

Weekly Parsha VAEIRA 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Many of the Torah commentaries point out that unlike our forefathers, Moshe, in this week's opening verses to the Parsha, did not accept that God's promises of redemption for the Jewish people had not yet been fulfilled. In God's response to this, we sense a veiled criticism of our great teacher and leader Moshe.

Heaven responded to Moshe by saying that he enjoyed a higher and different relationship to the Revelation from God than those original founders of the Jewish people. Because of this state of elevated Revelation, Moshe's complaint was unnecessary. Moshe should have realized that Heaven has its own timetable, and that its promises will always be fulfilled, but not necessarily according to the time schedule established by human beings.

It is difficult to understand the attitude in Moshe's statement to Heaven that it had not yet freed the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage. Moshe certainly realized through his powers of Revelation that he had experienced, and through the commitments made to him and to the Jewish people about redemption, that Heaven was aware of the promises, and that there was no need to be prompted by Moshe to fulfill its commitments.

However, Moshe, like all leaders, was subject to public pressure, complaints and hostility directed towards him by the Jewish taskmasters after the decree of the Pharaoh to withhold straw from them, while demanding the same number of bricks to be produced. These complaints by the people were deeply disturbing to Moshe. He deflects the criticism directed towards him and, instead, holds Heaven accountable for the situation.

Moshe, himself, has no doubt as to the eventual outcome and the inevitable redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Unlike Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob though, he was subject to popular opinion in the mood of the Jewish people, whom he had to convince that redemption would in fact take place.

According to the Midrash, many, if not most, of the Jewish people in Egypt did not believe Moshe's promises that they would soon be delivered from Egyptian slavery. Even after the series of plagues and punishments visited upon the Egyptians, most of the Jews still did not believe in their coming redemption. In contending with this psychological and emotional

state of mind by a large part of the Jewish people, Moshe necessarily turns the Heaven for help. He has no doubt that the redemption from Egyptian slavery will shortly take place. However, he must bring the masses of Israel along with him in this belief and faith.

Because of his great modesty and humility, Moshe does not rely upon his own powers of persuasion to accomplish this task, and he turns to Heaven in an almost provocative fashion. He implores God to hasten the process of the delivery of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage. His courageous words to Heaven, which seem like a complaint, are, indeed, but an expression of the greatness of his character and the forcefulness of Moshe's leadership.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Freewill (Vaera)

Rabbi 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? 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 conclusion they draw therefore is that 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 his resolve. 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?" (Ex. 10:7) 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 way other 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 (Ex. 7:5; 14:18). 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 actually 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, 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 someone gambles or drinks alcohol or takes drugs, they may do so freely, knowing the risks but ignoring them. Time goes on and their dependency increases until the craving is so intense that they are almost powerless to resist it. At a certain point they may have to go into rehabilitation. They no longer have the ability to stop without external support. As the Talmud says, "A prisoner cannot release himself from prison." (Brachot 5b)

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," Sir Walter Scott famously said, "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. They will make an attempt to cover it up. To do so they must enlist the help of others, who become 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.[5]

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 monarch's counsellors and townspeople.

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, God 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" (Gen. 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,[6] what Daniel Goleman calls an 'amygdala hijack' can occur in which instinctive reaction takes the place of reflective decision and we do things that are harmful to us as well as to others.[7] 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 person, the seven others were associates of the experimenter and were following his instructions. On a number of occasions the seven conspirators gave an answer that was clearly false, yet in 75 per cent of cases the eighth person was willing to agree with them and give an answer 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.[8] 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.[9]

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 by Egyptians themselves over many generations. 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.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Va’era (Exodus 6:2-9:35)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel –“And I will bring you into the land that I promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you as a morasha (heritage): I am the Lord.” (Exodus 6:8)

It is only natural for parents to want to leave a legacy for their children and grandchildren. For those fortunate enough to be able to do so, this wish expresses itself in the form of an inheritance. But for most people, this is simply not realistic. How might they transmit a legacy to the next generation? I believe the answer can be found in the important distinction the Torah makes between the words yerusha (inheritance) and morasha (heritage).

We are all more familiar with the concept of yerusha, used throughout the Torah to describe the passing down of material possessions from parents to children. Far less common is the concept of morasha, mentioned in the Torah in reference to only two things: Torah [“Moses prescribed the Torah to us, an eternal heritage (morasha) for the congregation of Jacob” (Deut. 33:4)] and Land of Israel (the verse cited above at the outset).

The different contexts in which these words appear reveals a great deal about the different kinds of relationships between parents and children, and different priorities that these bequests engender, as they are handed down from generation to generation. I would like to explore three different examples in which the differences between yerusha and morasha will clarify the significance of each.

The first point of distinction is in the realm of effort. The Jerusalem Talmud [Bava Batra 8:2] speaks of yerusha as something that comes easily. When a person dies, leaving a yerusha, the heir need not do anything other than receive the gift. Morasha, however, requires much more.

The added letter mem in morasha, suggests the Jerusalem Talmud, is a grammatical sign of intensity, the pi'el form in Hebrew grammar. In order for an individual to come into possession of a morasha, he must work for it.

While an inheritance is what you receive from the previous generation (without your particular input), a heritage requires your active involvement and participation. A yerusha is a check your father left you; a morasha is a business that your parents may have started, into which you must put much sweat, blood and tears.

This certainly explains why morasha is used only with regard to Torah and the Land of Israel. Our sages [Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 5a] remark that there are three gifts that God gave the Jewish people that can be acquired only through commitment and suffering: "Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come." And we understand very well that neither Torah nor the Land of Israel can be easily acquired.

Pirkei Avot 2:10 specifically teaches, "Prepare yourself to study Torah, for it is not an inheritance for you." All achievement in Torah depends on an individual's own efforts. A student of Torah must be willing to suffer privation.

Similarly, the Land of Israel cannot be acquired without sacrifice and suffering. One of the tests in the life of Abraham—and the source of the Jewish claim to Jerusalem—is the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah. The message conveyed by the Torah is that we can only acquire our Holy Land if we are willing to place the lives of our children on the line. Every parent in Israel who sends his/her child to the army understands this message very well. A heritage doesn't come easily, and our national heritage is Torah and Israel.

The second distinction between the terms is not how the gift is acquired, but rather how it may be dispersed. Even the largest amount of money inherited (yerusha) can be squandered or legitimately lost. In contrast, a morasha must be given intact to the next generation. Morasha literally means "to hand over to someone else." Silver is an inheritance, and can be used in whatever way the heir desires; silver Shabbat candlesticks are a heritage, meant to be passed down from parent to child and used from generation to generation.

Finally, in the case of an inheritance, one must have the object of yerusha in one's possession. This need not be the case with regard to a morasha. Jewish

parents bequeathed the ideals of Torah and the Land of Israel to their children for countless generations, even while living in exile far from the Promised Land, and even when poverty and oppression made it near impossible for them to become Torah scholars. Values can be passed down regardless of one's physical or material station in life.

For this reason, an inheritance, regardless of its size, pales in comparison to a heritage. We all want to be able to bequeath a yerusha to our children and grandchildren, and we should do what we can to make that possible. Nevertheless, the most important legacy that we can leave them is a morasha, the eternal heritage of Torah and the Land of Israel.

Shabbat Shalom!

The Mistaken Premise of Israel's Entry Policy

Jonathan Rosenblum - Mishpacha Magazine

<https://mishpacha.com/the-mistaken-premise-of-israels-entry-policy/>

Parashat Shemot 5782

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Future Redemption of Am Yisrael

<https://nachmankahana.com/category/parashat/>

Israel's Multiple Iranian Dilemmas -- Part I

Jonathan Rosenblum - Yated Neeman

<https://www.jewishmediaresources.com/2149/israel-multiple-iranian-dilemmas-part-i>

<http://www.jewishmediaresources.com/2149/israel-multiple-iranian-dilemmas-part-ii>

[Full text taken out for lack of space, though they are great articles CS]

The world's attention is currently focused on the off-again on-again negotiations in Vienna. But whatever comes out of those negotiations, it is now clear that they will not allow Israel to avoid or even delay much the decision whether to attack Iran's nuclear facilities.

As of this writing, the negotiations are off. But Iran has made clear, in any event, that it has no intention of returning to the 2015 JCPOA, and America is no longer pushing it to do so. Iran has long since exceeded the JCPOA's limitation on enrichment above 3.67%, and possesses enough or nearly enough nuclear material enriched to 60% to fashion a nuclear weapon in a short span of time.

Meanwhile, Iran is busy installing even faster centrifuges to get up to the 90% threshold necessary

for a weapon. It has denied the International Atomic Energy Agency access to the site where production of advanced centrifuges, which has no conceivable non-material use, is taking place.

As was the case leading up to the JCPOA, when American negotiators were holding a much stronger hand than at present, the Biden administration negotiators, including many veterans of the Obama era nuclear negotiations leading to the JCPOA, are behaving as the party desperate to conclude any sort of agreement. Though American officials state that Iran will not be permitted to obtain a bomb, no one, least of all the Iranians, believes that the U.S. would ever take military action to prevent Iran from doing so.

The Americans have demonstrated since 2012 that in their minds the worst possible result would be a military confrontation with Iran. And the frenzied manner in which the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan has only reinforced the impression that nothing could induce the U.S. to commit serious resources to another Middle East war.

Even if a deal were to be concluded, Iran will be allowed to retain the uranium already enriched far beyond the levels permitted under the JCPOA, as well as its advanced centrifuges. In addition, it will obtain billions of dollars in sanctions relief just for returning to the table. Indeed prior to the halt in negotiations, the Iranians had limited all discussions to the sole issue of sanctions relief.

So much for candidate Biden's promises to secure a better agreement – one which would encompass Iran's missile program and its support for terrorism. The U.S. has indicated that it will be satisfied if the Iranians just call a halt to their enrichment activities for the time being.

Meanwhile Iran continues to treat the U.S. with thoroughgoing disdain, refusing to allow the U.S. to even participate directly in the Vienna negotiations, as a punishment for President Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA.

IN BOMBING IRAQ'S OSIRAK REACTOR in 1981, then Prime Minister Menachem Begin established what became known as the Begin Doctrine: No avowed enemy of Israel will be allowed to obtain weapons of mass destruction. In 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert acted in accord with that doctrine when he ordered the bombing of a Syrian nuclear reactor.

With respect to the first condition for invocation of the Begin doctrine, there can be no doubt of the Iranian

regime's malevolent enmity to Israel, which its Supreme Leader has repeatedly declared to be a cancer that must excised from the world. Less than two weeks ago, the chief spokesman for Iran's armed forces, declared, "We will not back off the annihilation of Israel even one millimeter. We want to destroy Zionism in the world."

Israel's leaders have repeatedly emphasized that their red line is an enemy state, i.e., Iran, becoming a nuclear threshold state capable of producing a nuclear weapon within a short period of time. That capacity would allow Iran to provide a cover for its allies surrounding Israel – Hezbollah, Hamas, and Syria -- with various Palestinian groups in Judea and Samaria and within Israel proper providing operational support. Iran is already at that threshold stage or very close to it. And nothing that takes place at Vienna is going to affect its achievement of that status.

While Israel also has the power to inflict devastation on Iran, that does not necessarily mean that the ayatollahs are therefore permanently deterred. For one thing, deterrence in the form of mutual assured destruction (MAD) is only effective if both parties are operating within the same framework of rationality. But the theology of Iran's Shiite leaders alters that calculation. The great contemporary scholar of Islam and the Middle East Bernard Lewis frequently pointed out, the ayatollahs view history ending with the advent of the Hidden Imam, an event which will in their view be preceded by an apocalyptic confrontation. Therefore a nuclear confrontation with Israel might be for the ayatollahs "not a bug but a feature."

The ayatollahs are deeply unpopular in Iran, and the impact of severe sanctions imposed by the Trump administration only increased their unpopularity. But as Bret Stephens has pointed out, the very unpopularity of the regime makes the ayatollahs even more dangerous. Were they to feel power slipping from their grasp, they might well unleash an Iranian nuclear weapon at Israel in order to trigger the arrival of the Hidden Imam.

SO THE QUESTION BECOMES: Does Israel have the capacity to destroy the Iranian nuclear program and thereby remove the threat, as it did in Iraq in 1981 and Syria in 2007? Michael Makovsky, president and CEO of the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) wrote last week in the New York Post, that Israeli defense officials have told him that they believed that the JCPOA gave them ten years to draw up the plans for military action against Iran.

They did not anticipate President Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 and imposition of biting sanctions on Iran, which, in turn, provided Iran with a plausible excuse to openly ignore the JCPOA's provisions (something that they would have done on a smaller scale in any event.)

Former prime minister and subsequently defense minister under Netanyahu, Ehud Barak wrote recently in *Yediot Ahraonot* that Israel no longer has a viable military option for preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear threshold state, and needs the United States to develop the necessary military plans. He added that the U.S. has no interest in developing such plans nor in executing them if it did so.

Speaking at a Reichman University conference in Herzliya, Prime Minister Bennett implied that his predecessor had been mostly talk and no action with respect to Iran:

When I arrived at the Prime Minister's Office less than half a year ago, I was amazed by the gap between rhetoric and action. . . . To summarize the reality that we inherited in one sentence: Iran is further along in its nuclear program than ever before, and its enrichment machine is more advanced and broader. . .

Iran has also been consistently successful in encircling Israel in rings of militias and rockets from every direction. . . . To the northeast, there are Shi'ite militias in Syria; to the north, Hezbollah; to the south, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. . . . [T]he Iranians have surrounded the State of Israel with missiles, while they sit safely in Tehran. They harass us, drain our energy, and wear us out. . . . They bleed us without paying a price.

That Israel does not have a clear plan of action against Iran's nuclear program and the Revolutionary Guard at present is not difficult to believe. The development of such a plan is no easy matter, as we shall discuss next week. But the idea that Binyamin Netanyahu, who was obsessed with the Iranian threat, did little to work on an Israel response to the Iranian menace strikes me as implausible.

Netanyahu likely hoped that if American sanctions under President Trump failed to bring Iran to heel that President Trump could be persuaded to use the far greater military resources at his disposal to strike directly at the Iranian nuclear program. No doubt he prayed for Donald Trump's re-election.

But it would be hard to believe that a strategist of Netanyahu's level put all of Israel's eggs in the basket

of Trump's re-election. Netanyahu knew that Trump never had an approval rating over fifty percent in his four years in office, and the likelihood of his re-election was not great.

Moreover, it's clear that Netanyahu and head of the head of the Mossad under him, Yossi Cohen, missed no opportunity to make Iran aware of Israel's capabilities and to make its leaders uneasy. Their notable recent accomplishments include the assassination of Iran's top nuclear scientist; collaborating with the United States to rid the world of Iran's second most powerful figure, Qasem Soleimani, head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps; perhaps the greatest espionage achievement in history in removing tons of records of the Iranian nuclear program from Iran to Israel without being detected; repeated mysterious fires and explosions at Iran's nuclear facilities; and constant attacks on Iranian forces and weapons depots in Lebanon and Syria.

None of these square with the charge that Netanyahu was all talk and no action vis-à-vis Iran's nuclear program.

Israel's Iranian Dilemmas – Part II

I first wrote in these pages about the possibility of a military strike on Iran's nuclear weapons program over a decade ago ("Talk of a Military Operation on Iran," August 11, 2010). Despite a fair amount of time spent pondering the intricacies of such an attack by Israel since then, I cannot make any confident predictions about whether Israel will take military action nor about whether those actions would be successful. I am not privy to any information not available to any reader with an interest in the subject.

The difficulties on an Israeli strike are obvious. First, Iran is a long way from Israel, and any Israel action by air would likely involve a complicated refueling operation in midflight. Second, any effort to destroy or substantially set back Iran's nuclear program would involve strikes on multiple targets spread out over Iran. Finally, and perhaps most important, many of the most crucial nuclear sites are deeply embedded into mountains. Israel lacks the type of bunker buster munitions capable of reaching those underground targets. Over the past decade, the Iranian air defenses have improved greatly, with the addition of advanced Russian systems. In the absence of bunker buster munitions from the United States, Israeli pilots would have to fly multiple sorties over the target and hit with pinpoint accuracy, all while under heavy missile fire.

Matters have not remained static, however, over the last decade. Israel's new friendship with a number of Gulf States, fueled in large part by their shared fears of Iran, is one such factor. It is at least conceivable that one or more of those states might grant Israeli planes access to their airfields, much closer to Iran, as their contribution to reducing the threat from Iran. (On the other hand, as long as Iran remains undeterred, they may not wish to make themselves targets of Iranian payback.)

It has also become clear that Israel has multiple means of damaging Iran's nuclear infrastructure, and many of them have been deployed in recent years. Israel's intelligence gathering about the Iranian program is excellent. The removal without detection of Iran's nuclear archives provided clear insights into Iran's strategic thinking about the nuclear option and into the nature of the program.

Israel has clearly turned a number of Iranian nuclear scientists, some of whom have been the perpetrators of sabotage aimed at various stages of the Iranian program. The July 2, 2020 explosion at the large underground site at Natanz for assembling advanced centrifuges and nuclear enrichment is one example. Israel has established important alliances as well with opposition groups in Iran opposed to the Khomeini regime. Those groups have also taken part in a number of sabotage operations. The September 26 explosion and fire at the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps site for the development of the Shahab-3 medium-range missile likely to be employed in any strike on Israel is one likely example. As the focus of Israeli efforts to stymie Iranian nuclear ambitions switches from Iran's enrichment program to its efforts to weaponize its enriched uranium, those internal allies will become ever more important.

The IDF's cyber capacities are among the best in the world, and have already been used on multiple occasions to inflict serious damage on Iranian nuclear installations. The quality of Israel's cyberwarfare teams must give Iranian leaders cause to worry whether Israel could bring the country's entire modern electronic infrastructure to a standstill. Iranian ports, for instance, have been a past target. (Iran's cyberwarfare capacities are also substantial, though not equal to Israel's.)

Though Iran is close to becoming a nuclear threshold state, something Israeli leaders have said they would never allow to happen, there may, in fact, be reasons not to launch a major air attack immediately. While

Iran's program will continue to advance, it is also possible that Israel will develop a game-changer in the relatively near future. A laser-based missile defense system might be one such game-changer.

As effective as Iron Dome was against Hamas rockets in May, shooting down 1400 out of 1500 incoming rockets, Israel cannot count on the same kind of success against Hezbollah. The latter is estimated by the IDF to possess 140,000 missiles and rockets, many of them of long-range and precision guidance. Minimally, Hezbollah possesses ten times as many rockets and missiles as Hamas. It is capable of firing a volume of missiles that might well overwhelm Iron Dome, and even knock out crucial Iron Dome batteries.

Moreover, Iron Dome is very expensive to operate. Every rocket fired costs in the tens of thousands of dollars, whereas Hamas' projectiles may cost little more a few hundred dollars. A laser-based defense could overcome the latter problem, and likely the former as well. And Israel is working on such a defense.

In addition, a laser-based system would, at some point, be capable of striking a nuclear missile fired from Iran. The smaller the chances of an Iranian missile hitting Israel the smaller the chances of their attempting to launch such an attack. Israel is definitely at work on laser-based missile defense, the only question is how long it would take to develop and deploy.

THE LIKELIHOOD of a successful Israeli aerial attack on Iran's key nuclear facilities is, unfortunately, only one of the variables confronting Israeli policymakers. For an Israeli attack, whether successful or not, would not be the end of the matter. Even if successful, Iran would unleash Hezbollah on Israel, as well as other proxies. Indeed it has armed Hezbollah to the teeth primarily as insurance policy against an Israeli attack.

Hezbollah has missiles capable of hitting every part of Israel, and they would be aimed at high value targets – oil refineries, oil drilling in the Mediterranean, desalinization plants. If an oil refinery were hit, it would result in a fireball leaving a path of destruction and death. Moreover, Hezbollah would certainly attempt to overwhelm Iron Dome with the sheer volume of its rockets in order to wreak destruction on Israel's civilian population.

At the end of May fighting with Hamas, Hamas was still firing as many rockets per day as at the beginning.

Iron Dome allowed Israel to tolerate such a situation. But there would be no such room for leeway against a Hezbollah onslaught. Israel would have no choice but to basically level immediately any house in Lebanon known to be sheltering missiles – pretty much the entirety of southern Lebanon, and to use ground troops as well. Israeli military chiefs have been very publicly warning for years that the Israeli response to a full-out Hezbollah attack would be fiercer and more brutal than anything yet seen in Gaza or Lebanon, in an effort to prepare the world for such an attack.

The battle with Hezbollah would be far more complex than the periodic outbreaks of fighting with Hamas in Gaza. The Lebanese border is far longer than that between Israel and Gaza, and it is far from hermetically sealed, as the Gaza border was from the time that Hamas's underground tunnels into Israel were discovered and destroyed. At least twice this year, Hezbollah fighters have penetrated into Israel, with one squad reaching the outskirts of Metullah. Hezbollah would likely deploy its best units, battle-hardened from years of fighting in Syria, in attempts to penetrate Israel.

Another complicating factor is that the IAF would not have the unchallenged air superiority that it has in Gaza. Hezbollah has advanced air defense batteries, the destruction of which would be a high priority for the Israeli air force. But, in addition, its missiles would be aimed at Israeli air bases around the country to destroy planes on the ground and to render runways unusable.

Already in 1999, MK Yuval Steinitz wrote in Commentary an article, "When the Palestinian Army Invades the Heart of Israel," in which he outlined the ability of the Palestinians and Israeli Arabs to disrupt IDF operations in the event of war. And the events of May, in which Israeli Arabs terrorized the Jewish populations in mixed cities, such as Lod and Ramla, have only brought into clearer focus the magnitude of that threat.

Though Israel bombing in Lebanon would be responding to aggression from Hezbollah, and a matter of life and death for Israel, if we learned one thing from the May fighting with Hamas, it is how little much of the world, including important sectors of the American media and the left-wing of Democratic Party, care about who instigated the fighting. And if a Hezbollah launch of missiles at Israel was precipitated by an Israeli attack on Iran, Israel would be portrayed as the aggressor responsible

for unleashing the havoc. Enemies of Israel would redouble efforts to turn it into a pariah state.

An attack on Iran and its nuclear program might well be necessary to prevent Israelis from living under the perpetual cloud of a nuclear Iran bent on their destruction. As Hitler, ym"sh, taught us, when your enemies proclaim their intention to exterminate the Jewish people, believe them.

And no doubt, at shul Kiddush tables around America voices will be raised to proclaim the need for the immediate Israeli bombing of Iran. But those bravely telling Israeli leaders what to do would be well-advised to at least be aware of the difficulty of the task ahead and likely aftermath of even a successful attack. Better that they should raise their voices in prayer to Hashem that we find the wherewithal to destroy our mortal enemies and be spared from their evil plans for us.

Staining Matters

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Stains

On Shabbos, must I try not to stain my clothes?

Question #2: Lipstick

May I freshen my lipstick on Shabbos?

Question #3: Bleaching

Does bleaching out color violate the melacha of dyeing?

Introduction:

One of the 39 melachos listed in the Mishnah (Shabbos 73a) is tzovei'a, dyeing. This is derived from the fact that many of the textiles and hides used in the Mishkan required dyeing; for example, the ram skins used to cover the Mishkan were dyed red (Yerushalmi, Shabbos 7:2).

Painting metal or the walls of a house are other examples that violate the Torah prohibition of tzovei'a (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 9:13; Tiferes Yisroel, Kalkeles Shabbos; Minchas Chinuch).

Non-permanent dyeing

The prohibition of tzovei'a is violated min haTorah only when the dyeing is permanent (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 9:13). Non-permanent dyeing does not violate the law min haTorah, but was prohibited by Chazal.

There are several ways that dyeing or coloring something could be non-permanent. It could be that the colorant you used is not fast – meaning it does not absorb sufficiently into the cloth to remain (Tosefta, Shabbos 12:6). It also could be that the material to

which you applied the dye will soon decompose (Tosefta, Shabbos 12:6). Yet another possibility is that the material you are dyeing is permanent, and so is the dye when used for coloring cloth, but the colorant will not set on this particular material. The Rambam picks such an example, when he rules that one does not violate tzovei'a min haTorah by smearing makeup onto metal, since the metal will not remain colored for very long (Hilchos Shabbos 9:13). Each of these non-permanent examples of dyeing is prohibited on Shabbos, but none involves a Torah prohibition.

The halachic authorities dispute concerning the length of time that a color must last in order to qualify as permanent. According to the Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 9:13), a dye that will remain for a day is long enough to be considered permanent -- thus, someone using a colorant that will disappear a day after use desecrates Shabbos min haTorah (Shaar Hatziyun 303:68; see also Chayei Odom who appears to agree with this ruling). However, other authorities contend that violating the melacha of tzovei'a min haTorah requires a more permanent act of coloring, defined as something that lasts for a "long time" (Tiferes Yisroel in Kalkeles Shabbos).

Staining your clothes

The Shulchan Aruch rules that, because of the melacha of tzovei'a, when eating foods like beets and cherries, you should be careful not to stain your clothes (Orach Chayim 320:20). Notwithstanding that most of us are not interested in having our clothes stained by these foods, it is still prohibited miderabbanan to do so deliberately; for example, to wipe one's hands on clothing after eating cherries. There are halachic authorities who rule that the laws of Shabbos do not require you to be concerned about staining your clothes, because doing so is considered dirtying your clothes, not dyeing them (Darchei Moshe 320:2, quoting Agur). However, the Shulchan Aruch rules strictly, and the consensus of later authorities accepts this opinion.

We can, therefore, now address our opening question: "On Shabbos, must I try not to stain my clothes?"

The answer is that it is forbidden to wipe my hands on my clothes if my hands have something that might be considered a dye, even though, from my perspective, I am dirtying the garment.

Two melachos

We see from the Gemara (see below) that a particular activity can be forbidden both because of tzovei'a and because of another melacha, at the same time

(Shabbos 75a). Although in our day, there is no practical halachic difference whether an activity violates one melacha or two, when the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt, speedily and in our days, there will be different halachic practices that result.

Lipstick on Shabbos

According to some authorities, applying lipstick is prohibited, both because of tzovei'a and because of memarei'ach, the melacha involved when one smoothes or files down a surface (Nimla Tal, Tzovei'a, note 31).

At this point, we can address the second of our opening questions: "May I freshen my lipstick on Shabbos?"

The answer is that applying lipstick may potentially involve two different melachos of Shabbos, tzovei'a and memarei'ach, and that both violations may be min haTorah. There are possibilities why the violation of tzovei'a, in this instance, may be only rabbinic. One reason is because the lipstick may not remain on the lips for a full day, and the second reason, because the lips are already colored. However, notwithstanding these reasons, it is still, definitely prohibited miderabbanan as tzovei'a and is probably prohibited min haTorah as memarei'ach.

Is squeezing dyeing?

One rishon, the Ramban (Shabbos 111a), contends that squeezing liquid out of a soaked piece of cloth violates the melacha of dyeing, because the squeezing changes the current color of the cloth. (This is how his opinion is understood by the Magen Avraham, end of chapter 302, and Shu"t Avnei Neizer, Orach Chayim #159:20; however, the Lechem Mishneh [Hilchos Shabbos 9:11] understands that the Ramban agrees with the other rishonim that squeezing is prohibited because of melabein, laundering and not because of dyeing.)

Creating a dye

The rishonim dispute whether creating a dye violates dyeing. According to the Rambam, blending together ingredients that, together, create a dye is a toladah of the melacha of tzovei'a, meaning that this is a subcategory of dyeing that is prohibited min haTorah (Hilchos Shabbos 9:14). However, the Ra'avad disagrees, contending that someone who creates a vat dye, which means that he heats raw materials intending to dye cloth by submerging it in the heated liquid, violates the melacha of "cooking" when he creates the dye. According to the Ra'avad, the melacha of dyeing is not violated until the cloth is

placed in the vat to absorb the dye, and creating a dye without use of heat is not a Torah violation at all. This is because tzovei'a is violated min haTorah only when the result is a finished product; since creating a dye is only a preliminary step, it does not constitute a Torah violation of the melacha.

It seems that this identical dispute is a contention between other early rishonim. The Mishnah explains that it is prohibited min haTorah to stir a pot of vat dye on Shabbos. The question is -- which melacha does this act violate? Tosafos (Shabbos 18b s. v. dilma) explains that this stirring violates tzovei'a, whereas Rashi (ad loc.) implies that it violates bishul, cooking. It would appear that the Ra'avad and Rashi have a similar approach, both contending that preparing a vat dye violates cooking, but not dyeing, whereas the Rambam agrees with Tosafos that manufacturing the dye violates tzovei'a.

Intensifying color

If a cloth or another textile already has a shade of color, but it is not dyed as deeply as you want, is it prohibited min haTorah to dye it to a deeper hue? According to most authorities, intensifying the shade of a pigment that already exists violates tzovei'a min haTorah. If the additional dyeing does not make a significant difference in the color, the violation is rabbinic, not min haTorah (Mor Uketziyah, end of 328; cf., however, see Shu"t Avnei Neizer, Orach Chayim #172, who contends that once the fabric has been dyed a certain color, adding to that color does not involve a Torah prohibition. This is a minority opinion.).

Bleaching or dyeing?

At this point, we can ask whether dyeing is defined as changing the color of an item, or adding color to an item. A difference in practical halacha between the two approaches is whether bleaching an item, which changes the color by removing pigment, violates the melacha of tzovei'a.

According to most authorities, tzovei'a means applying pigment or colorant to the surface of an item that thereby changes its color. For example, the Rambam defines a different one of the 39 melachos, melabein, to be bleaching. He seems to understand that laundering is a sub-category of melabein. The question is why bleaching is not considered the same melacha as tzovei'a, dyeing, which is also concerned with changing the color of a fiber. The answer appears to be that, whereas tzovei'a adds color to the fiber, bleach removes color from the fiber. In the Rambam's

opinion, adding color to an item constitutes tzovei'a, whereas bleaching it and removing impurities that detract from the appearance of the cloth constitute melabein.

However, a minority opinion contends that any color change, including bleaching out the color, violates tzovei'a (see Tosafos, Bava Kama 93b, s. v. ha).

Painting white

"If someone whitewashes his wall or paints something white, what melacha has he performed?"

The answer is that he violated the melacha of tzovei'a, dyeing, not of melabein, even though the word melabein could be translated as "he makes something white." This is true, even according to those who contend that bleaching does not qualify as tzovei'a. The reason is that bleaching removes color, whereas in these cases a white color is added to the surface of the wall or other item.

The Rogatchover's position

Rav Yosef Rosen -- early 20th century rav of the Chassidishe community of Dvinsk, Latvia (for much of this period, part of the Russian empire), known colloquially as "the Rogatchover," for his place of birth -- was known for his original approaches to halachic issues. Often, these approaches produced interesting strict or lenient conclusions. In one of his essays, the Rogatchover concludes that mixing a dye into a liquid does not constitute the melacha of tzovei'a. His logic is that tzovei'a requires changing an item's color. When mixing a dye base into a liquid, the liquid's color is not changed. What has happened is that two colors are blending together to appear as one consistent color.

Regarding tzovei'a, the Rogatchover will permit several instances that are prohibited by other authorities. An example is if someone diluted a dye with water to create an art display. According to the Pri Megadim and the Tiferes Yisroel, this act is prohibited on Shabbos min haTorah. However, the Rogatchover will dispute their conclusion, since the color is created by mixing and not by coating an item with color.

Staining your hands

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 320:20) implies that there is no halachic problem with getting your hands or face stained while eating. The Mishnah Berurah (320:58) asks: since we prohibit women from applying makeup on Shabbos because of tzovei'a, applying color to human skin violates tzovei'a. If this is true, just as staining clothes violates tzovei'a,

shouldn't someone be required not to stain his hands and face? The Mishnah Berurah answers that since men do not usually apply makeup to their faces, it is permitted for them to eat foods that might stain their faces.

Conclusion

Shabbos is a day which is called "mei'ein olam haba" – a day that is a small taste of the World to Come; a day when we are given a neshamah yeseirah – a special Shabbosdik neshamah; a day when Hashem's Shechinah resides with us. The sefarim hakedoshim discuss these ideas and how much we need to prepare ourselves, every week, in order to properly relate to Shabbos Kodosh and to receive all of the benefit and bracha that Shabbos brings us.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (Shemos 20:10) notes that people mistakenly think that work is prohibited on Shabbos, in order to provide a day of rest. This is incorrect, he points out, because the Torah does not prohibit doing avodah, which connotes hard work, but melacha, which implies work with purpose and accomplishment. On Shabbos, we refrain from altering the world with our own creative acts and, instead, emphasize Hashem's role (Shemos 20:11). We thereby acknowledge the true Builder and Creator of the world and all that it contains, and focus on our relationship with Him.

Weekly Halacha **Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

Parshas Vaera

Visiting The Graves Of Tzadikim: How And Why?

The ancient custom of visiting and davening at graves of tzaddikim during times of tribulation has many sources in Talmudic literature.(1) Indeed, Shulchan Aruch records in several places that it is appropriate to do so on certain public fast days in general(2) and on Tishah b'Av after midday in particular.(3) Erev Rosh Hashanah, too, is a day when it has become customary to visit graves.(4) But what is the reason for this? How does it help us?(5)

The Talmud(6) gives two explanations: 1) To serve as a reminder of man's mortality so that one will repent while he still can; 2) To ask the dead to pray for mercy on our behalf. A practical difference between these two reasons, says the Talmud, is whether or not it is appropriate to visit graves of non-Jews [when there are no Jewish graves near by], since even a non-Jew's grave reminds man of his mortality. Nowadays,

however, when non-Jews mark their graves with religious symbols, it is no longer appropriate to visit non-Jewish graves even if there are no Jewish graves in the area. (7)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE VISIT: PROPER CONDUCT

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

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

Upon reaching the grave, one should place his left hand on the marker.(19) It is forbidden, though, to lean on it.(20)

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

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

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

* The tzitzis strings should be concealed.(24)

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

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

LEAVING A CEMETERY

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

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

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

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

* After washing, any water that remains in the vessel is poured out. The vessel is turned upside down and placed on the ground, not handed to the next person.(36)

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

* Some wash their face as well.(38)

Footnotes:

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

2 O.C. 579:3.

3 Rama O.C. 559:10.

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

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

6 Ta'anis 16a.

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

8 Shemos 20:3.

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

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

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

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

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

14 581:27.

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

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

17 Mishnah Berurah 224:17.

18 Mishnah Berurah 4:42.

19 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 128:13. See there also for the text that should be recited at that time.

20 Shach Y.D. 363:3.

21 Taz Y.D. 363:1.

22 Mishnah Berurah 581:27.

23 Note that according to the Ari z"l (quoted by Mishnah Berurah 559:41), one should never go within four amos of a grave [except at interment]. In Igeres ha-Gra he writes that one should never enter a cemetery at all, and especially not women. [It is commonly accepted that a woman who is a niddah does not go to a cemetery at all (Mishnah Berurah 88:7). Under extenuating circumstances a rabbi should be consulted; see Beis Baruch on Chayei Adam 3:38.]

24 Mishnah Berurah 23:3. Tefillin, too, must be concealed.

25 Y.D. 368:1; Rama Y.D. 343:2.

26 Y.D. 367:3; 368:1.

27 Birkei Yosef Y.D. 344:17.

28 Gesher ha-Chayim 1:16-4.

29 Be'er Heitev O.C. 224:8.

30 Y.D. 376:4. Some do this only after an interment.

31 O.C. 547:12.

32 Kaf ha-Chayim 4:80.

33 Mishnah Berurah 4:43. It is permitted, however, to enter a shul or another public place before washing; Harav M. Feinstein (Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 58).

34 Mishnah Berurah 4:39.

35 Some of these customs do not have a halachic source; they are based on Kabbalistic writings and customs.

36 Rav Akiva Eiger (Y.D. 376:4). See Zichron Meir, pg. 450.

37 Several poskim write that this does not apply during the cold winter months when the hands will become chapped; see Kaf ha-Chayim 4:78.

38 Mishnah Berurah 4:42.

Drasha

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vaera

Proof in the Putting

This week, the Torah tells us how the Egyptian exile entered its waning moments as the dawn of redemption begins. Moshe and Aharon threatened Pharaoh with strong repercussions if Hashem's will was not fulfilled and the Jews were not redeemed from Egypt. But before they took action, Moshe and Aharon proved they were messengers from Hashem by displaying their ability to control and even change nature. The first miraculous spectacle occurred on a governmental level, in Pharaoh's palace. After those demonstration did not impress the ruler, only then did the nation feel the brunt of Hashem's punishment they were stricken with the plague of blood.

Moshe and Aharon did not enter the palace of the tyrant unaware of his arrogance. They had met him before and were mockingly rebuffed. But this time they were equipped to prove their powers and authority. They were forewarned that their adversary would doubt their authority, and he would ask them to produce celestial credentials with a sign that they were truly Divinely ordained.

Hashem tells them, "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Provide a wonder for yourselves,' you shall say to Aharon, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh — it will become a snake!' " (Exodus 7:9).

The Noam Elimelech, Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk, questions the wording. What would Pharaoh mean with the words "Provide a wonder for yourselves"? He asks. The wondrous act was not for Moshe and Aharon, rather it was for Pharaoh! Shouldn't the posuk read "provide a wonder for me"? With these words did Pharaoh, the master showman whose world renowned chicanery held Moshe at bay for a year, teach us something about the nature of miraculous occurrences that prove a point to a skeptic?

P.T. Barnum was a master showman who astounded hordes of foolish curiosity seekers with displays of the bizarre and the seemingly impossible.

One of his amazing displays had a lamb grazing peacefully in a display cage, while two fierce lions strolled nonchalantly only a few feet away. He obviously felt that the exhibit would attract hundreds who would marvel at his pretended prescient fulfillment, albeit partial, of the prophet Yishayahu's (11:6) description of the Messianic era. "And the wolf shall lie with the lamb, and the leopard will lay down with the kid, and the lion shall walk with the lamb dwell peacefully."

One of Barnum's friends, who was amazed at the sight of this post Messianic mimicry, asked in wonder, "how long do you think you will be able to maintain this exhibit?"

Barnum shrugged his shoulders, smirked, and replied sardonically, "as long as my diminishing supply of lambs holds out!"

Reb Elimelech of Lizensk explains the words with which Hashem warned Moshe and Aharon, "It will be when Pharaoh will ask, 'give for yourselves a sign.'"

Pharaoh the charlatan would know the difference between a true sign and a spectacular hoax. The difference is how the performer perceives it. Pharaoh's conniving magicians performed sorcery that

they themselves knew to be filled with lies. As performers, they were not impressed.

Pharaoh would ask for a sign, not only that would impress him, but would impress Moshe and Aharon as well.

The greatest accomplishment in life, and the greatest way to influence others in a meaningful and lasting way, is to be as impressed and excited about one's own actions as are others.

A parent or teacher who discusses Torah with true enthusiasm, impressed by the Heavenly genius contained within, will surely impact a child in a more meaningful way than a parent who exudes an "I heard this one already" attitude toward his audience. Pharaoh understood that, and Hashem told his Divine messengers that Pharaoh, who knew very well how to lie, would ask for the real sign — one that generated the same excitement for the messengers as well as the recipients. It was not only a sign for himself, but for Moshe and Aharon as well.

The Proof is not always in the way something is received. Sometimes the proof is in the putting! Good Shabbos ©2000 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Weekly Biblical Thoughts

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Commentary based on the Chidushei HaRim
Comfortable Exile (Vaera)

The comfort zone takes our greatest aspirations and turns them into excuses for not bothering to aspire. -Peter McWilliams

The Jewish people were enslaved by the Egyptians for centuries. The Chidushei HaRim on Exodus 6:6 wonders not so much as to how the Jewish people endured, but how did they leave? He picks out an interesting nuance from the text.

God says to the Jewish nation in Egypt, "And I will take you out from under the labors of Egypt." The key word in Hebrew is "sivlot" which is commonly translated in this context as "labors." The Chidushei HaRim reads "sivlot" as bearing, as in they were bearing the pain of Egypt. The verse would then read "And I will take you out from bearing the pain of Egypt."

The Chidushei HaRim explains that the Jewish people had adjusted to their exile and their enslavement. They had learned to bear it. In a certain sense they had even become comfortable with their slavery. We see multiple indications of that later during the desert journey, when at the first whiff of trouble or challenge or hardship, the people complain and want to go back to Egypt.

God is telling them, "I'm going to make your enslavement unbearable." And indeed, He does, as Moses' involvement initially ratchets up Pharaoh's crackdown on the Jewish

people. Overnight, the Egyptians stop providing the Jews with straw for the brick production, whilst still demanding that the Jews keep the daily quotas intact. The Jewish people had thought that their enslavement was bearable and didn't want to rock the boat of their relations with the Egyptians, as we see in the Jewish taskmasters' complaint about Moses' intervention. God sets plans in motion to make the enslavement unbearable, to make the Jewish people ready to leave their previously comfortable enslavement.

The Chidushei HaRim stresses that when Jews decide that they can endure exile, if Jews decide that they are not ready to leave the comfort of their golden exile, redemption will never come.

May we always be prepared to transition from comfort to redemption.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the Hebrew word of the year — tirlul, translated as "lunacy."

Rav Kook Torah

Va'eira: God's Name

Why do we find different names for God in the Torah?

Different names correspond to the different ways in which God reveals Himself in the world. The Tetragrammaton, the special name composed of the four letters Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey, corresponds to a level of Divine revelation that was concealed before Moses' time.

... "I revealed Myself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as E-I Shaddai [God Almighty].

But I was not known to them through My name [Yud-Keh-Vav-Keh]. (Exod. 6:3)

What is the significance of these two names of God? Why did only Moses' generation merit knowledge of the Tetragrammaton?

In the same prophetic communication to Moses, God contrasted the Patriarchs' ties to the Land of Israel with that of their descendants. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were only travelers and foreigners in the Land:

"I made My covenant with them, giving them the Land of Canaan, the land of their wanderings, where they lived as foreigners." (Exod. 6:4)

Their descendants, on the other hand, were destined to settle permanently in the Land: "I will give it to you as an eternal inheritance" (Exod. 6:8).

Is there some connection between the different names for God and residence in Eretz Yisrael?

A Higher Level of Providence

Dwelling in the Land of Israel means living with a greater degree of Divine providence. It is "a land constantly under the scrutiny of the Eternal, your God; the eyes of the Eternal your God are on it at all times" (Deut. 11:12).

God gave Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people as an eternal inheritance, so that they will always benefit from this unparalleled level of Divine providence. God's providence will never leave the people of Israel; their history transcends the laws of nature.

This level of Divine guidance was only possible after they became a nation. Individuals, even the most righteous, may waver and stumble. Therefore, the Patriarchs could only be sojourners in Eretz Yisrael. They could only merit the Land's preternatural providence in a temporary, sporadic fashion.

The name Shaddai comes from the word shiddud, meaning "to intervene." This name for God implies occasional Divine intervention in the natural realm. This was the degree of providence that the Avot experienced. They lived in a world of natural forces - with occasional miracles. They were but travelers in the Land of Israel. God was thus revealed to them as El Shaddai.

With the formation of Israel as a nation, however, the special providence of the Land of Israel became the Jewish people's permanent inheritance. The generation of Moses was granted a higher revelation of God's providence, as reflected in the name Y-H-V-H. This Divine name comes from the word lehavot, "to cause to exist."

Their world was no longer a universe ruled by the forces of nature. They merited a constant, direct connection to the One Who continually creates and sustains all existence.

Torah Weekly Parashat Vaera

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt. However, the Jewish People do not listen. Hashem commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. Hashem punishes the Egyptians, sending plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these miracles on a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh to be obstinate. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only Hashem could be performing these miracles.

Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

What's Your Name?

But with My Name, Hashem, I did not make Myself known to them." (6:3)

Moshe had ten names: Moshe, Yered, Chaver, Yekutiel, Avigdor, Avi Socho, Avi Zanuach, Tuvia, Shemaya

andHalevi. Of all these names, the only one that Hashem used was Moshe, the name he was given by Pharaoh's daughter, Batya.

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

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

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

Another question — but with the same answer:

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

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

It was not an easy thing for Yocheved to put her son into a wicker basket and abandon him to if I will ever see my son's chupa (marriage canopy)? Certainly there were safer places for a baby than a makeshift basket adrift in a river. However, Yocheved chose a hiding place that may not have been the safest because it meant that she could save the lives of other Jewish children.

From two sides of the same event the quality of self-sacrifice was instilled into Moshe - by his real mother when she put him into the river and by his adopted mother when she drew him out from the river, for if any quality epitomizes the essence of leadership, it is the ability to forget oneself and give up everything for the good of the people.

• Sources: Based on the Midrash of Shemot Rabbah 1:24, 1:29; Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz

Parshas Va'eira

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

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Close to You

And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be your God... (6:7)

This week's parsha opens with Hashem discussing with Moshe His plans for rescuing Bnei Yisroel from Egypt. Herein we find the well-known "arba leshonos shel geula – four iterations of salvation," i.e. four different words describing the process of Hashem taking Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt. The fourth word that the Torah uses is "velokachti" – generally translated as "I will take."

Yet, both Targum Onkelos and Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel translate the word "velokachti" as "ve'escorev" from the language of "kiruv" as in "I will draw near." This is odd; in general there are two Aramaic translations for taking: "ud'var," which is used when referring to taking people (see Bereishis 12:5 when Avraham took his wife Sarah), and "u'nesiv," which is used when referring to taking inanimate objects (see Bereishis 28:18 when Yaakov takes the rock and places it under his head). So why did both Targumim deviate from the usual translation of the word "to take" in this particular instance?

We find another place where the Torah uses the word "to take" and both Targumim translate it as "ve'escorev": When Hashem asks Moshe "to take" ("kach") Aharon and his children (Vayikra 8:2). Here too both Targumim translate the word "to take" as "karev – to draw near." In fact, when the Torah itself describes what Moshe did it says, "vayakrev Moshe es Aharon ve'es bonov – and Moshe drew near Aharon and his sons." Why does the Torah describe this "taking" in such a manner?

Moshe is asking Aharon and his children to take a position of responsibility within the Jewish people. This kind of responsibility has to be accepted as a matter of free will. The way to get someone to accept it is to draw them close and allow them to make their own decision. Ask any professional involved in "kiruv" and they'll tell you that the only effective manner of drawing someone near to Judaism is to be "mekarev – to bring them close," meaning to allow them to make their own decision to continue forward.

Chazal teach us that this fourth language of salvation ("velokachti") refers to Bnei Yisroel receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai (See Sforno and Ibn Ezra ad loc). Thus, standing at Mount Sinai Hashem draws us near, but we must choose to move forward and accept the Torah. It is quite significant that the very act of accepting the Torah has to be done as an act of free will.

Maharal, in the introduction to his work Tiferes Yisroel, explains that this is the meaning of the verse "and this is the Torah that Moshe placed in front of Bnei Yisroel" (Devarim 4:24). We weren't forced to take the Torah, it was placed in front of us and we chose to come and take it.

In other words, when you're trying to get someone to develop in a certain area you cannot force them to change, they need to choose to want to change and take positive steps in that direction.

Accepting the Torah as a way of life wasn't about getting Bnei Yisroel to act a certain way; it was about getting them to develop in a certain direction. This kind of "buy-in to the program" only happens if one completely accepts it of his or her own free will.

Perhaps this provides the most enduring message for both parents and educators. All too often we spend the majority of our efforts focusing on teaching our children and students how to act. This, of course, is the wrong approach to chinuch. We must focus on exposing our children and talmidim to the beauty and brilliance of the Jewish way of life. This in turn will cause them to be inspired and choose to lead a meaningful life of Torah and mitzvos. Only by guiding our children to choose properly for themselves can we ensure an enduring impact on the next generation.

In the Presence of the King

And Moshe said to him, as soon as I am gone from the city, I will spread out my hands to Hashem... (9:29)

Towards the end of this week's parsha the Torah recounts the events surrounding the seventh plague – the plague of hail. After being bombarded with the miraculous form of hail (the Torah tells us that the hail was a deadly combination of fire and ice, see 9:24 and Rashi ad loc), Pharaoh summons Moshe and begs him to daven to Hashem to remove the plague. Moshe informs him that he will leave the city and beseech Hashem to remove the plague.

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Moshe had to leave the city because it was full of idols. Presumably, this means that Moshe wasn't permitted to daven in a city so rife with idols and idol worship. Ramban wonders why Moshe chose this time to go outside the city when previously he didn't feel compelled to leave to communicate with Hashem. Ramban answers that on prior occasions Moshe davened in his house, but this time he wanted to spread his hands towards the heavens and doing that in the city would be inappropriate.

There are several issues with this understanding of why Moshe chose this particular time to leave the city. Firstly, the Torah doesn't say anything about spreading his hands towards the heavens. Secondly, the Gemara frowns strongly on someone who prays in an open area (Brachos 34b, see also Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 90:5). If Moshe could have davened quietly in the privacy of his home, why did he venture out of the city?

There are different types of davening to Hashem. There are many prayers that are, for lack of a better term, like placing a phone call to Hashem. In other words, we reach out to Hashem in many different circumstances and for a variety of reasons. Many teffilos beseech Hashem for different needs – such as asking Hashem to heal a relative – and one

can make these kinds of tefillos even while laying down in bed or while riding a bike. The same goes for all of the general things we wish to communicate with Hashem.

However, there is another kind of prayer, that of standing in Hashem's presence. This is typified by the Shemoneh Esrei. There are very specific rules about how a person must conduct himself in the presence of the King. Shemoneh Esrei isn't like a phone call to Hashem, rather it's like standing directly in front of Him.

Moshe told Pharaoh that he needed to spread his palms toward Hashem. Holding up your hands with your palms open facing someone is an indication of surrender. One can only surrender to another in their presence, thus this prayer required the presence of Hashem. This is the first time that Moshe wanted to daven in this manner. Moshe was actually bringing the presence of Hashem down, and it would have been inappropriate to have the presence of Hashem in a city filled with idols. Therefore, Moshe had to leave the city.

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Remember the Shabbos: Take it Personally

Our Rabbis (Talmud Yuma 29a) teach us that the night is darkest right before dawn. Similarly, right before the actualization of the four l'shonos ha'geula, the Egyptian servitude was at its most oppressive point. The Torah teaches that "v'lo shomu el Moshe", they could not listen to Moshe and his optimistic promise of deliverance, m'kotzer ruach, and avodah kasha - due to their shortness of breath and hard work.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky zt"l (in his Emes L'Yaakov) has an additional explanation. The Medresh Shemos Rabba (5:22) teaches that Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim had megillos - texts that they studied every Shabbos that helped them maintain their emunah/bitachon in their being redeemed, but we are not told what the contents of these megillos was. Rav Kaminetsky opines that they contained those pirkrei Tehillim that were composed by Moshe, as we are taught in Bava Basra (14b) that Moshe composed Tefilah L'Moshe (Tehilim 90) and the next eleven perakim, including Mizmor Shir L'Yom Ha'Shabbos. It is most intriguing to note that perek 92, a song for the Shabbos day, has no reference to Shabbos nor to the mitzvos or character of the day. However, it does contain the important answer to the question of tzadik v'ra lo - namely, why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? We are assured that while evildoers enjoy temporary success, it is only that they may be eventually destroyed forever. The psalm ends with the assurance that the righteous will flourish as a palm tree, and that Hashem is my rock, in Whom there is no wrong. It is this psalm and others that maintained Bnei Yisroel's faith.

Initially, "Yismach Moshe b'matnat chelko" - Moshe convinced Pharaoh to give the Hebrew slaves a day of rest and Moshe chose Shabbos, which gave them not only

physical rest but also a weekly spiritual injection of faith. However, as taught at the end of Parshas Shemos (5:9), when Moshe asked for the liberation of the slaves, Pharaoh intensified their servitude, which included their loss of Shabbos and thus, explains Rav Yaakov, they were losing faith and could not listen to Moshe.

Shabbos, since time immemorial, has been the bastion of our faith. Every Friday night we fulfill the biblical mitzva of kiddush, and in it there are two remembrances: a remembrance of the work of creation, and of the exodus from Egypt. The Ramban (Devarim 5:15) teaches that these are not two independent themes, but rather the Exodus proves Creation. The fact that Hashem demonstrated complete and total control over nature, providing water for the Hebrews and blood for the Egyptians, sending wild animals that could distinguish between Egyptian and Jew, etc., all showed that "Ani Hashem b'kerev ha'aretz" (Shemos 8:18), that He is not only the Creator-Boreh, but the Ruler-Manhig over all creatures.

Regarding Yeztiyas Mitzrayim, the Seforno (Shemos 12:26-27) teaches a most exciting concept. He understands the question of the ben ha'rasha of "ma ha'avoda ha'zos lachem?" to be asking why is the korban Pesach a korban yachid, an individual's korban, as opposed to a communal one? His answer is that each individual has to bring their own sacrifice since the miracle of the Exodus happened to each individual, not only to the nation as a whole. It is one thing to say, for example, that the Egyptians had blood as a result of the first plague and the Jewish people had water. That would be understood as a miracle for the nation. However, we are taught that if an Egyptian and a Jew were drinking from one glass, at the very moment that the former drank blood, the Jew drank water - thus demonstrating a personal miracle for that individual. Moreover, Chazal teach (on the verse Shemos (14:30) that not only did the Jewish nation see the Egyptians dead on the seashore, but that Hashem washed onto the shore in front of each Jew the very cruel taskmaster who had tortured him. Again, a personalized miracle for each individual.

Just as Yetziyas Mitzrayim has these two components of personal and communal, so too does Shabbos. On the verse (Shemos 31:16) "V'shomru Bnei Yisrael es ha'Shabbos la'asos", the Or HaChaim teaches that the first half of the verse refers to the obligations of each individual to honor and guard the Shabbos, while the second part, "la'asos", imposes the obligation to see that the community as a whole keeps the Shabbos.

Regarding the individual obligation to observe Shabbos, I'd like to suggest that as Shabbos uplifted and strengthened the emuna of the Jews even before the Exodus, Shabbos forever adds to our religious growth and connection to Hashem. This is done by zachor, the positive actions of preparing for and observing the holiness of the day, by dressing properly and eating and studying of Torah, and

shamor, i.e. by yielding to His restrictions we consciously imbibe His being the Master of the universe.

In addition, as the Exodus clearly demonstrated His hashgacha pratis, His involvement in the life of each individual, so too on Shabbos we are to pause and reflect on this phenomenon. While we acknowledge and extend thanksgiving to Hashem thrice daily in the bracha of modim in Shemoneh Esrei for the personalized miracles that He performs for us, too often it is said in a hurried and hectic environment. The peacefulness of Shabbos provides the ambiance for a more deliberate focus on the personal relationship that we each are blessed to have with Hashem.

The singing of Shalom Alechem of Friday night is universal. After that, appropriately we sing Eshes Chayil in honor of the Shabbos Queen and the queen of the household who creates the holy atmosphere that envelops the home on Shabbos. I was fortunate that every Shabbos in between these two my father z"l recited the prayer entitled "Ribon kol ha'olamim", a beautiful tefillah admiring the personal relationship we are privileged to have with Hashem. Including therein is, "I thank you, Lord my G-d, and G-d of my ancestors, for all the loving kindness that You have done and will do for me, and all the members of my household and all my fellow creatures". I strongly recommend that as part of the Shabbos meal, aside from the zemiros and divrei Torah, each of the participants

in the meal should share an experience or occurrence whereby they saw His Hashgacha Pratis in their day to day living in their past week. This will help them focus and realize His personal involvement in their life.

The Or HaChaim teaches on the verse "va'yivarech Elokim" (Bereishis 2:3) that Shabbos provides blessing and energy throughout the week. May the focus on His personal relationship with us not only enhance our individual Shabbos, but strengthen us to influence others to keep Shabbos as well. Similarly, the Ramban, in his famous commentary at the end of Parshas Bo, teaches that from the open great miracles we learn to appreciate the small daily miracles as well. The Creation and the Exodus are clearly the two greatest and overt miracles which are the bedrock of Shabbos, and hopefully will assist us in appreciating His personal involvement in our lives.

We are living in most extraordinary times. It is hard to absorb but 800,000 Americans have died from Covid. This is clearly a living implementation of "Yoshev b'seser Elyon" (Tehillim 91), where we are taught "a thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you." "Thank you, Hashem" is not only the way a Jew begins his day with Modeh ani, but is also the very adrenaline that keeps him going strong throughout the day.

לעיין

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה