, once again, Hashem sent Moshe and Ahron to Pharaoh in a second effort to sway his heart and have him change his mind to let the Hebrews leave Egypt. Unlike the unembellished appeal in last week’s portion, this time they were equipped with more than pleas - this time they came with miracles. Standing in front of the ruler, Ahron threw his stick down and it turned into a snake. Pharaoh was not impressed. He countered with a little magic of his own. His sorcerers matched the miraculous stick-to-snake act by having his spooks throw down their sticks and by transforming them into snakes.

Ahron one-upped the Egyptian magicians as his stick swallowed all of their sticks. But that obviously was not enough. Pharaoh’s heart was once again hardened and he refused to let the Jews leave Egypt. And so, Hashem decided that the benign miracles would not be effective with the stubborn king. It was time for the heavy artillery -- the ten plagues.

Hashem commands Moshe: “Go to Pharaoh in the morning -- behold! He goes out to the water -- and you shall stand opposite him at the river’s bank, and the staff that was turned into a snake you shall take in your hand” (Exodus 7:15). A simple question bothers me. Moshe had only one special stick. There are various Midrashic explanations as to its origin, but everyone agrees it was a unique one. It was a special one with special powers. Moshe may have been a leader of many hats, but he only carried one stick. Why did Hashem need to define the stick as the one that turned into a snake? He could have simply asked

Moshe to come with his stick. Moshe would surely have known exactly which stick Hashem wanted him to take.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson is better known to us as Lewis Carroll, author of the 1865 children's fantasy story, Alice in Wonderland. What most of us do not know about him was that he was also a brilliant mathematician spending more than twenty-five years teaching at Oxford University.

An apocryphal story relates that Queen Victoria was so delighted after reading his fantasy-laced novel, Alice in Wonderland that she asked him to send her any other works penned by the same quill. Dodgson responded immediately, but the Queen was somewhat taken aback when she received two of his other works, Syllabus of Plane Algebraical Geometry and An Elementary Treatise on Determinants.

We tend to look at the world and forget that routine natural events are also replete with awe-inspiring miracles and supernatural properties. We become acclimated to the mundane miracles of life so that we also shrug when Hashem turns proverbial sticks into proverbial snakes. We feel we can do that too!

Therefore, before orchestrating the largest insubordination of natural law in world history, by turning the flowing Nile into a virtual blood bath, Moshe is told to bring with him the stick that Pharaoh only considered to be capable of performing minor miracles. Moshe is told that the same stick that was not able to impress Pharaoh has the ability to shatter the Egyptian economy and with it the haughty attitude that kept the Hebrew nation enslaved.

Sometimes our marvel of G-d's wonders is dulled by the scoffing of the naysayers. They lead us to forget that the same power behind the minor miracles of life are the generators of great miracles that we can hardly fathom and surely not anticipate! Even the incomprehensible miracle of life itself is blunted by its ongoing regularity. Our emotions become bored and our intellect spoiled with the majestic events that are considered trite by their regular reoccurrence. And when we fail to see the greatness of genius in the wonderland in which we live, we expect G-d to send us a more prominent message. But we must never forget that even the most awe-inspiring message comes from the same Hand and Stick that bring us the simplest benign worms!

Dedicated in memory of David Kramer by Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Kramer and family Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series.

Questions or comments? Email feedback@torah.org.. Project Genesis, Inc.

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## Rav Kook List

### Rav Kook on the Torah Portion *Psalms 2: Rejoice with Trembling*

#### *The Splendor of Tefillin*

What should be our emotional state during prayer? Joy and delight? Or seriousness and reverence?

In fact, we find that the psalmist advocates both of these conflicting emotions:

שֶׁבַח אֱת־ה' בְּרִצְצָה, וְגִילוֹ בְּרַעְדָּה. (תהילים ב:א)

"Serve God in awe, and rejoice with trembling." (Psalms 2:11)

How can one rejoice and tremble at the same time?

#### Joy and Solemnity

What is the source of joy in prayer? The wonderful sensation of closeness to God naturally makes us feel happy. We feel sadness and even bitterness, on the other hand, when we reflect on our mistakes and character defects. Awareness of our faults becomes more pronounced as we advance spiritually and morally, and relate more deeply to God's perfection.

From the verse, however, it is not clear which emotion should be the major theme, and which the minor one. What does it mean to "rejoice in trembling"? Should our overall attitude in prayer be one of solemnity and trembling, accompanied by a measure of gladness? Or should joy be our dominant emotion, tempered by seriousness and introspection?

The Sages taught: "When rejoicing, there should also be trembling" (Berachot 30). This indicates that our overriding emotion should be one of joy. True spiritual growth is achieved through happiness and an expansive frame of mind.

However, we must be careful that this joy does not lead to frivolity and flippancy. Therefore, the psalmist counseled that we "rejoice with trembling." We should temper our joy with a contemplative reverence, as we reflect on who we are and before Whom we are standing in prayer. This sobering thought limits our joy only to those aspects that relate to genuine spiritual advancement.

#### Gilah versus Simchah

Rav Kook noted that the verse specifically uses the Hebrew word "gilah," meaning an exuberant outburst of joy. This form of lively gaiety may lead one to frivolity, and neglecting the path of spiritual growth. Therefore, the psalm admonishes us to "rejoice in trembling," to keep this high-spirited joy in check with reverence and thoughtful seriousness.

Yet there is another form of joy, an inner happiness called "simchah," the result of wisdom and enlightenment. Simchah contains a tranquility that is free of the potential pitfalls of the more exuberant gilah. It does not need to be diluted or restrained. It is about this reverential service of God that it says, "Reverence of God will add days," so that "sadness will add nothing to it" (Proverbs 10:27,22).

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol I, p. 128)

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## *Should I Recite Ga'al Yisrael Aloud?*

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question #1: As a child in shul, I noticed that shortly before the Shemoneh esrei was begun, some of the older European Jews would wait before reciting the words "Shirah chadasha" until the chazzan completed the entire beracha and said "Ga'al Yisrael." They would answer "Amen" to the chazzan's beracha, then complete the beracha themselves and begin the Shemoneh esrei. I no longer see anyone doing this. Were they following a correct procedure?

Question #2: I have noticed a recent trend that the chazzan recites the beracha of Ga'al Yisrael very softly, and some members of the tzibur recite the beracha aloud with him. Is this a correct procedure?

Question #3: I see that in some minyanim, the chazzan says the words Ga'al Yisrael inaudibly, and in others he says it loud enough for people to hear. Which is the correct approach?

Answer:

Before we can explain this issue, we first need to discuss a topic that appears to be unrelated. The Gemara quotes two apparently contradictory statements as to whether one should recite "amen" after one's own beracha; one beraisa stating that it is meritorious to do so and the other frowning on the practice. To quote the Gemara:

"It was taught in one source, 'someone who responds "amen" after his own blessings is praiseworthy,' whereas another source states it is reprehensible to do this." The Gemara explains that the two statements do not conflict. Rather, they refer to two different berachos. It is praiseworthy to recite amen upon concluding the beracha Bonei Yerushalayim in bensching, whereas it is reprehensible to recite amen after any other beracha (Berachos 45b). The halacha is that someone who is completing a beracha at the same time as the chazzan or anyone else may not recite amen to the other person's beracha, since in doing so, one has recited amen to his own beracha. For example, when reciting Baruch she'amar, if one completes the beracha at the same moment that the chazzan did, one may not recite amen (Elyah Rabbah 51:2).

What is unique about the beracha Bonei Yerushalayim that one may recite amen after his own beracha?

The Rishonim note that it is not the beracha Bonei Yerushalayim that makes its law special; rather, it is its location as the last of the three main berachos of birchas hamazon. (Although there is still another beracha afterwards, this last beracha is not part of the series, as it was added at a later time in history. Because it is not part of the series, it begins with a full beracha "Baruch ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'olam," whereas berachos that are the continuation of a series, such as most of the berachos of Shemoneh esrei, do not begin with these words [Pesachim 104b].) Reciting amen after Bonei Yerushalayim demonstrates the completion of a series of berachos (Rambam, Hilchos Berachos 1:17, 18). On the other hand, reciting amen after one makes any other beracha implies that one has completed a unit, which is not true (Rabbeinu Yonah). We find a similar idea that, upon completing the pesukei dezimra, we repeat the last pasuk (both at the end of Chapter 150 and at the end of Az yashir) to demonstrate that this section has now been concluded (see Tur, Orach Chayim Chapter 51).

Is Bonei Yerushalayim Unique?

Are there other instances, besides Bonei Yerushalayim, when it is praiseworthy to recite amen to your own beracha at the closing of a sequence?

Rashi, in his comments to the above Gemara, indeed mentions that one concludes with amen after reciting the last beracha of the birchos keriyas shema, which is the beracha of Ga'al Yisrael in the morning and of Shomer amo Yisrael la'ad in the evening. (The beracha that Ashkenazim outside Eretz Yisrael recite on weekdays after Shomer amo Yisrael la'ad, beginning with the words Baruch Hashem le'olam, is an addition from the times of the Geonim, and is not one of the birchos keriyas shema.) Many other Rishonim advise reciting amen at the end of any sequence of berachos, adding to Rashi's list also Yishtabach, the end of a "sequence" that begins with Baruch she'amar, and the closing beracha of Hallel, the sequel to the beracha introducing Hallel (quoted by Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 66).

From our personal experience, we all realize that there must be something more to the story. We know that whereas we always complete the beracha of Bonei Yerushalayim with amen, we do not close the other berachos mentioned with the word amen. This practice is very old and is already mentioned by Tosafos, who notes that the custom among Ashkenazim is not to recite amen after one's own beracha except after Bonei Yerushalayim.

To explain our practice, we will first see what other Rishonim state concerning the topic. For example, although accepting the premise that we may recite amen following the last beracha of a series, the Rambam disputes what is considered a succession. He contends that if anything is recited between the berachos, there is no longer a series – thus, Yishtabach, the latter beracha of Hallel and the beracha of Ga'al Yisrael are not considered the ends of series, although the berachos immediately before keriyas shema are (see Hilchos Berachos 1:17, 18, as explained by Beis Yosef). The Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim 51) explains that the Rambam accepts the same distinction regarding reciting amen after Yishtabach or after Hallel. The pesukim recited between the berachos break the succession, and, therefore, one should not recite amen. Those who dispute with the Rambam contend that both Yishtabach and the ending beracha of Hallel are considered the end of a series, since they connect back to the original beracha.

How do we rule?

The Shulchan Aruch, reflecting Sephardic practice, rules a compromise position: Upon concluding Yishtabach, one may add amen to one's own beracha, but it is not required (Orach Chayim 51:3). It is curious to note that in another place (Orach Chayim 215:1), the Shulchan Aruch mentions that Sephardic custom is to recite amen after Yishtabach and the last beracha of Hallel, and the Rama there notes that, according to the Shulchan Aruch's conclusion, one should recite amen also after concluding Shomer amo Yisrael la'ad, the last beracha of the evening keriyas shema series. Thus, we see that there is a qualitative difference between berachos that complete a sequence and those that do not. After the first group, one may recite amen after one's own beracha, whereas after the second group, one may not.

Although Ashkenazim agree that one may recite amen after these berachos, we usually do not recite amen then. However, if one hears the closing of someone else's beracha when completing one of these berachos, one answers amen to the other person's beracha (Elyah Rabbah 51:2).

Why is Bonei Yerushalayim Different?

However, we have still not answered the original question: Why single out the beracha Bonei Yerushalayim? If, indeed, one may recite amen after the last beracha of any series, to signify that the series is completed, why does the Gemara mention this only regarding the beracha Bonei Yerushalayim? And, furthermore, why is the prevalent Ashkenazi custom to recite amen, almost as if it is part of the beracha, only after the beracha Bonei Yerushalayim, but not after other closing berachos?

Both of these questions can be answered by studying a different passage of Gemara (Berachos 45b), which cites a dispute between Abayei and Rav Ashi whether the word amen recited following Bonei Yerushalayim should be said aloud. Abayei recited this amen aloud in order to announce his completing the main berachos of birchas hamazon. He did so to remind employed workers to return diligently to work. That is, although Chazal had instituted a fourth beracha to birchas hamazon, they exempted people working for others from reciting this beracha, thereby emphasizing an employee's responsibility to be meticulous not to cut corners on his full day of work. (In today's environment, where it is assumed that workers take off for coffee breaks during the workday, an employee is required to recite the fourth beracha of birchas hamazon.) Abayei recited amen aloud at the end of the third beracha, so that everyone would realize that the fourth beracha is not part of the series and is treated halachically differently.

Rav Ashi, on the other hand, deliberately recited amen softly, so that people should not disrespect the fourth beracha. Reciting amen after the third beracha of Bonei Yerushalayim is an apparent carryover of Abayei's practice – that is, we emphasize that the fourth beracha is not min hatorah.

At this point, we understand the laws applicable to the question of whether one recites amen after Bonei Yerushalayim, Yishtabach, Shomer amo Yisrael la'ad, and the end of Hallel. Sephardim recite amen after all these berachos. Ashkenazim permit this, but in practice say amen only after Bonei Yerushalayim, and for the other three berachos only when responding to someone else's beracha at the same time.

What about Sheva Berachos?

The Beis Yosef and other authorities note what appears to be an inconsistency in Sephardic practice: Whereas they recite amen after the above-mentioned berachos, they do not recite amen after other series of berachos, such as the morning berachos (birchos hashachar) or sheva berachos.

The resolution of this seeming inconsistency is that a "series" for our purposes means a unit of berachos that one is not permitted to interrupt, which includes Hallel, pesukei dezimra, birchos keriyas shema and birchas hamazon. Although morning berachos and the berachos of sheva berachos are recited as a group, one may interrupt between them. This means that they are not an indivisible unit or series.

What about Ga'al Yisrael?

Now that we have completed our analysis of the amen after Bonei Yerushalayim and other ends of series, we are in a position to discuss whether one should recite amen after the beracha Ga'al Yisrael, and what should be the proper practice regarding the closing of this beracha.

The Beis Yosef contends that, logically, this beracha should be treated the same as any other beracha at the end of a series, which would mean that Sephardim would recite amen afterwards and Ashkenazim would recite amen if they hear the ending of someone else's beracha at the same time. Indeed, this is how the Rama rules, contending that if someone recited Ga'al Yisrael at the same time as the chazzan, he should recite amen. However, the Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim Chapter 66 and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 66:7) reports that the Sephardic custom is different, but because of a special consideration: "Now the custom is not to say amen after Ga'al Yisrael... because it is considered a hefsek, an interruption, between completing Ga'al Yisrael and beginning Shemoneh esrei." In a different place, the Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim 51) quotes an ancient source for this "custom" – the Zohar.

The Rama disputes this, contending that reciting amen between Ga'al Yisrael and Shemoneh esrei is not an interruption. However, once one began reciting the words Hashem sefasei tiftach, one is considered to have started Shemoneh esrei and he should not answer amen (Elyah Rabbah).

Avoiding Dispute

Now the story gets interesting. Since the early authorities dispute whether or not one should recite amen after Ga'al Yisrael, which side should we follow? With time, different attempts to resolve this predicament developed. Not wanting to take sides, a practice developed of waiting before one says either Shirah chadasha or Tzur Yisrael in order to answer amen. The Acharonim decry this practice for two reasons:

1. Both of these places are in the middle of the birchos keriyas shema, where it is prohibited to answer amen for any beracha except for Ha'keil hakadosh and Shomei'a tefillah.
2. One is required to start the Shemoneh esrei together with the tzibur.

With this background, we can answer question #1 raised above:

"As a child in shul, I noticed that shortly before the Shemoneh esrei was begun, some of the older European Jews would wait before reciting the words "Shirah chadasha until the chazzan completed the entire beracha and said "Ga'al Yisrael." They would then answer "Amen" to the chazzan's beracha, complete the beracha themselves, and begin the Shemoneh esrei. I no longer see anyone doing this. Were they following a correct procedure?"

The answer is that although these Jews had observed such a custom, the halachic authorities are opposed to this approach.

So we return to our predicament. Since there is a dispute as to what to do, what should we do?

Some Suggestions

Among early Acharonim, we find two other suggestions regarding answering amen to the beracha of Ga'al Yisrael. The Magen Avraham advocates reciting the words Ga'al Yisrael together with the chazzan and not saying amen to the

beracha. Based on the records of community minhag books and the halachic recommendations of later authorities, it appears that this was the custom followed in most Ashkenazi kehillos. The chazzan recited Ga'al Yisrael aloud, and the community recited it softly along with him.

However, this approach does not resolve all conflict, since, according to the Rama, in this situation one should recite amen after Ga'al Yisrael.

#### Start Early!

Another suggestion is mentioned, which appears to resolve all difficulty. The Levushei Serad suggests beginning saying Hashem sefasei tiftach just a little bit before the chazzan completes the beracha Ga'al Yisrael. Since this is considered having already started Shemoneh esrei, one may no longer answer amen according to all opinions, thus avoiding being caught in a dispute, and one will begin the Shemoneh esrei together with the tzibur.

Today, I have noticed that many shullen follow a fairly new method of avoiding the shaylah by having the chazzan complete the beracha of Ga'al Yisrael silently, so that no one can answer amen to his beracha. Although I have occasionally heard of prominent talmidei chachamim who advocate this position (see, for example, Yesodei Yeshurun, Volume I page 284), one should be aware that several renowned gedolei Yisrael have strongly contested this practice, including Rav Elyashiv zt"l, and Rav Henkin zt"l (Hapardes, Tishrei 5730). In addition, I am personally unaware of a single community that did not have the minhag that the chazzan recite the ending of the beracha Ga'al Yisrael aloud. Proof that this was a universal custom can be rallied from the fact that during the entire discussion as to what to do, none of the earlier authorities mention the option that the chazzan close the beracha Ga'al Yisrael inaudibly.

Of course, the question is: why is this option ignored? Why not have the chazzan close the beracha in such a soft voice that no one is placed in the halachic predicament whether to answer amen or not?

The answer lies, I believe, in the words of the Rambam, who says explicitly that the chazzan recites the words Ga'al Yisrael aloud. The Rambam explains that the requirement of having a chazzan includes reciting the entire birchos keriyas shema aloud. Initially, this was so that the chazzan could be motzi those who could not daven on their own. Although today most people use siddurim and thereby fulfill their own mitzvah, the institution of the chazzan and his requirements still remain.

Some may take issue and contend that according to the Rambam's position, the chazzan recites every word of the birchos keriyas shema, which reflects Sephardic practice to this day, whereas Ashkenazi practice is that the chazzan says aloud only the end of the beracha. The contention, then, is that Sephardim rule that the chazzan's responsibility is to recite the full berachos, but Ashkenazim do not require this. However, the universal custom demonstrates that the Ashkenazi custom still requires the chazzan to close the beracha in way that the individual could at least hear the end of the beracha. Even if the individual does not fulfill his halachic responsibility this way, it would still seem that some measure of birkas keriyas shema is accomplished this way, and this was included in the takanah.

Those who advocate that the chazzan recite the closing of Ga'al Yisrael softly contend that there is no such takanah.

At this point, we can now address the other questions that I raised above:

"I have noticed a recent trend that the chazzan recites the beracha of Ga'al Yisrael very softly, and some members of the tzibur recite the beracha aloud with him. Is this a correct procedure?"

"I see that in some minyanim the chazzan says the words Ga'al Yisrael inaudibly, and in others he says it loud enough for people to hear. Which is the correct approach?"

Answer:

I prefer that the chazzan recite the words Ga'al Yisrael aloud, and the tzibur recite the words quietly either along with the chazzan or just ahead of the chazzan and begin the verse Hashem sefasei tiftach while the chazzan says the words Ga'al Yisrael. There is no reason for the tzibur to close the beracha Ga'al Yisrael aloud, since this simply creates a shaylah for those hearing their beracha and it is not part of the takanas chachamim.

Conclusion

Chazal emphasize that one should not interrupt between reciting the words Ga'al Yisrael that close the birchos keriyas shema and beginning the Shemoneh esrei. Only by remembering the unique redemption of our forefathers and our identification with their travails can we proceed to pray to Hashem.

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#### Ohr Somayach :: Talmud Tips :: Yoma 51 – 57

For the week ending 28 December 2013 / 25 Tevet 5774

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

***"When the Jewish People did the will of G-d, the keruvim ("cherubs" in the Holy of Holies) faced each other; but when the Jewish People did not do the will of G-d, the keruvim faced away from each other. Yoma 54b***

This teaching is found in Bava Batra 99a and seems to contradict what we learn on our current daf. Here we are taught that when the pagans destroyed the first Beit Hamikdash they brought out the keruvim from the Holy of Holies in an attempt to show that the Jewish People had been worshipping these idols.

However, our gemara seems to run counter to the gemara in Bava Batra since here at the time of the destruction the keruvim were found embracing and facing each other — a sign of the Jewish People fulfilling the word of G-d. But the destruction was a punishment for them not fulfilling His will! Numerous answers are offered by the Rishonim and Achronim. One is that when the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed the Jewish People sincerely took to heart that they needed to repent and return to the way of G-d — and they did.

***"Come see what is written about the Jewish People: 'G-d dwells with the Jewish People in the midst of their tumah (defilement, ritual impurity and transgressions)'." Yoma 57a***

Rabbi Chanina states this on our daf in rebuttal to a claim by a tzeduki heretic that G-d does not dwell with the Jewish People when they are in such a downfallen state of tumah. He cites Vayika 16:16 as proof that G-d continues to dwell amongst with the Jewish People even then.

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