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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAEIRA - 5775

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date: Thu, Jan 15, 2015 at 8:36 PM  
subject: Rabbi Mordechai Willig - Darkness Before the Light

**Rabbi Mordechai Willig**  
**Darkness Before the Light**

I  
"G-d (Elokim) spoke to Moshe and said to him 'I am Hashem'" (Shemos 6:2). The attribute of strict justice attempted to harm Moshe for his complaint that his speaking to Pharaoh only made matters worse for Am Yisrael (5:22,23), but when Hashem saw that Moshe complained because of the pain of Am Yisrael, He treated him with mercy (Shemos Rabba 6:1).

The Midrash elaborates: Hashem had already informed Moshe that Pharaoh would not let them leave until after He punished him with His strong hand (3:19, Rashi). But Moshe did not learn this lesson, and instead, based on his own wisdom, complained about Hashem's decrees. This wisdom was foolish, for "who is man to question Hashem's decree after Hashem already foretold it" (Koheles 2:12)?

Rabbeinu Bachaye (5:11) interprets Moshe's behavior more charitably, explaining that Moshe did not complain but merely asked: why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? Hashem responded that the suffering of Am Yisrael exists only to increase their reward when they withstand the suffering and tolerate it with love (of Hashem).

The first exile in Egypt hints to our present exile as well (Shemos Rabba 9:13). We patiently await Hashem's salvation, "more than watchmen await the morning, more than watchmen await the morning" (Tehillim 130:6). The repetition in the preceding phrase indicates that we wait, and wait again. If the redemption is delayed, it is all to add reward and goodness at the end of days.

Just as the suffering in Egypt increased after the appearance of Moshe, the redeemer, so too, in the case of final redemption there will be greater hatred and affliction of Am Yisrael by the nations after the initial signs of redemption. And just as Moshe was hidden after his initial appearance, as Hashem, like a deer, is visible and invisible (Shir Hashirim 2:9, Midrash 2:22), so will it be in the final redemption. More and stronger troubles are a sign of the ultimate redemption of Am Yisrael (Sanhedrin 98a).

II

The precise timing and unfolding of events leading to the messianic era is unknown and not critical. Speculation based on midrashim is futile and unproductive. Rather, one should wait and believe in the coming of the Mashiach (Rambam Hilchos Melachim 12:2). However, the understanding of past events in light of the aforementioned midrashim is appropriate, and has enabled Am Yisrael to survive two millennia of anti-Semitic atrocities in our present exile.

As we suffered through the dark night of exile, only the belief in the dawn of redemption enables us to survive. "Watchmen what of the night? Watchmen what of the night? The watchman said morning is coming, but also night. If you really desire it ('vayu bayu) repent and come" (Yishaya 21:12). Once again, the repetition in this phrase as well indicates that we wait, and wait again, as the night seems unbearingly long. The morning will come when we repent (Rambam Hilchos Teshuva 7:5).

What do the words "t'vayu bayu - if you really desire it", mean? Rav Soloveitchik zt'l cited Onkelos who translates "with my sword and with my bow" (Bereishis 48:22) as "with my tzlusa and ba'usa", the two terms for prayer found in Kadish Tiskabel. A sword is a short-range weapon, and represents short-term needs. The first half of the requests of Shemone Esrei are personal, immediate needs for wisdom, repentance, forgiveness, deliverance, health and wealth, thus tzlos'hon. The bow is a long range weapon, and represents long term aspirations. The second half of the requests of Shemone Esrei are national and eschatological: ingathering of exiles, restoration of judges, submission of the wicked, security for the righteous, rebuilding of Yeushalayim, and the flourishing of Mashiach, thus ba'u'shon.

The Rav zt'l described how our personal needs have gone unfulfilled through much of the frightening night of exile. We suffered repeated exiles and many murderous plots, large and small. How have we survived? By overlooking immediate privation and tragedy and focusing instead on t'vayu bayu, the long term prayer. Our unshakable belief in the coming of the morning glory enables us to survive the seemingly endless cruel night.

III

Have we seen any signs of redemption? There is no greater sign of the impending redemption than the fulfillment of "You, O mountains of Israel, give forth your branch and bear your fruits for my people Israel, for they are soon to come" (Yechezkel 36:8) (Sanhedrin 98a). Yet several decades after the fulfillment of this prophecy, as Eretz Yisrael produced bountiful harvests for Am Yisrael for the first time in nearly two millennia, the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust claimed the lives of six million Jews.

Perhaps these events, far beyond our ability to comprehend, reflect the prediction of the aforementioned midrashim. After the initial signs of redemption, there is greater hatred and affliction, as Hashem, like a deer, hides His face, as it were, in unprecedented hester panim.

The next stage of rebuilding the destruction of Eretz Yisrael was realized by our independence and Jewish control of the state of Israel, which confers the halachic status of "bebinyano" (Magen Avraham 561:1). The juxtaposition of these epic events in Jewish history, national destruction and national independence, was recognized nearly unanimously as positive Divine Providence (see Shana B'shana 5750 pg. 377, Hatziyonut Mabat Torani, by R. Yehuda Levi, citing Rav Eliyahu Desler, Rav Elya Meir Bloch, and Rav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik zt'l).

Yet, ever since, Am Yisrael, especially in Eretz Yisrael but, as last week's murders reminded us, throughout the world as well, continues to suffer. Wars in Eretz Yisrael have claimed thousands of Jewish lives, and terrorist attacks of numerous forms have left a trail of Jewish blood worldwide, and most frequently in the Holy Land.

We dare not complain, although one who does so because of the pain of Am Yisrael will likely be treated with mercy, as Moshe was. Rather we must strengthen our faith that suffering exists only to increase our reward when we withstand it, and love Hashem in bad times as in good ones (Berachos 54a).

May it be Hashem's will that the most recent tragedies, accompanied by the appropriate response of Am Yisrael, will be the final moment of darkness before the dazzling light of our imminent and ultimate redemption.  
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date: Thu, Jan 15, 2015 at 4:23 PM

## Free Will

### Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The question is ancient. If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, then it was God who made Pharaoh refuse to let the Israelites go, not Pharaoh himself. How can this be just? How could it be right to punish Pharaoh and his people for a decision – a series of decisions – that were not made freely by Pharaoh himself? Punishment presupposes guilt. Guilt presupposes responsibility.

Responsibility presupposes freedom. We do not blame weights for falling or the sun for shining. Natural forces are not choices made by reflecting on alternatives. Homo sapiens alone is free. Take away that freedom and you take away our humanity. How then can it say, as it does in our parsha (Ex. 7: 3) that God hardened[1] Pharaoh's heart?

All the commentators are exercised by this question. Maimonides and others note a striking feature of the narrative. For the first five plagues we read that Pharaoh himself hardened his heart. Only later, during the last five plagues, do we read about God doing so. The last five plagues were therefore a punishment for the first five refusals, freely made by Pharaoh himself.[2] A second approach, in precisely the opposite direction, is that during the last five plagues God intervened not to harden but to strengthen Pharaoh's heart. He acted to ensure that Pharaoh kept his freedom and did not lose it. Such was the impact of the plagues that in the normal course of events a national leader would have no choice but to give in to a superior force. As Pharaoh's own advisers said before the eighth plague, "Do you not yet realise that Egypt is destroyed." To give in at that point would have been action under duress, not a genuine change of heart. Such is the approach of Yosef Albo[3] and Ovadiah Sforno.[4]

A third approach calls into question the very meaning of the phrase, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." In a profound sense God, author of history, is behind every event, every act, every gust of wind that blows, every drop of rain that falls. Normally however we do not attribute human action to God. We are what we are because that is how we have chosen to be, even if this was written long before in the divine script for humankind. What do we attribute to an act of God? Something that is unusual, falling so far outside the norms of human behaviour that we find it hard to explain in any other way than to say, surely this happened for a purpose.

God himself says about Pharaoh's obstinacy, that it allowed him to demonstrate to all humanity that even the greatest empire is powerless against the hand of Heaven. Pharaoh acted freely, but his last refusals were so strange that it was obvious to everyone that God had anticipated this. It was predictable, part of the script. God had disclosed this to Abraham centuries earlier when he told him in a fearful vision that his descendants would be strangers in a land not theirs (Gen. 15: 13-14).

These are all interesting and plausible interpretations. It seems to me, though, that the Torah is telling a deeper story and one that never loses its relevance. Philosophers and scientists have tended to think in terms of abstractions and universals. Some have concluded that we have freewill, others that we don't. There is no conceptual space in between.

In life, however, that is not the way freedom works at all. Consider addiction. The first few times you smoke a cigarette or drink alcohol or take drugs, you do so freely. You know the risks but you ignore them. As time goes on, your dependency increases until the craving is so intense that you are almost powerless to resist it. At that point you may have to go into

rehabilitation. You no longer, on your own, have the ability to stop. As the Talmud says, "A prisoner cannot release himself from prison."<sup>[5]</sup> Addiction is a physical phenomenon. But there are moral equivalents. For example, suppose on one significant occasion, you tell a lie. People now believe something about you that is not true. As they question you about it, or it comes up in conversation, you find yourself having to tell more lies to support the first. "Oh what a tangled web we weave," said Sir Walter Scott, "when first we practise to deceive."

That is as far as individuals are concerned. When it comes to organisations, the risk is even greater. Let us say that a senior member of staff has made a costly mistake that, if exposed, threatens the entire future of the company. He will make an attempt to cover it up. To do so he must enlist the help of others, who become his co-conspirators. As the circle of deception widens, it becomes part of the corporate culture, making it ever more difficult for honest people within the organisation to resist or protest. It then needs the rare courage of a whistle-blower to expose and halt the deception. There have been many such stories in recent years.<sup>[6]</sup>

Within nations, especially non-democratic ones, the risk is higher still. In commercial enterprises, losses can be quantified. Someone somewhere knows how much has been lost, how many debts have been concealed and where. In politics, there may be no such objective test. It is easy to claim that a policy is working and explain away apparent counter-indicators. A narrative emerges and becomes the received wisdom. Hans Christian Anderson's tale, The Emperor's New Clothes, is the classic parable of this phenomenon. A child sees the truth and in innocence blurts it out, breaking the conspiracy of silence on the part of the king's counsellors.

We lose our freedom gradually, often without noticing it. That is what the Torah has been implying almost from the beginning. The classic statement of freewill appears in the story of Cain and Abel. Seeing that Cain is angry that his offering has not found favour, He says to him: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4: 7). The maintenance of freewill, especially in a state of high emotion like anger, needs willpower. As we have noted before in these studies there can be what Daniel Goleman calls an 'amygdala hijack' in which instinctive reaction takes the place of reflective decision and we do things that are harmful to us as well as to others.<sup>[7]</sup> That is the emotional threat to freedom.

Then there is a social threat. After the Holocaust, a number of path-breaking experiments were undertaken to judge the power of conformism and obedience to authority. Solomon Asch conducted a series of experiments in which eight people were gathered in a room and were shown a line, then asked which of three others was the same length. Unknown to the eighth, the seven others were associates of the experimenter and were following his instructions. On a number of occasions the seventh gave an answer that was clearly false, yet in 75 per cent of cases the eighth was willing to give an answer, in conformity with the group, he knew to be false.

Yale psychologist Stanley Milgram showed that ordinary individuals were willing to inflict what appeared to be devastatingly painful electric shocks on someone in an adjacent room when instructed to do so by an authority figure, the experimenter.<sup>[8]</sup> The Stanford Prison Experiment, conducted by Philip Zimbardo, divided participants into the roles of prisoners and guards. Within days the 'guards' were acting cruelly and in some cases abusively toward the prisoners and the experiment, planned to last a fortnight, had to be called off after six days.<sup>[9]</sup>

The power of conformism, as these experiments showed, is immense. That I believe is why Abraham was told to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's house. These are the three factors – culture, community and early childhood – that circumscribe our freedom. Jews through the ages have been in but not of society. To be a Jew means keeping a calibrated distance from the age and its idols. Freedom needs time to make reflective decisions and distance so as not to be lulled into conformity.

Most tragically there is the moral threat. We sometimes forget, or don't even know, that the conditions of slavery the Israelites experienced in Egypt were often enough felt historically by Egyptians themselves. The great pyramid of Giza, built more than a thousand years before the exodus, before even the birth of Abraham, reduced much of Egypt to a slave labour colony for twenty years.[10] When life becomes cheap and people are seen as a means not an end, when the worst excesses are excused in the name of tradition and rulers have absolute power, then conscience is eroded and freedom lost because the culture has created insulated space in which the cry of the oppressed can no longer be heard.

That is what the Torah means when it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Enslaving others, Pharaoh himself became enslaved. He became a prisoner of the values he himself had espoused. Freedom in the deepest sense, the freedom to do the right and the good, is not a given. We acquire it, or lose it, gradually. In the end tyrants bring about their own destruction, whereas those with willpower, courage and the willingness to go against the consensus, acquire a monumental freedom. That is what Judaism is: an invitation to freedom by resisting the idols and siren calls of the age.

[1] Three different verbs are used in the narrative to indicate hardening of the heart: k-sh-h, ch-z-k and k-b-d. They have different nuances: the first means 'harden,' the second, 'strengthen,' and the third, 'make heavy.'

[2] Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 6: 3.

[3] Albo, *Ikkarim*, IV, 25.

[4] Commentary to Ex. 7: 3.

[5] *Berakhot* 5b.

[6] On Enron, see Bethany McLean and Peter Elkind. *The Smartest Guys in the Room: The Amazing Rise and Scandalous Fall of Enron*. New York: Portfolio, 2003.

[7] Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam, 1995.

[8] Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

[9] Philip G. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. New York: Random House, 2007.

[10] It has been calculated, based on a ten hour working day, that one giant block of stone weighing over a ton, would have to be transported into place every two minutes of every day for twenty years

#### **Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:**

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

#### **Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

##### ***The Palestinian Refugees***

One of the tragic consequences of war is that thousands and perhaps even millions of civilians are displaced, uprooted from their homes and lives and have involuntarily acquired the unwanted distinction of becoming refugees. Yet, in most instances regarding refugees after the wars of the twentieth century, these refugees eventually found new homes and new lives – many times better homes and better lives – and were, in the main, successfully absorbed into their new societies.

This pattern happened to the survivors of the Holocaust and to the almost three quarters of a million Jewish refugees from Arab lands that immigrated to Israel in the 1940s and 1950s. However, the three quarters of a million Arabs who fled or were forced to flee from their homes because of the wars initiated by the Arab countries against the fledgling state of Israel, have never been resettled or absorbed in the surrounding Arab societies to which they fled.

They were and are kept as hostages, and as is further demanded by the Arab countries, that Israel somehow should commit certain national suicide by allowing these families – now numbering in the millions of people – to establish themselves in Israel. This cynical exploitation of human misery is par for the course in the Middle East.

The rest of the world also pays lip service to this idea, knowing that it is impractical, untenable and counterproductive to any sort of settlement and

stabilization here in the Middle East. Israel may not appear on the maps of Moslem textbooks the world over but apparently there are millions of Moslems who somehow long to live there.

The United Nations, especially UNRWA, willingly is a co-conspirator in this cruel charade known as "the right of return." The Palestinians are hell-bent on declaring themselves to be a state. Yet, within the portion of the land of Israel now under their control, there are large refugee camps containing hundreds of thousands of their own Palestinian people, for whom it does little or nothing.

In the outskirts of Gaza, Jenin, Bethlehem and other Arab cities on the West Bank there are enormous refugee camps crammed with despairing and helpless people. It is in these refugee camps that terror squads are formed and bred. The Palestinian Authority, upon which the world lavishes hundreds of millions of dollars a year, keeps these people in squalor, subject to crime and hopelessness. It feeds them the line that someday – and that day is always just around the corner – they will inhabit Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jaffa and Safed.

In order to deflect anger and violence from itself, the Palestinian Authority has indoctrinated these unfortunates with the belief that Israel is the root cause for all of their misery and troubles. There is a growing sense that these people now realize that the corruption and cruelty of their Palestinian brothers towards them is certainly the direct cause of their misery.

Because of this realization it is possible, if not even probable, that the next intifada will be against the Palestinian Authority and it will be fueled by the frustration and hopelessness bred in the refugee camps.

However, there is no doubt that the propaganda and indoctrination of the Palestinian Authority has so poisoned the minds of the Palestinian masses that Israel and the Jews remain the real enemy, worthy of destruction and annihilation. So the ultimate intifada will be against Israel solely.

Is there anything Israel can do regarding this near existential threat to its existence as represented by the Palestinian refugees? It should be clear to all that any sort of settlement with the Palestinian Authority that does not now include a blanket "right of return" will not be accepted by the Palestinian masses.

The Palestinian Authority has painted itself – and Israel with it - into a corner by trumpeting this issue for the past almost seventy years and has left itself almost no wiggle room for compromise. There is no Israeli government that can ever agree to any blanket, all-inclusive "right of return" for the generations descended from the original Palestinian refugees.

This issue has always been swept under the rug and overshadowed by territorial withdrawals, land swaps and other such cosmetic issues. The heart of the matter still lies with the status of Jerusalem and with the refugee issue. Since neither of these issues seems amenable to settlement in the foreseeable future, maintaining the status quo, tenuous and uncomfortable as it may be for both sides, seems to be the only practical option remaining.

One certainly cannot win a Nobel Peace Prize for maintaining the status quo. Nevertheless, the status quo may be the only viable policy extant within the current makeup of the Middle East and Arab society.

Shabbat shalom

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

#### ***Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein***

##### ***Vaeira***

The extended, tension filled, confrontation between Moshe and Pharaoh forms the backdrop for the story of the plagues and the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. Pharaoh, from the outset, is unwilling to consider the request of Moshe to allow the Jewish people a three day furlough to worship God in the desert. The commentators to the Torah differ as to whether or not this was a sincere request by Moshe or simply a negotiating gambit to loosen the grip of Pharaoh on the Jewish slaves.

We do not find that God specifically endorsed or instructed Moshe to make such a proposal to Pharaoh. Nevertheless, all of these questions and difficulties are rendered moot by the fact that Pharaoh never for a moment really considered giving in to the demands of Moshe.

Even later, after coming under the pressure of the plagues and the wishes of his own advisors, and after agreeing to the three-day sojourn in the desert, Pharaoh refuses to allow the families of the slaves to accompany them, thus obviating his seeming concession to Moshe.

Pharaoh's stubbornness, his intransigence in the face of the reality of the plagues is characteristic of people who view themselves as gods and superior beings. Pharaoh cannot afford any show of compromise or accommodation to the demands of Moshe. By so doing, he would admit to the fact that, in truth, he is not a god and thus his entire basis for rule over Egypt would be threatened.

Complete dominion over others that is based upon a colossal lie of superhuman status eventually is doomed to collapse. It may take centuries for this to occur but history has shown us that it always does occur. It is Pharaoh's false claim to superhuman qualities that motivates his stubbornness and is what will doom him and Egypt to defeat and destruction. Moshe, on the other hand, does possess superhuman qualities. But the one main quality that the Torah itself most emphasizes in its description of Moshe, over his decades of leadership, is a most human one – humility, modesty, and the realization of the difference between the created and the Creator. The opening verses of this week's parsha teach us this lesson of humility.

The Jewish people and Moshe himself complained to God that somehow things were not going according to the plan that they envisioned. God's response is that one of the limitations of humans is that they can never truly fathom God's will and His direction of human affairs. This is an important lesson that Moshe must learn and assimilate into his personality. As he journeys through life, it is this quality that will eventually make him "the most humble of all human beings."

Someone who is able to communicate with Heaven freely, almost at will, and who can perform miracles and bring plagues upon a mighty empire, can easily be seduced into believing in his own powers and abilities. Thus the opening sentences of this week's Torah reading are vitally important for they are the key to the humility of Moshe and thus to the salvation of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage.

We must always be wary of the great human being who slips into the belief that he is somehow superhuman. It is this issue that highlights and contrasts the two antagonists – Pharaoh and Moshe - in the drama of the Jewish redemption from Egypt.

Shabbat shalom

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vaera**

*For the week ending 17 January 2015 / 26 Tevet 5775*

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

**Insights**

**Expletive Deleted**

***"I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments"* (1:1)**

"Rav Huna said in the name of Bar Kapara: It was in the merit of four things that the Jewish People were redeemed from Egypt: They didn't change their names; they didn't change their language; slander and gossip was not found amongst them, and they maintained their moral standards." (Yalkut Shimoni, Remez 226)

Hebrew is referred to as the "The Holy Tongue". It's holy not just because it was language with which G-d created Existence; it's not just because it's the

language of the Torah; it's not only because it was the language spoken by the holiest people who ever lived — Moshe, the Patriarchs and the Prophets. It's the only language in the world that has no 'swear words'.

It cannot be mere coincidence that 'comedians' whose lexicon relies so heavily on the obscene and the tawdry rub shoulders with displays of indecency and lewdness.

Morality is the first casualty of a mouth filled with gossip and slander, however 'funny' it may be.

The Jewish People in Egypt guarded their mouths not just against foul language, but also against language with words that were as clean as fresh laundry — but their intent was the assassination of character and social standing.

This is what saved them from Egypt.

As it says in Kohelet, "Man's entire labor is with his mouth." (6:7)

Imagine you have a wine cask filled with fine vintage wine. Place a spout on it which is tainted with filth, and the finest wine becomes disgusting. So it is with man. Even someone who is full of Torah and good deeds and prayer, if his language is coarse, even if not obscene, all his virtues become tainted and perhaps worthless.

But even a wine of modest pedigree when cleansed of dross and lees becomes palatable and pleasant. Even if someone may not be a great tzaddik, but his manner of expression is pleasant, generous and gentle — he has the merit to escape the "exile of Egypt".

Sources: Rabbi Shimshon Pincus; Rambam, Moreh HaNevuchim Part 3, chapter 8 .

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

**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 and with great judgments.* (6:6)**

The above pasuk contains therein the four different expressions of redemption, which represent four progressive stages of the redemption with which Hashem liberated Klal Yisrael from Egypt. These three are followed by V'lakachti eschem Li l'am, "I shall take you to Me for a people," referring to the Giving of the Torah, our acceptance of which made us Hashem's nation. The Chidushei HaRim wonders about the sequence of the expressions, of placing V'hotzeisi, "And I shall take you out" before V'hitzalti, "And I shall rescue you from their service." One would assume that, in the sequence of redemption, cessation of labor would be first, after which Klal Yisrael would be taken out of Egypt. He explains that this sequence addresses the vagaries of human nature, whereby people under intense pressure fail to realize fully the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves. It is only after they have emerged from darkness, and they can finally sense the beauty of light, that they begin to realize the depth of misery in which they had been immersed.

Very often, we become so terribly complacent, so used to our miserable lot, our desolation and sorrowful condition, that we lose sight of how really miserable it is.

The Jewish People had been in Egypt so long, had been enslaved by the wicked Pharaoh and his equally evil nation for such a long time, that they were no longer aware of the meaning of freedom. It was only after they had been liberated from Egypt, and were now a free people, that they could reconcile themselves with the misery of their forced labor. They had no idea of how much they had actually suffered until it was over, they were out, and now they could look back in retrospect.

A powerful analogy lends insight to this idea. The story is told of a king who sought to imbue his son with common sense and understanding concerning

the ways of the world. For his first lesson, he chose to break his son's dependency on money. After all, the prince was wealthy; nothing prevented him from spending whatever he wanted. He could have anything, go anywhere; there was nothing in his way - except for his intellect, which would teach him that everything has a limit.

The king felt that the best way to teach his son the proper values would be to remove him from his present setting and situate him in a community of poor beggars, who earned their daily bread by soliciting door to door for pennies if they were lucky! A year passed, and the king decided to check up on his son to determine if he had benefited from the experience. "My son, how are you doing?" the king asked. "Fine. I am doing well," the prince answered. "Is there anything I can do for you? Anything I can get for you?" the king asked. "Yes, there is. I need a bag, so that when I go begging, I will have a place in which to put my few coins," the prince answered.

After only a year, the prince had lost sight of the palace with its gold and silver. He did not ask for anything much, because his entire perspective had been altered. He was no longer a spoiled prince living in luxury, in a palace awash with gold, silver, precious paintings and fine furniture. He needed nothing more than a bag to hold his few pennies, because if he would lose a "penny," he would have lost a fortune!

"Is it any different with us?" asks the Chidushei HaRim. Ask a Jew what he needs, the response will invariably be, "a raise" or "a few extra dollars." We have lost our sense of values. Sadly, we rarely hear, "I wish I had more time to learn," or "I am having great difficulty understanding this passage in the Gemorah." We have lost sight of our priorities. Instead of focusing on what is really important, we complain about foolish things.

Horav Shlomo Levenstein, Shlita, relates an incident which took place concerning Horav Shaul Rubin, zl, who served as Rosh Kollel in Afula. One day he met a fellow who served as a security officer at one of the prisons. The officer related to the Rav that he had been dealing with a recalcitrant husband who had been jailed for refusing to give his wife a get, halachic divorce. In Eretz Yisrael the rabbanim take serious action against one who is guilty of such egregious behavior. They frown on one who relegates his wife to becoming an agunah, abandoned wife - as should we all. The officer asked Rav Rubin if perhaps he would meet with the obstinate husband, who would rather spend his life in jail than give his wife a get.

Rav Rubin complied with the officer's wish and visited the prison, where he spent some time in conversation with the husband. At the conclusion of the conversation, he commented to the officer, "I am sorry to say that this man will never give his wife a get - even if he is incarcerated for one hundred years! He has become quite used to being in prison. He no longer knows what life on the outside is like. He does not know the meaning and value of freedom. He sees neither anything wrong, nor restrictive, about being in prison. I suggest that you release him for a few months. Let him get a taste of freedom. Then, suddenly, return him to prison. You will see how fast he will give his wife a get."

The prison officials followed the Rav's suggestion and released the prisoner. In two months' time, he was "reintroduced" to his prison cell. Two weeks later, he begged to be released. He would give his wife a get.

#### ***I shall take you to Me for a people, and I will be a G-d to you. (6:7)***

The election of Klal Yisrael as the nation upon whom Hashem confers His Name is a concept about which every ben Torah, every observant Jew and Jewess, is acutely aware. Sadly, the term "observant" in this case is more than a mere adjective. It defines those who believe in Klal Yisrael as the am ha'nivchar, "chosen people." We choose to be chosen, and only we are willing to aspire to be worthy of the mission of "chosenness." Of the millions who carry the name Jewish to define race, only those who are knowledgeable and committed to this mission understand its meaning and responsibilities and take pride in carrying its banner. Those who have had their Jewish heritage surreptitiously purloined from them can only blame their misguided forebears and prevaricating leadership.

Horav Shlomo Levenstein, Shlita, quotes Rav Meir Grozman, a rav in Tel Aviv, who was present when a tour group of Israeli air force pilots visited with Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, during their tour of Bnei Brak. They entered his apartment and were immediately overwhelmed by a large salon which was lined from (the) floor to ceiling with bookcases, each filled to capacity with sefarim, volumes of Torah commentary. In the middle of the room was a table covered with a tablecloth, upon which were piled a number of sefarim all opened up to a specific page. At the table sat an elderly man, bent over the books, apparently engrossed in study.

The members of the group entered the room and took seats surrounding the Rosh Yeshivah. Rav Shach looked up and asked, Mi ba'rosh, "Who is the leader of this group?" One of the men came forward and said, "I am." "Since you are the leader, I would like to extend my hand to you and welcome you on behalf of your group to my home. Please sit down." One of the aides of the Rosh Yeshivah asked Rav Shach to sit down, but he dismissed him with a wave of his hand, saying, "In honor of these distinguished visitors, I will stand while they remain seated. They came to visit me, which indicates they seek to do me honor. I also feel that I should pay my greatest respect to them."

Rav Shach then turned to the men and said, "You are very distinguished men. Your mission of protecting the Jewish People in Eretz Yisrael demands the utmost gratitude on our part. I understand very well your contribution to the safety and security of every man, woman and child living in the Holy Land. You should all be blessed by the Almighty for your devotion to His People.

"When you are up there, flying high above the terrain which includes all of Hashem's creations, land, sea, mountains, inhabited areas, forests, and deserts, you have the opportunity to view the world through a unique perspective. As such, you are availed a global perspective of the Almighty. Seeing it all before you allows you to see what the average person cannot. Furthermore, when you are "up there," you may feel "closer" to the Creator. Do you take a moment to cogitate on what you see? Do you ever ask yourselves: Who created all of this? You are so fortunate to have this privilege. I am truly envious of your opportunity to achieve even greater emunah, faith, in the Almighty.

"If, Heaven forbid, your faith is not increased exponentially, it must be because the spiritual education which was availed to you was abysmally deficient. Let me elaborate on how deficient the educational system is." Rav Shach went on to point to a large, heavy tome on his desk, "This large sefer is a volume of the Talmud Zevachim." He pointed to the various commentators, Rashi, Tosfos, Rosh, Rif, Maharshal, and then went on to mention a host of other names. He then pointed to his bookcases filled with sefarim, explaining the general nature of the areas upon which these authors focus. After giving them an outline of the vastness of Torah, he asked, "Do you now agree with me that your Jewish education has been stunted?

"I have neither asked you to repent, nor have I asked you to put on Tefillin or observe Shabbos. I just want to know one thing: What right do you have to deprive your children of their heritage? Let them learn, understand, and, then, if they choose to reject the Torah, they at least will have been allowed to make an educated choice! Have they had the opportunity to see what a Shabbos looks like? - A Yom Kippur? Moreover, let them compare the freedom of an observant Jew with the freedom of one who does what he wants with his life. I would like to know which life has greater satisfaction, inspiration, future. "We, in the yeshivah, as well as all of the Torah-observant Jews throughout the world, have chosen to follow in the path of our Patriarchs, the way of life that, throughout the millennia, has been transmitted from father to son. We have been hounded and persecuted, yet, we have remained staunchly committed to our heritage and have preserved this legacy, so that it may be transmitted to future generations.

"Hashem should protect you as you guard over His Land. May you be successful in all of your endeavors on behalf of our People. May we together greet Moshiach Tzidkeinu."

Rav Shach refused to sit down until the very last pilot had left the room. The pilots left and congregated outside the Rosh Yeshivah's apartment: "This cannot be the very same Rav Shach who last week railed against members of the kibbutz who do not observe the laws of kashrus. Imagine! He even questioned their Jewish pedigree."

After all was said and done, they all agreed that meeting the Rosh Yeshivah and listening to him speak was a seminal experience - one that would remain with them for the rest of their lives. In summing up the experience, the commander remarked, "We need someone of his elevated stature at the helm of the Jewish People. It is because of his inspiration and demands that we are what we are. Imagine how low we might descend without someone like him to look up to."

***Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. (9:20)***

What is the meaning of avdei Pharaoh, the servants of Pharaoh? What about the citizens of Egypt? What did they do? The Meshech Chochmah explains that, when word went out from Moshe Rabbeinu that all Egyptians should take their animals inside, the immediate reaction was to comply. After all, Moshe seemed to have a powerful track record. It would be suicide to defy his warning. Pharaoh, however, would not allow his people to cave in to Moshe. He dispatched his servants throughout the land with an order to actively disregard Moshe's warning. The Egyptian citizen was now in a quandary: To whom should he listen - Moshe, or Pharaoh's servants? The fear which gripped the Egyptians was now doubled. If they left their animals outdoors, the animals might die. On the other hand, if they brought the animals inside, they might die. Those G-d-fearing Egyptians who listened to Moshe - the yarei es dvar Hashem mei'avdei Pharaoh, who feared Hashem more than they feared the servants of Pharaoh - took their animals in. They made the wise choice.

When we consider that this was not the first makah, plague, to strike Egypt - and that each one was devastating - one begins to wonder at the utter foolishness of those Egyptians who did not seem to care. They had seen the miracles. How could they be so dense, to disregard the past as if it had never occurred? Apparently, this is human nature. How often do we perceive overt miracles and occurrences which are clearly supernatural, yet go on with business as usual? It is only when we are personally affected, when we personally experience a miracle, that we lift up our heads and pay attention. The Mashgiach of Kol Torah, Horav Yitzchak Yeruchem Bordyanski, related the following telling story. The Mashgiach had occasion to take a monit, taxi, to a student's wedding. Accompanying him were three students of the yeshivah. The nahag, driver, who apparently was friendly with the Mashgiach, asked for a dvar Torah. This must have been their usual exchange, with the Mashgiach sharing a Torah insight with this otherwise yet-to-be-observant Jew. This time, however, the Mashgiach countered, "I am the one who always says the dvar Torah, while you listen. This time we will exchange our roles. I will listen, while you will say a dvar Torah." "Fine," began the driver. "I have an inspiring story to relate. When I was in the army, training to become a paratrooper, I once had to endure a difficult day of training. Our entire group was taken to a desolate spot in the wilderness and told to bed down for the night. We were all exhausted and could not wait to go to sleep - even in the miserable wilderness. A few minutes after we lay down and immediately floated into an exhausted sleep, we were awakened to terrible screaming. We immediately jumped up to see the cause of the screams. We looked around to see that one of the soldiers lay with a poisonous snake coiled around his leg.

"The soldier knew that the slightest movement on his part would cause the snake to attack, and his life would be over. He lay there without moving, begging us for assistance. 'Please do something,' he cried out. Regrettably, there was nothing any of us could do to help him.

"In a last-ditch attempt to save the soldier, the commander called over one of the sharpshooters, a marksman of exemplary ability, and instructed him to

take careful aim and shoot the snake. The marksman replied somewhat nervously, 'But the snake is coiled around his leg. If I miss, or if it does not die immediately, it will react and bite the soldier!' The commander replied that there was no other alternative. Otherwise, the soldier would certainly die.

"The marksman lined up his rifle, carefully adjusting the sight, checking the wind, and was about to take aim and shoot, when a chareidi, observant, soldier called out, 'Stop! Before you shoot, try one alternative gesture.' He looked at the soldier lying on the ground, white as a sheet, with sweat pouring down his face, and said, 'Recite Shema Yisrael. It will protect you.' "He had nothing to lose, so he began saying the age-old words from the Torah. Word-by-word came out of his mouth, very slowly and clearly. He then repeated it. Suddenly, to our astonishment, we saw the snake slowly begin to uncoil itself from the soldier's leg and crawl away.

"This was a miracle experienced by each one of us. We all saw it. There was no doubt that G-d had listened to the prayer and intervened."

The driver concluded the story and was silent, prompting the Mashgiach to ask, "What was the conclusion of the story?"

The driver replied, "The soldier who was saved took it as a sign from Heaven. He changed his life and is now dati, fully observant, and studies Torah."

Hearing this, the Mashgiach asked the driver, "What about you, my friend? Did you change as a result of this overt miracle?"

"Rebbe, I have not changed. You see, the snake did not coil itself around my leg."

Herein lies the difference between a wise man - a perceptive person - and a fool. The fool waits for the snake to coil itself around his leg. The wise man, however, suffices with a perceptive lesson from others. He would much rather remain an innocent observer. Another powerful lesson can be derived from the Torah's characterization of the G-d-fearing Egyptian: yarei es dvar Hashem; "he feared the word of G-d." Did it require a rocket scientist to believe in Hashem? One makah after another struck the land of Egypt. What more did this G-d-fearing Egyptian require to infuse him with the fear of Heaven? How could they not fear Hashem? We see clearly, comments Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, that it is quite simple for one to become a yarei Shomayim. It does not take much. Indeed, if one believes because he is up against the proverbial wall, with no way out, and the chips are all stacked against him - and he believes in Hashem, which is a no-brainer - he is still considered a yarei

Shomayim! How easy it really is; yet, how difficult it apparently must be to so many who talk the talk, but are ill-prepared to assume the duty of becoming a true G-d-fearing person.

Vерitably, if it were so simple, why did those Egyptians refuse to listen - at a danger to their servants and animals? How could they ignore something that was clearly going to occur? Rav Yeruchem quotes Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, who applied a powerful analogy to explain how a person could possibly ignore Hashem. He suggested the following: A person chances upon a glass of water which seems untouched. It appears pristine. There is no reason for him not to drink it. In fact, a number of intelligent people who are in the area where the glass of water is located all attest to its purity. As he is about to drink the water, a man saunters over and claims that the water has been poisoned! This man has a long history of emotional problems. Indeed, the last few weeks he had been acting even more irrationally than ever before. Chances are that this person had conjured up in his own deviated mind that the water had been poisoned. Yet, will anyone in his right mind drink the water? Ab

solutely not! If there is even a remote possibility that the water is poisonous, no intelligent person would drink from it.

With this idea in mind, Rav Yisrael wonders how any rational person could go through life and not be afraid that, perhaps, he will ultimately be punished for his evil. How could one blatantly transgress Hashem's command when there is a "remote" possibility that he will be punished for his misdeeds?

Even if there is a "slight" chance that Torah Judaism is the only way of life to which a Jew should adhere, and one who does not observe will pay dearly for his decision, it would make sense that any Jew with a modicum of intelligence would be observant. Yet, it is clearly not the case.

The fear of G-d manifest by the Egyptians was elementary in nature. It was the simplest form of fear. Yet, they were called *yarei Hashem*. This supports the notion that *yiraas Shomayim* takes intelligence. On the other hand, the criteria for the one who did not fear Hashem was *lo sam libo*, "And he who did not apply (the lessons) to his heart." He did not take the miracle seriously. The lessons did not catalyze his asking: What should I do? How should I react? No, he ignored the miracles and continued along his merry path of iniquity, with business as usual. In order to be a *yarei Shomayim*, one has only to look, acknowledge and relate to his heart. If one closes his eyes and refuses to see, it is no wonder that the greatest miracles leave him unmoved.

*In loving memory of Miriam Bas Avraham Yehuda Jacobson by her family David, Susan, Danial, Breindy, Ephraim, Adeena, Aryeh and Michelle Jacobson and her great grandchildren*

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**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**  
Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)  
**Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column**  
**Vaera: "Hopeless"**

I remember the conversation very well. It was a discussion among a group of assorted friends, from a variety of backgrounds. One or two were true scholars. The others were not scholars by any stretch of the imagination but were familiar with those Jewish texts frequently read in the synagogue. The discussion revolved around the question, "What is the saddest verse in the entire Bible?" The opening candidate for the saddest verse was the passage in the weekly portion of *Vayetzei*, which reads, "The Lord saw that Leah was unloved." But that phrase was soon rejected in favor of the second half of that same verse, "but Rachel was barren." No question about it. Both the lack of love and infertility are very sad human conditions.

Others quoted various verses from the curses in the weekly portions of *Bechukotai* and *Ki Tavo*. There is no paucity of horribly sad verses in those two parshiyot. Here are just a few: "I will set my face against you...your foes shall dominate you," "I will heap your carcasses upon your lifeless fetishes;" "You shall eat your own issue, the flesh of your sons and daughters." For these phrases, the adjectives "frightening" or "terrible" seem more appropriate than "sad."

For most of the discussion, I remained silent. For, you see, I had long before concluded which Torah verse was the saddest for me. The verse appears in this week's Torah portion, *Parshat Vaera* (Exodus 6:2-9:35). It reads, "But they would not listen to Moses because of their crushed spirit and difficult toil." (*ibid.* 6:9)

Let's understand the context of this verse. In last week's parsha, we read of the first time Moses delivered the message that the redemption was near. The "people were convinced." They believed. They trusted Moses. They "bowed low in homage." They had hope.

This week's parsha, however, begins after the Jews knew bitter disappointment. Moses had intervened with Pharaoh, but his intervention backfired. Pharaoh reacted by increasing the burden he placed upon the Jews. He said, "Let heavier work be laid upon the men; let them not pay attention to deceitful promises." After such disillusionment, the eloquent promises with which this week's parsha begins evoked a very different reaction. Moses' words were met with disbelief, with a despair that is the

result of *kotzer ruach*, a crushed spirit, and *avodah kashah*, painfully difficult toil.

For me, hopelessness is the saddest of human emotions, especially when it follows upon the excitement of hopefulness. The moment when hopes are dashed and dreams abandoned is, for me, the saddest moment of all. Ironically, this saddest of all verses gives us the opportunity to learn important lessons about hope and its opposite, despair. To learn these lessons we must scrutinize these two phrases, *kotzer ruach* and *avodah kashah*, which I have thus far translated as "crushed spirit" and "difficult toil". Our great commentators give these phrases different "spins".

For example, Rashi understands *kotzer ruach* to mean "shortness of breath", the result of strenuous physical labor. Can a man who is gasping for air be expected to hope? Of course not. He is so panicked that hope for a better future is totally beyond his capacity.

Whereas Rashi translates *ruach* as "breath," Rabbi Obadiah Sforno, the great Jewish commentator who lived in Italy during its Renaissance, prefers to translate it as "spirit." For him, it is not "shortness of breath" that deprives a person of hope. Rather, it is the "shortness of spirit," the absence of a "spirit of faith," which makes hope so difficult. The Jews lost faith in Moses. He had let them down by failing to provide them with an instant solution to their plight. Thereby they lost their faith in the God of Moses. Without faith, argues Sforno, hope is impossible.

The eighteenth century mystic and ethicist, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, understands our verse differently. For him, Pharaoh was the expert par excellence about the processes of despair and discouragement. He knew how to squash hope. He knew why genuine hope is so rare. To keep man from hope, Pharaoh knew, you must keep him so busy with all sorts of tasks and chores that he is too distracted to take the few moments necessary to begin to think of hopeful possibilities.

This is how Luzzato puts it in his masterpiece, *The Path of the Upright* (*Mesillat Yesharim*):

"This is, in fact, one of the cunning artifices of the evil yetzer (inclination), who always imposes upon men such strenuous tasks that they have no time left to note whether they are drifting... This ingenuity is somewhat like that of Pharaoh, who commanded, 'Let heavier work be laid upon the men...' For Pharaoh's purpose was not only to prevent the Israelites from having any leisure to make plans against him, but by subjecting them to unceasing toil, to deprive them also of the opportunity to reflect."

Without this opportunity — with *kotzer ruach*, "shortness of time to reflect" — hopefulness is out of the question. One would be too busy to hope.

Another insight into the possible meaning of *kotzer ruach* is found in a most unusual source. There exists a collection of brief homilies, authored by Rabbi Kalonymos Kalman Shapira, the Chassidic Rebbe of Piacezna in pre-Holocaust Poland. He recorded these homilies, delivered in the early years of the Warsaw Ghetto, in a little notebook, which miraculously survived those fateful years.

He writes that under conditions of *avodah kashah*, of very difficult toil, one loses the "spirit of life." Rabbi Shapira knew all too well the meaning of difficult toil, enslaved as he and his "congregation" were in that horrible ghetto. And he knew how he and they struggled to do God's will despite their dire straits. He witnessed their attempts to help each other, to maintain faith in God, and to perform whatever ritual mitzvot they could. But furthermore, he observed that their tortured souls could not muster the "spirit of life" necessary for religious action. *Kotzer ruach* for him meant the absence of a "spirit of vitality." For him, religious actions performed without enthusiasm were defective.

Like the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, the Jews of ancient Egypt suffered from *kotzer ruach*. They could not respond to Moses with a "spirit of vitality." No vitality, no life, no hope.

These commentators lived centuries apart from each other and in very diverse circumstances. But they all teach us this: there are many factors in

life that render hope impossible. Some of these factors are cruel and unusual, as exemplified by the slaveries of Egypt and Nazi Germany.

But some of these factors are common today. They relate to our busy lifestyles, to our work routines, even to the ways we play. We are consumed by "busyness." There may be little that slaves can do to free themselves for the possibility of hope. But there is much that we can do to avoid our own "slavery," to at least limit the avodah kashah that leads to kotzer ruach.

Reflect upon it. Where there is time for reflection, there are opportunities for hope.

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### Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vaera

#### *The Resume Of Moshe Rabbeinu*

The Parshiyos we are currently studying serve as Moshe Rabbeinu's introduction to Klal Yisrael. The narratives covered in these weekly Torah readings illuminate for us the attributes the Jewish people seek in choosing their leaders.

In describing the events of Moshe's early life, the Torah seems to be trying to make the case that Moshe is fit for his future position of leadership in the Jewish nation. Yet scant few "bullets" in Moshe's resume shed light on his qualifications for the job. Remember, when Moshe appeared before Pharaoh at the start of his mission of redemption, he was 80 years old! What kind of resume did he build during those first 80 years that would qualify him for becoming the chosen person to lead the Jewish people?

Rav Simcha Zissel (the 'Alter') from Kelm spends many chapters of his sefer discussing this idea. The Alter makes an elaborate case that we really only see one thing about Moshe Rabbeinu that qualified him for the job. There is one theme and quality, which begins in Parshas Shmos and continues in Parshas Vaera, which shows us why Moshe Rabbeinu was worthy of being chosen for this position. This quality is being "nos'e b'ol im chaveiro" – the capacity that Moshe Rabbeinu had to feel the pain of his fellow Jew.

Rav Simcha Zissel documents this for us: We read in last week's parsha "...and he went out to his brethren and he saw their suffering..." [Shmos 2:11]. Moshe Rabbeinu was a prince. He was almost like a grandson of Pharaoh. He could have remained in the lap of luxury and done nothing. However, our Rabbis say, commenting on the above quoted pasuk, "He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over them. He said 'I wish I could be in your place.'"

Moshe saw the Egyptian beating up the Jew. Moshe saved the Jew from the hand of the Egyptian. Is that not a case of "nos'e b'ol im chaveiro"? Again, the next day, when it was not a case of an Egyptian against a Jew but of Jew against Jew, what does Moshe Rabbeinu do? He does the same thing: Nos'e b'ol im chaveiro. It costs him his entire secure position in the palace of Pharaoh. He becomes a fugitive of justice and must run away for his life from Egypt.

Then when Moshe went to Midyan, and he might have already 'learned his lesson' to keep himself out of other people's fights, he sees that the daughters of Midyan are being harassed and again he sticks up for the underdog and jumps in to save them.

Moshe bears the burden of his fellow man's suffering. This and this alone is the primary quality that Moshe possessed, which qualified him for the job of Jewish leadership. His resume contained the fact that he was a "nos'e b'ol im chaveiro".

Rav Yonasan Eibeshutz, in his sefer Tiferes Yonasan, uses this idea to explain why Pharaoh excused the entire Tribe of Levi from the Egyptian bondage. According to our Rabbis, the Tribe of Levi was not enslaved the entire time of our sojourn in Egypt. Rav Eibeshutz offers an interesting theory why Pharaoh did this. He says that Pharaoh saw through his astrologers that the eventual savior of the Jewish people would be a

descendant of the Tribe of Levi. Pharaoh figured, and shrewdly so, that a person who was never enslaved in the first place would not be the leader of a rebellion. How can a person who was not a victim of oppression turn around and take the oppressed class out of slavery? He never felt the pain so he would not risk his status quo to attempt to lead a revolt to overthrow the current situation.

It was a brilliant plan. Pharaoh was willing to give up the labor of the Tribe of Levi as a means of stifling the ability of any Levite to aspire to become the savior of his people! Even the Jewish people themselves were skeptical of Moshe's ability to lead them out of slavery, due to his lack of familiarity with their situation. "...And they did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of wind and hard work." [Shmos 6:9]

Pharaoh underestimated the Tribe of Levi. He failed to realize that the Tribe of Levi in general and Moshe Rabbeinu in particular had an unbelievable ability to empathize with their fellow man. In spite of the fact that they were not the victims of the slavery, they had this capacity of putting themselves in someone else's shoes as if they themselves were the victim.

The Shalo'h HaKadosh points out an anomaly in the Torah's pasukim [Shmos 6:14-19]: When the Torah introduces us to and tells us the genealogy of Moshe Rabbeinu, it begins with the Tribe of Reuven and lists the sons of Reuven. It then goes lists the sons of Shimon. There is similar syntax in both cases: "The sons of Reuven..." "And the sons of Shimeon..." We would expect to next find a parallel listing of Moshe Rabbeinu's tribe, beginning with the words "And the sons of Levi..." Instead, the Torah says, "And these ARE THE NAMES OF THE SONS OF LEVI..."

The Shalo'h says an amazing idea. Levi prophetically realized that his sons and grandsons were not going to be victims of the enslavement in Egypt. He did not want them to forget about their cousins who were slaves. Therefore, he took pains to name each of his sons with a name somehow connoting the enslavement in Egypt. Kehas (meaning dark) connotes the fact that "they blackened their teeth with the suffering of the enslavement." Merari (coming from the word Mar) connotes that they made their lives bitter. Gershon (coming from the word Ger) connotes being temporary sojourners in this land of our exile. Levi anticipated what was coming and he took pains to imbue in his children the sense of kinship and empathy with other members of the family. Levi wanted to ensure that his descendants would not be able to sleep well at night – even if they were not enslaved – as long as another member of the family was in pain.

Moshe Rabbeinu in particular possessed this attribute. He was the prime example of this capacity to be nos'e b'ol im chaveiro.

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that Moshe Rabbeinu's statement at the end of last week's parsha "My L-rd, why have You harmed this people, why have you sent me?" [Shmos 5:22] was a worse sin than what he did at Mei Meriva (when he hit the rock). Imagine the audacity to lecture the Almighty, as it were! The Medrash, in fact, states that at this very moment, the Attribute of Justice wanted to smite Moshe. However, G-d responded, "Leave him alone, he speaks this way only out of a sense of honor for the Jewish people."

Rav Matisyahu Solomon explains the Medrash: "Why did the Almighty say 'Let him be'? It was because it was not Moshe Rabbeinu talking. It was Klal Yisrael talking." Moshe Rabbeinu was so fused with the needs and suffering of the Jewish people, it was as if the Jewish people were talking through the voice box of Moshe. This expression of "Why have You harmed this people?" is what the people felt. Moshe Rabbeinu, as it were, was like a puppet who mouthed the words the people were feeling. For such speech, the Almighty said, one cannot be held accountable. The people could not be held accountable for such speech because "a person is not held accountable for what he says in his moment of anguish."

This then was the resume of Moshe Rabbeinu. He qualified for Jewish leadership because he had the preeminent quality required of a Jewish leader – the ability to empathize with the suffering of the Jewish people.

#### *The Unique Lesson of the Plague of Frogs*

The Kli Yakar makes an interesting inference in this week's parsha. After the conclusion of the Plague of Frogs, the Torah states: "...and the frogs died – from the houses, from the courtyards, and from the fields. They heaped them up into many piles, and the land became foul. Pharaoh saw that there had been a relief, and kept hardening his heart. He did not listen to them, as Hashem had spoken." [Shmos 8:9-11]

The Kli Yakar asks: Why is it only by the plague of Frogs that we have the expression "Pharaoh saw that there had been a relief" (vayaar Pharoah ki hayasa harvacha)? By definition, this was true of all the plagues – first there was the plague (be it blood, frogs, lice, etc.) and then the plague stopped and there was relief. What is unique here about Frogs that the Torah needs to call to our attention that Pharaoh took note of the fact that it let up?

The Kli Yakar makes an interesting point. With every other plague, when it was over it was over. When it stopped hailing, it stopped hailing. When the plague of Darkness finished, it was light outside. With the Frogs, there was a unique situation. Even after the frogs finally died, the Egyptians now had billions and billions of frogs sitting, rotting, and reeking. The Torah testifies to the fact that the land stank! Thus, even when it was "over", it was not really over! However the pasuk says that Pharaoh saw that there was some "harvacha" (literally "wide open spaces"), the simple interpretation however is that the word in this context means "relief".

The Kli Yakar explains that if one has a large enough territory, one can escape the smell. It is only in a confined area that a foul odor is so offensive. The wider the area, the more the smell will dissipate. Therefore, the pasuk states that when Pharaoh saw that there was "harvacha" — i.e. – wide open spaces in Egypt that he could escape to where it did not smell so bad -- his heart was hardened as before.

The lesson, says the Kli Yakar, is that as soon as Pharaoh saw there was the slightest let up, he felt "now I can go back to my old ways". With the other plagues, it is simple that this is what happened. When the hail stopped, Pharaoh went back to being the wicked Pharaoh. However, over here, one would have thought that it never really stopped and the aftermath should still give him pause from his evil ways. No! As long as he found a little wiggle room – of "harvacha" in the wide open spaces of Egypt – he immediately went back to being the old Pharaoh.

What is the lesson for us? This is the way we all are. When Heaven forbid we are confronted with trials and tribulations, we daven better, we act better, and we do all the things we are supposed to be doing. Then as soon as there is somewhat of a letup – "Okay, it's not so serious, we can go back to the way we were." Such is human nature. As soon as the pressure is off, we revert to our old patterns.

Pharaoh should remind us of this lesson: "And he saw that there was relief". Our challenge is that if we know how to daven properly "when things are bad" then how much more so we should be davening like that when things are good!

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

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### Rav Kook List

#### Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

##### *Va'eira: "Hamotzi" - for all Times*

Note: I found the following idea difficult to translate, as it requires some knowledge of Hebrew grammar. Nonetheless, it provides a fascinating example of how a Talmudic disagreement over a single letter may reveal a profound philosophical discussion.

It was definitely the low point in Moses' mission to free the Hebrew slaves. Pharaoh responded to the demand for freedom by adding more oppressive measures, and the Israelites began to wish that Moses had never come. Even Moses had his doubts. In response, God commanded Moses to relay the following message to the Israelites:

"You will know that I am the Lord your God, the One who brings you out (ha-motzi) from under the Egyptian subjugation." (Ex. 6:7)  
Hamotzi - Past or Future?

The tense of the verb 'ha-motzi' here is unclear. The Israelites have not yet been freed. Why say, "who brings you out"? The future tense, "who will bring you out," would make more sense.

The word 'ha-motzi' brings to mind the blessing recited before eating bread. The Talmud (Berachot 38a) records a debate regarding this blessing. Rabbi Nehemiah felt the blessing should read, "Blessed are You ... Who brought forth (motzi) bread from the earth." But the other sages argued that the blessing should be "the One Who brings forth (ha-motzi) bread from the earth" - as in our verse.

What is the difference between 'motzi' and 'ha-motzi'?

The Talmud explains that this disagreement is based on how the verse in Exodus should be understood. According to Rabbi Nehemiah, the word 'ha-motzi' implies the future. The Jews were still slaves in Egypt, and God assured them that He would take them out in the future. The future tense, however, is not appropriate for the blessing over bread. We recite this blessing in recognition of the wheat that has already come out of the earth. The word 'motzi,' on the other hand, refers to the past, and is therefore more suitable.

Rabbi Nehemiah's colleagues felt that the word 'ha-motzi' implies both the past and the future. They understood the verse as follows: the Israelites will be freed (in the future), after which they will recognize God as their Liberator (in the past). Since 'ha-motzi' also includes past events, it is also appropriate for the blessing over bread.

What is the essence of this disagreement? Is it simply an argument over Hebrew grammar? What is the significance of the blessing over bread being in the past or the future?

### Contemplating God

There are two basic ways to attain love and awe of Heaven. The first approach is to contemplate God's greatness by examining His works. Reflecting on His amazing creations allows one to appreciate God's infinite wisdom and justice, and instills a tremendous longing to know God's great Name (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Yesodei HaTorah 2:1).

The second approach maintains that intellectual reflection alone is insufficient. There must also be an emotional element. We need to awaken within ourselves love and awe for the Essence that creates these spectacular works.

Rabbi Nehemiah, by preferring the word 'motzi,' concurred with the first approach. Before eating bread, we need to raise our intellectual awareness of the event that occurred: this bread was baked from wheat that God brought forth from the earth. The word 'motzi' is a verb, referring to an event that has taken place. Rabbi Nehemiah stressed the importance of the past tense, since appreciation of God's greatness is achieved by objectively analyzing God's hand in history and past events.

The other scholars disagreed. The blessing should be 'ha-Motzi,' "the One Who brings forth." 'Ha-Motzi' is not a verb but a descriptive phrase. We do not only observe the event itself, but we attempt to look beyond it to the Cause of the action. This is a supra-scientific, intuitive approach, relating to God according to His actions. The scholars held that the blessing over bread is not just a way of contemplating the process of wheat growing out of the earth. We must concentrate on the Source of this process, and form a corresponding mental image of God.

Beyond Time

Since this opinion stresses not the event but the Cause of the event, the framework of time becomes irrelevant. 'Ha-motzi' thus implies both past and future. This changes our understanding of God's promise to the Israelites, "You will know that I am the Lord your God, the One who brings you out from under the Egyptian subjugation." We now understand that the present tense is just as accurate as the past and the future. For all time, we will recognize God's attribute of 'Ha-Motzi,' the One who liberates us from slavery.

(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 110-112. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 176-177).

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<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/vaera-faith-is-the-cure/>

**Vaera: Faith is the Cure**

**Ben-Tzion Spitz**

**January 15, 2015**

*The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and human responsibility.* -Vaclav Havel

The greatest, most powerful, most important orator in Jewish history, Moses, started off with some type of speech impediment. Commentators have a variety of opinions as to exactly what the problem was, but one thing that is abundantly clear is that Moses had no desire to speak publicly. He was so perturbed by his condition that he was willing to argue with God Himself to be spared from being the divine spokesman.

God berates Moses and asks him who he thinks gives man the capacity to speak in the first place? God seems particularly harsh with Moses on this count. The question is why does God give Moses such a hard time on an issue that anyone who has ever felt discomfort or even sheer terror in front of an audience can appreciate? Why was God so demanding, even insistent that this poor, speech-challenged man should have to speak in front of the mortal ruler of the most powerful empire on Earth? Couldn't God have chosen a natural orator, a seasoned politician, even a classroom teacher? Why did he have to focus on a lonely desert shepherd for whom the extent of discourse up until then was probably limited to giving directions to sheep?

According to the Baal Haturim on Exodus 6:30, Moses needed to have faith that God has the power to rectify the situation. God chose Moses on purpose, knowing his limitations and perhaps even because of his limitations. God knows that Moses can and will overcome them. He just needed to be placed in the position to have the necessity to overcome his challenges. Otherwise, he may have forever remained incapacitated. What angered God about Moses' fear and denial was his lack of faith. All that he needed to overcome was faith.

It was clearly not a simple or direct path for Moses, but eventually he acquires that faith and becomes the fundamental leader of the Jewish people. May we each overcome our particular challenges and thereby merit to contribute in our own way to our people.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

*Dedication*

*To Ed Stelzer. It's incredible where challenges and faith can lead us and how roads diverge and then intertwine.*

Ben-Tzion Spitz is the Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of two books of Biblical Fiction and over 400 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes. Ben-Tzion is a graduate of Yeshiva University and received his Master's in Mechanical Engineering from Columbia University.

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### **On Never Having to Mention Islam**

**Jonathan Rosenblum -**

**Mishpacha Magazine - Parahsa Va'eira 5775**

The Obama administration responded characteristically to the savage terrorist attack by gunmen shouting "Al-lahu Akbar" and "We have avenged the prophet" on the French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo. Press secretary Josh Earnest made the rounds of TV talk shows to repeat that "Islam is a religion of peace," and to warn that the attack was still under investigation, and therefore it is "not clear who was responsible and what their motivations were." If he really didn't know their motivations, he was surely the last person on the planet in that position.

Secretary of State Kerry spoke of "extremists," without mentioning what they represented the extreme version of, and insisted that the West does not face a war of civilizations – not with Islam or even a version of Islam.

No matter how many times the authors of savage deeds of barbarism proclaim that they are acting in the name of Al-lah, the "prophet," or the "holy Koran;" no matter how many imams praise their actions and rejoice in their upholding the honor of Islam; no matter how many times they announce that their goal is imposition of sharia, Muslim religious law, on the entire world; no matter how many foundational Islamic texts calling for war on the infidel they cite – they can still count on Western apologists to deny their actions have anything to do with Islam. Why? Because everyone knows that "Islam is a religion of peace. Never mind that the three letter root for peace in Arabic is better translated as submission.

These flights of fancy have consequences: They endanger citizens of the West. Political correctness led the Obama administration to excise every reference to Islam from government anti-terrorist manuals, in contravention of Sun Tzu's admonition in The Art of War: "Know your enemy." New York City mayor Bill de Blasio campaigned against police surveillance of mosques, which are often terrorist recruitment and planning centers. That same slothful thinking leads to slack enforcement of airplane watch lists. Witness the "underwear bomber," whose own father had informed authorities of his brainwashing by radical Islamists.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, new year's day speech, thus came as a welcome refutation of so much nonsense about the lack of connection between Islam and terrorism. Speaking in the Al-Azhar University, a center of Islamic learning, al-Sisi lamented that "the corpus of [Islamic] texts and ideas that we have sacralized over the years [are] antagonizing the entire world." He asked whether it makes sense that "1.6 billion people [the world's Islamic population] should want to kill the rest of the world's inhabitants . . . so that they may live."

Only a religious revolution, said al-Sisi, could keep Muslims from being seen as "a source of anxiety, danger, killing and destruction for the rest of the world."

At least one Muslim it would appear has eyes to see that the source of the problem lies in Islam itself.

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