

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

VAEIRA 5783

Weekly Parsha VAEIRA

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

As the narrative of the redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage unfolds, I am continually struck by the apparently gradual process that is described for us in the Torah. What does all of the detail associated with each of the plagues visited upon Egypt come to teach us? And would not one great plague alone have sufficed? After all, in the past century we witnessed how two bombs, alone, forced the powerful and fanatical Japanese Empire to surrender unconditionally. So, what is the message of the ten plagues and the elapse of time from the onset of the mission of Moshe to its final successful conclusion?

These issues are raised and discussed by all of the great rabbinic commentators over the ages. As is usual in Jewish biblical commentary, there is no one definitive answer, for the Torah itself is said to have seventy different "faces." Yet, there is much ground for a general understanding of the matter in their writings and opinions.

The main thrust of rabbinic opinion is that all of this was necessary to give the Egyptians an opportunity to repent and save themselves and, just as importantly, to give the Jews an opportunity to begin to think of themselves as a free and independent people and no longer as slaves and pagans. It takes time and a series of many events to turn around the mentality and preconceived ideas of human beings.

The Egyptians had to somehow become accustomed to the fact that they had no right to rule over others and be cruel to their fellow human beings. The Jews had to become accustomed to the responsibilities of freedom and an independent life and to realize that they were destined to be a special people dedicated to the service of God and humankind.

These things cannot happen suddenly and if they do, then they are not of a long-lasting nature. Judaism is not built upon sudden epiphanies but rather upon the long, grinding routine. Only after ten plagues have visited Egypt, the Egyptians and the Jews as well begin to understand what God wants from them.

We see from many incidents recorded for us throughout the Bible that one-shot miracles, no matter how impressive and meaningful they are at the moment they occur, do not really change the mindset of people in the long run. The miracle performed through Elijah, when all of Israel proclaimed that Hashem is the God of the universe, was not of a long-lasting nature and/or influence.

The people soon sank back into the swamp of idolatry and immorality. Regularity, consistency and repeated instruction and education are necessary to make miracles truly influential and long-lasting. If the Jews had been delivered from Egyptian bondage by one great miracle,

they would have had a much harder time grasping the unique role that God intended them to play in world history.

They would have been much more reticent to accept that role at Sinai had it not been for the fact that they witnessed so many miracles. Those miracles were repeated regularly and explained to them by Moshe in the light of the godly Torah, which they now willingly accepted.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vaera

The Power of Holiness Needs To Be Balanced by the Power of Impurity

The pasuk says, "And the magicians of Egypt did the same with their magic..." (Shemos 7:22). The Ribono shel Olam told Moshe Rabbeinu to go before Pharaoh and to impress upon him the fact that he was the Agent of Hashem. "Take you staff and throw it onto the ground and it will turn into a serpent." (Shemos 4:3) When Pharaoh challenged his sorcerers to match that "trick," they were able to match it, just like that. The Zohar adds that not only were the Egyptian sorcerers able to do this "trick," but Pharaoh even called their wives, and the sorcerers' wives were also able to do this same "trick." He then called in their children and the children of the magicians, who performed the same "trick" as well. The point of the Zohar is that this act of turning a staff into a serpent was not a particularly impressive sign that Moshe was an Agent of Hashem. It was something even a kindergarten kid could do.

We see this concept by at least some of the other plagues as well—that the Chartumei Mitzrayim were able to replicate them. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky in his Emes L'Yaakov provides a very important explanation about what happened to this power of magic in the world. In other words, we see that this "kishuf" was a reality in the ancient world, not just "magic" based on sleight of the hand. This was the real thing! Rav Yaakov addresses the issue: How come this stopped? Likewise, in many places the Talmud discusses the power of Shaydim. Closer to our times, there apparently was a reality called a Dybbuk. A Dybbuk was a spirit that entered a body and took it over, controlling the person until he was treated by someone who knew how to exorcise the Dybbuk. What happened to all these things? Why do we not seem to experience (real) magic, Shaydim, or Dybbuks today?

Rav Yaakov says (and this is well known, but the application is very important) that there is a concept in hashkafa that is based on the pasuk in Koheles "...zeh l'umas zeh asa Elokim..." (7:14) (G-d has made the one as well as the other). To put it in layman's terms, HaKadosh Baruch Hu creates a level playing field. If the true prophets

(e.g., Moshe Rabbeinu) were given the power to do these kinds of tricks—to turn a piece of wood into a snake or other types of miracles like that—then it would be nearly impossible to deny the truth of Hashem’s message. Everyone would need to be an observant Jew who keeps the Torah. That would require a mass conversion of the entire planet, because no person or nation could deny the reality of the words of the true prophet. This in effect would take away the phenomenon of free choice.

A person receives reward for choosing the right path in this world when he has the ability to choose the wrong path. If the deck is stacked or the playing field is not level, and only the prophets of Hashem can perform supernatural miracles, theological decisions would become meaningless. There would not be freedom of choice, and there could be no reward and punishment.

Therefore, as long as this tremendous koach hakedusha (power of holiness) existed and a tzadik or navi was gifted with the ability to change nature, there had to be, by virtue of the principle of zeh-l’umas-zeh-asa-Elokim, corresponding powers in the nations of the world as well.

Rav Kamenetsky cites in this regard the comment of the Ramban in Parshas Beshalach, that at Krias Yam Suf there was a “Ruach Kadim Aza kol haLaylah” (strong east wind blowing all night). Why was that necessary? The Ramban explains that this enabled Pharaoh to say to himself: “You know why the sea split? It was a natural event, like a tsunami or an earthquake, that caused it to split. Therefore, I can enter the dry land between the parted waters myself.” The Ribono shel Olam had to allow him to deceive himself and claim “This was just nature, the result of a strong wind. It was not the Yad Hashem.”

For this reason, as long as we had the power of kedusha (holiness) on our side in the personage of Neviim and tzadikim, the nations of the world had to have parallel forces through the koach hatumah (forces of impurity). We all know the teaching of Chazal regarding Moshe’s role as the greatest of the prophets. Chazal expound: “There never again arose in Israel a prophet like Moshe...” (Devorim 34:10) – In Israel there never arose such a prophet, but amongst the nations of the world there was such a prophet—Bilaam son of Beor. Bilaam was a degenerate, but he was a prophet. Why? It would not be fair. The nations could claim that if they had a prophet like Moshe, they would have been different. So Hashem gave them such a prophet, but he led them further astray!

This is the point emphasized by the Emes L’Yaakov: As long as there was any power of kedusha in the world, there had to exist a corresponding power of Tumah in order to make it even. Once the era of prophecy ceased in Yisroel, such powers of tumah stopped in the world at large as well. With this principle, the Emes L’Yaakov attempts to answer a very difficult Rambam. The Rambam writes in his Mishna Commentary on Tractate Avodah Zarah that Shaydim have no power whatsoever and the entire belief in

them is false. The Vilna Gaon in Shulchan Aruch uses strong language against this opinion of the Rambam, which on the face of it is contradicted by many Talmudic and Medrashic sources.

Rav Yaakov explains that in the era of the Tanaim and Amoraim mentioned in the Gemara, when there were in the Jewish world many personalities who were miracle workers, there also existed Shaydim which were powers of impurity that existed in the world to counter-act the power of kedusha given to certain righteous miracle workers who existed in Klal Yisrael. When the Rambam said there are no such things as Shaydim and the like, he was referring to his day and age, when conceivably they no longer existed, just as there no longer existed miracle workers amongst Klal Yisrael.

At the end of Rav Yaakov’s discussion on this topic, he shares something very interesting. There is a famous story whereby the Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933) exorcised a Dybbuk from a person. The Chofetz Chaim was not associated with bubbe meises (old wives’ tales) and apocryphal stories. Rav Yaakov writes that at the time of this incident, Rav Elchanon Wasserman commented that this will most likely be the last Dybbuk to ever enter a human body. He elaborated that when there is someone on the level of the Chofetz Chaim, who possesses within himself at least a remnant of the kedushah that once existed in Klal Yisrael, then there can be a Dybbuk. But once the likes of the Chofetz Chaim left the world, there will probably never again be a story with a Dybbuk—unless there would be also a Jewish community with such pure holiness and emunah that their power of kedusha necessitated the presence of a corresponding power of tumah in their midst.

As a rule, however, our level of sanctity is so low and so weak that there is no need for a corresponding force that grants this level of supernatural abilities to the power of tumah.

The Urgency of Removing the Frogs

The sefer Darash Mordechai asks, why did Moshe need to cry out to Hashem to remove the frogs (Shemos 8:8)? Pharaoh deserved every plague he received. He deserved the full duration of Hashem’s intended punishment. It seems that here Moshe intervened. He left the palace and cried out to Hashem to remove the frogs that He had placed upon Pharaoh. Why not let Pharaoh suffer a little longer? Why did Moshe seemingly preemptively stop this plague?

The Darash Mordechai offers several answers to this question.

First, he cites an answer in the name of the Imrei Emes (Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter, the fourth Gerer Rebbe). We see that Hashem was very particular about kavod malchus (preserving the honor of the monarchy). Despite the fact that Pharaoh was wicked, he was a king. There is a concept that a king must be given honor. In order to display

kavod malchus, Moshe Rabbeinu acquiesced to Pharaoh's request that the frogs be removed.

The Darash Mordechai then quotes an answer from the Rebbe, Rav Bunim of P'Shische. He says the purpose of the plagues was to establish Emunah (Belief in G-d) in the world. The Ramban speaks about this. After the Exodus, no one could doubt that there was a Ribono shel Olam who controls the world. Part of Emunah is that there is a thing called koach hatefillah. A person needs to believe in the power of prayer. Moshe wanted to demonstrate that prayer has the power even – as it were – to override a decree of the Almighty. Therefore, that is why Moshe prayed for the maka to cease, and that is why the plague of frogs was truncated, so to speak.

Finally, the Darash Mordechai cites an answer from the Chiddushei HaRim (Rav Yitzchak Meir Alter, the first Gerer Rebbe). Moshe Rabbeinu did not merely daven over here. The Torah has many words to express prayer. Here the Torah uses the words “VaYitz'ak Moshe el Hashem” (Moshe cried out to Hashem), which indicates one of the highest and most intense forms of Tefilla. In fact, the pasuk in Parshas Shemos says “Behold the tzeaka (crying out) of Bnei Yisrael has reached Me...” (Shemos 3:9). The Zohar says that tzeaka goes straight to the Ribono shel Olam, bypassing any intermediaries. Sometimes someone needs a malach to boost his prayers and to take them in to the Ribono shel Olam, so to speak. Tzeaka literally is a primal scream. That scream is so powerful that it goes straight to the Ribono shel Olam.

This really intensifies the question. It does not say “Vayispalet Moshe el Hashem” (which would indicate a more conventional word for prayer) but “Va'Yitzak”. Moshe was so concerned that the frogs should cease that he resorted to the most powerful form of Tefilla that exists – namely, Tze'aka! Why? In Tefilas Geshem (recited on Shemini Atzeres to pray for rain of blessing for the coming winter season) we invoke the merit of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and then Moshe. The paragraph regarding Moshe mentions how he provided water for the people. We conclude with the words “Upon the Rock he struck and waters came forth.” Many commentaries ask, this would seem like an inappropriate time to bring up “Al ha'Selah hach, va'yetzoo mayim”? The hitting of the Rock is what caused Moshe Rabbeinu to not be able to go into Eretz Yisrael. So why bring that up? We talk about the merits of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. It would seem that we should mention Moshe's merits as well, and steer clear of his actions that may have been problematic.

The Chiddushei HaRim makes a magnificent observation. Moshe Rabbeinu knew what he was doing when he hit the rock. It was not a mistake. Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to save Klal Yisrael from Divine criticism. He reasoned: Here I talk to them repeatedly and still they do not do the right thing. If I go to a stone and say to the stone “Give forth your water” and just like that, it gives forth its water, how

would that reflect on the Jewish people? Moshe could talk until he was blue in the face to the Jewish people, who benefited from G-d's kindness, and they might not listen. And yet the stone obeys instantly! What a poor reflection that would be on Klal Yisrael!

Therefore, Moshe decided he would not speak to the rock. He would instead hit the rock, thereby lessening the implicit criticism of Klal Yisrael. It is for such self-sacrifice and concern for the welfare of the Jewish people that Moshe is praised in Tefilas Geshem.

The Chiddushei HaRim applies the same line of reasoning with regard to the frogs:

Moshe Rabbeinu had commanded the frogs to ascend from the Nile. The frogs obeyed the command of Hashem. They ascended from their comfortable home in the Nile. They went into the ovens of the Egyptians and died there. They were killed Al Kiddush Hashem. The frogs reflected poorly on the Jewish people. Hashem gave them an order and they followed it to martyrdom, while the Jews had sunk spiritually to the 49th level of spiritual impurity. “These are idolaters and these are also idolaters.”

As long as the frogs were present and jumping into the Egyptian ovens, every minute was another indictment of Klal Yisrael. Therefore, when Moshe had the opportunity to get rid of the frogs, he did so with intensity: Va'Yitzak! “I want to stop them in their tracks and immediately halt this embarrassing comparison between their actions and that of the Jewish people.” He therefore used the highest form of Tefilla.

The HaKaras HaTov of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach For the first three plagues – Blood, Frogs, and Lice – it was Aharon who hit the water and hit the sand with the Staff of Hashem, thereby bringing on these plagues. Chazal say that Moshe Rabbeinu owed Hakaras HaTov (gratitude) to the water which saved him as an infant, when the basket his mother hid him in floated in the Nile River. Likewise, it was the sand that saved Moshe when he buried therein the Egyptian whom he killed. Moshe “owed” so to speak to the water and the sand and therefore did not want to be the initiator of a plague which came from these entities.

We are all aware that water and sand are inanimate objects who don't appreciate a ‘Thank-you’ and don't even know what a ‘Thank-you’ is. And yet, we see that a person needs to have Hakaras HaTov even to inanimate objects. So clearly, Hakaras HaTov is not for the benefit of the person (or object) receiving the Hakaras HaTov. It is for the benefit of the person who gives the Hakaras HaTov. If a person learns to show gratitude even to something like a rock or sand or water, then he will certainly show Hakaras HaTov to a human being.

I recently heard the following story: Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was once in the hospital. He made a point of thanking every doctor and every nurse for the care they provided for him while he was in the hospital. (This is something that someone does not need to be Rav Shlomo

Zalman to do. Many people rightly have this practice under similar circumstances.) But then he asked if he could see the woman who went from room to room to water the plants in the hospital rooms. He said that the plants brightened up the room and therefore the woman who poured the water into the plants to make sure that they would stay fresh also needed to be thanked for her efforts. Most people may thank a doctor or a nurse who was helpful to them. But thinking about the lowly woman that goes from floor to floor and from room to room watering plants? She also should receive Hakaros HaTov, because if even inanimate objects receive Hakaros HaTov, certainly every human being deserves no less.

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Spirits in a Material World

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The Torah sometimes says something of fundamental importance in what seems like a minor and incidental comment. There is a fine example of this near the beginning of this parsha.

In the previous parsha, we read of how Moses was sent by God to lead the Israelites to freedom, and how his initial efforts met with failure. Not only did Pharaoh not agree to let the people go; he made the working conditions of the Israelites even worse. They had to make the same number of bricks as before, but now they had to gather their own straw. The people complained to Pharaoh, then they complained to Moses, and then Moses complained to God. “Why have You brought trouble to this people? Why did You send me?”

Exodus 5:22

At the beginning of Va’era, God tells Moses that He will indeed bring the Israelites to freedom, and tells him to announce this to the people. Then we read this:

So Moses told this to the Israelites but they did not listen to him, because their spirit was broken and because the labour was harsh.

Exodus 6:9

The italicised phrase seems simple enough. The people did not listen to Moses because he had brought them messages from God before which had done nothing to improve their situation. They were busy trying to survive day by day. They had no time for utopian promises that seemed to have no grounding in reality. Moses had failed to deliver in the past. They had no reason to think he would do so in the future. So far, so straightforward.

But there is something more subtle going on beneath the surface. When Moses first met God at the Burning Bush, God told him to lead, and Moses kept refusing on the

grounds that the people would not listen to him. He was not a man of words. He was slow of speech and tongue. He was a man of “uncircumcised lips” (Ex. 6:30). He lacked eloquence. He could not sway crowds. He was not an inspirational leader.

It turned out, though, that Moses was both right and wrong, right that they did not listen to him, but wrong about why. It had nothing to do with his failures as a leader or a public speaker. In fact, it had nothing to do with Moses at all. They did not listen “because their spirit was broken and because the labour was harsh.” In other words: If you want to improve people’s spiritual situation, first improve their physical situation. That is one of the most humanising aspects of Judaism.

Maimonides emphasises this in The Guide for the Perplexed. The Torah, he says, has two aims: the well-being of the soul and the well-being of the body.[1] The well-being of the soul is something inward and spiritual, but the well-being of the body requires a strong society and economy, where there is the rule of law, division of labour, and the promotion of trade. We have bodily well-being when all our physical needs are supplied, but none of us can do this alone. We specialise and exchange. That is why we need a good, strong, just society.

Spiritual achievement, says Maimonides, is higher than material achievement, but we need to ensure the latter first, because “a person suffering from great hunger, thirst, heat or cold, cannot grasp an idea even if it is communicated by others, much less can he arrive at it by his own reasoning.” In other words, if we lack basic physical needs, there is no way we can reach spiritual heights. When people’s spirits are broken by harsh labour they cannot listen to a Moses. If you want to improve people’s spiritual situation, first improve their physical conditions.

This idea was given classic expression in modern times by two New York Jewish psychologists, Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) and Frederick Herzberg (1923–2000). Maslow was fascinated by the question of why many people never reached their full potential. He also believed – as, later, did Martin Seligman, creator of positive psychology – that psychology should focus not only on the cure of illness but also on the positive promotion of mental health. His most famous contribution to the study of the human mind was his “hierarchy of needs.”

We are not a mere bundle of wants and desires. There is a clear order to our concerns. Maslow enumerated five levels. First are our physiological needs: for food and shelter, the basic requirements of survival. Next come safety needs: protection against harm done to us by others. Third is our need for love and belonging. Above that comes our desire for recognition and esteem, and higher still is self-actualisation: fulfilling our potential, becoming the person we feel we could and should be. In his later years Maslow added a yet higher stage: self-transcendence, rising beyond the self through altruism and spirituality.

Herzberg simplified this whole structure by distinguishing between physical and psychological factors. He called the first, Adam needs, and the second Abraham needs. Herzberg was particularly interested in what motivates people at work. What he realised in the late 1950s – an idea revived more recently by American-Israeli economist Dan Ariely – is that money, salary, and financial rewards (stock options and the like) is not the only motivator. People do not necessarily work better, harder, or more creatively, the more you pay them. Money works up to a certain level, but beyond that the real motivator is the challenge to grow, create, find meaning, and to invest your highest talents in a great cause. Money speaks to our Adam needs, but meaning speaks to our Abraham needs.

There is a truth here that Jews and Judaism have tended to note and live by more fully than many other civilisations and faiths. Most religions are cultures of acceptance. There is poverty, hunger, and disease on earth because that is the way the world is; that is how God made it and wants it. Yes, we can find happiness, nirvana, or bliss, but to achieve it you must escape from the world, by meditation, or retreating to a monastery, or by drugs, or trance, or by waiting patiently for the joy that awaits us in the world to come. Religion anaesthetises us to pain.

That isn't Judaism at all. When it comes to the poverty and pain of the world, ours is a religion of protest, not acceptance. God does not want people to be poor, hungry, sick, oppressed, uneducated, deprived of rights, or subject to abuse. He has made us His agents in this cause. He wants us to be His partners in the work of redemption. That is why so many Jews have become doctors fighting disease, lawyers fighting injustice, or educators fighting ignorance. It is surely why they have produced so many pioneering (and Nobel Prize-winning) economists. As Michael Novak (citing Irving Kristol) writes:

Jewish thought has always felt comfortable with a certain well-ordered worldliness, whereas the Christian has always felt a pull to otherworldliness. Jewish thought has had a candid orientation toward private property, whereas Catholic thought – articulated from an early period chiefly among priests and monks – has persistently tried to direct the attention of its adherents beyond the activities and interests of this world to the next. As a result, tutored by the law and the prophets, ordinary Jews have long felt more at home in this world, while ordinary Catholics have regarded this world as a valley of temptation and as a distraction from their proper business, which is preparation for the world to come.[2]

God is to be found in this world, not just the next. But for us to climb to spiritual heights we must first have satisfied our material needs. Abraham was greater than Adam, but Adam came before Abraham. When the physical world is harsh, the human spirit is broken, and people cannot then hear the word of God, even when delivered by a Moses.

Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev said it well:

“Don't worry about the state of someone else's soul and the needs of your body. Worry about the needs of someone else's body and the state of your own soul.”

Alleviating poverty, curing disease, ensuring the rule of law, and respect for human rights: these are spiritual tasks no less than prayer and Torah study. To be sure, the latter are higher, but the former are prior. People cannot hear God's message if their spirit is broken and their labour harsh.

[1] Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:27.

[2] Michael Novak, *This Hemisphere of Liberty* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1990), p. 64.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vaera (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 desire to leave their children and grandchildren with a legacy. 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 that the answer can be found in an important distinction in the Torah 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” (Deuteronomy 33:4) and Land of Israel (the verse cited above at the outset).

The different contexts in which these words appear is quite revealing about the different kinds of relationships between parents and children, and different priorities handed down from generation to generation, that these bequests engender. 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*, they 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, but 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 comes hard, not 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 over 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!

[Why Do You Need to Control Me?? "Let My People Go!" But Can They Let Themselves Go?

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Three Boys

Three boys are in the schoolyard bragging of how great their fathers are.

The first one says: "Well, my father runs the fastest. He can fire an arrow, and start to run, I tell you, he gets there before the arrow."

The second one says: "Ha! You think that's fast! My father is a hunter. He can shoot his gun and be there before the bullet."

The third one listens to the other two and shakes his head. He then says: "You two know nothing about fast. My father is a civil servant. He stops working at 4:30 and he is home by 3:45!"

The First Commandment

The Biblical account of the Jewish Exodus from Egypt has been one of the most inspiring stories for the oppressed, enslaved and downtrodden throughout history. From the American Revolution, to the slaves of the American South, to Martin Luther King's Let Freedom Ring, the narrative of the Exodus provided countless people with the courage to hope for a better future, and to act on the dream.

Moses' first visit to Pharaoh demanding liberty for his people only brought more misery to the Hebrew slaves; the Egyptian monarch increased their torture. The Hebrews now would not listen any longer to the promise of redemption. Now let us pay heed to this seemingly strange verse in Exodus, in the Torah portion of Vaeira:

So G-d spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and He commanded them to the children of Israel, and to Pharaoh the king of Egypt, to let the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

[1]

G-d is charging Moses with two directives: Command the people of Israel and then command Pharaoh the king. However, the verse is ambiguous: What did G-d command Moses to instruct the people? The message for Pharaoh is clear: Let the children of Israel out of Egypt. But what is it that Moses is supposed to command the people themselves?

The Jerusalem Talmud[2] says something profoundly enigmatic:

G-d instructed Moses to command to the Jewish people the laws of freeing slaves.

The Talmud is referring to a law recorded later in Exodus:[3] If a Jew sells himself as a slave, the owner must let him go after six years. He is forbidden to hold on to the slave for longer. This was the law Moses was to share with the Israelites while they were in Egyptian bondage.

The Basis for the Commentary

The Talmud bases this novel and seemingly unfounded interpretation on a fascinating narrative in the book of Jeremiah: [4]

Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: So says the Lord G-d of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers on the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves, saying: "At the end of seven years you shall let go every man his brother Jew who has been sold to you, and when he has served you for six years you shall let him go free from you."

The question is, where do we find a covenant made by G-d with the Jewish people when they left Egypt to free their slaves? In a brilliant speculation, the Talmud suggests that this is the meaning of the above enigmatic verse, "G-d spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and He commanded them to the children of Israel, and to Pharaoh the king of Egypt, to let the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." The commandment to the children of Israel was to set free their slaves.

Yet this seems like a cruel joke. The Children of Israel at this point were crushed and tormented slave themselves, subjugated by a genocidal despot and a tyrannical regime, enduring horrific torture. Yet at this point in time G-d wants Moses to command them about the laws relevant to the aristocrat, the feudal lord, the slave-owner?![5]

What is more, as the Torah puts it: "G-d commanded them to the children of Israel, and to Pharaoh the king of Egypt to let the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." It seems like the two instructions—the one to the Israelites and the one to the Egyptian king—are linked. And furthermore: the commandment to the Israelites preceded the commandment to Pharaoh. But what does the commandment to the Jewish people that they free their slaves one day in the future have to do with the mission to Pharaoh to set the Hebrews free from bondage?

Who Is Free?

The answer to this question is profoundly simple and moving, and is vital to the understanding of liberty in the biblical imagination.

Before Pharaoh can liberate the Jewish slaves, they must be ready to become free. You can take a man out of slavery, but it may prove more challenging to take slavery out of a man. Externally, you may be free; internally you may still be enslaved.

What is the first and foremost symptom of bring free? That you learn to confer freedom on others.

The dictator, the control freak, or the abusive spouse or parent, does not know how give others freedom. He (or she) feels compelled to force others into the mold that he has created for them. Uncomfortable in his own skin, he is afraid that someone will overshadow him, expose his weaknesses, usurp his position or make him feel extra in this world. Outwardly he attempts to appear powerful, but

inwardly his power is a symptom of inner misery and confinement.

Only when one learns to embrace others, not for whom he would like them to be, but for whom they are, then can he begin to embrace himself, not for whom he wishes he was, but for whom he is. When we free those around us, we are freeing ourselves. By accepting them, we learn to accept ourselves.

Who is powerful? He who empowers. Who is free? He who can free others. Who is a leader? He who creates other leaders.

"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power," Abraham Lincoln said. Ask yourself, do you know how to celebrate the soaring success of your loved ones and constituents? Do you encourage them to spread their wings and maximize their potentials? Can you allow others to shine?

Pharaoh may set you free physically. But former slaves can become present tyrants. People who were abused often become abusers themselves. It is what they know about life; it is the paradigm they were raised with. They grew up in abuse and slavery, so they continue the cycle with others. The first Mitzvah the Jews had to hear from Moses before even he can go the Pharaoh to let them go free was: One day you will be free. Remember that freedom is a gift; use it to free others.

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[1] Exodus 6:13 [2] Rosh Hashanah Chapter 3:5. See the commentary of the Karban Heidah *ibid*. See at length Torah Shleimah Parshas Vaeira for all the commentary on this Talmudic statement. [3] Exodus 21:2

[4] 34:12-14 [5] See Meshech Chachmah (By Rabbi Meir Simcha Hakohen, the Rabbi of Devink and author of Or Samach) to Parshas Vaeira for his novel explanation, that there were Egyptian Jews at the times who owned Jewish slaves. Moses instructed them to set their slaves free. Cf. Torah Shleimah *ibid* for additional explanations.]

Parashat Va'aira

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Confusion and Perplexity!

Among the divergent ingredients that HaShem introduced into His "questionable creation" called "Man" was intelligence and logic. "Questionable creation"? The Midrash relates that HaShem concurred with angels if it was wise to create an entity who would be called Adam and would possess the freedom to do evil if he so chose? The angels had diverging opinions.

At the end of the deliberations, HaShem did create Man, who could not refrain from sinning more than an hour or two after creation, and then found himself and all future humanity expelled from Paradise and subject to death. HaShem's rationale for creating Man was that He could

contain the iniquities of humanity for the sake of the mitzvot and Torah way of life that Am Yisrael will accept. So Man, as a logical entity, seeks order and stability in his surroundings which would permit him to understand from where he came – and more important to predict where he is destined to go. However, HaShem holds the reins of power to limit Man's acquisitiveness and invention through a weapon called "confusion".

In Jewish history, we perceive examples of HaShem's supra-natural intervention in the ongoing history of Am Yisrael when "confusion" reigned among our leaders. Just as the captain of a ship permits a midshipman to handle the wheel, but in rough weather the skipper "takes over".

Examples:

1- Bridging the last two parshiot of Shemot and Va'ai'ra is the scenario where Moshe is dispatched by HaShem to demand Paro free immediately millions of his Jewish slaves. Moshe knew at firsthand that it would be a mission fated to fail, which indeed turned out to be a disaster for the Jews. Moshe is confused and questions the Almighty why he was sent when the outcome would obviously be devastating for the millions of HaShem's own nation? Confusion and perplexity!

But little to Moshe's knowledge was that HaShem was signaling an oncoming unnatural act of salvation.

2- What was our father Avraham experiencing while walking towards Mount Moriah with Yitzchak in order to fulfill HaShem's command to offer up his son as a sacrifice? Confusion! For did not HaShem promise that Yitzchak would be Avraham's heir in establishing the Jewish nation? But Avraham could not have known that at the outcome of the experience HaShem would rescind His command to sacrifice Yitzchak and would bless Avraham's Jewish descendants for all time, as stated (Bereishiet 22,16-18):

Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.

Yitzchak experienced confusion when the wells of water he had dug were repeatedly destroyed. Ya'akov could not understand the path that his life was taking, when the holy man (of the tent) was forced to live for 20 years in galut with the evil Lavan. Followed by the terrifying meeting with Aisav where Ya'akov prepared in three different ways – prayer, gifts and war. And then the 20-year estrangement from his beloved son Yosef. confusion preceding a great salvation of HaShem.

At the Red Sea the newly freed slaves and their leader Moshe were confused and bewildered as to what path to choose, when HaShem commanded them to enter the

churning waters of the sea. Again, human bewilderment preceding HaShem's supra-natural salvation.

So was it with Queen Esther as related in the Gemara (Megila 15b). The profound feelings of rejection and confusion expressed by her entering the inner chamber of Achashverosh and called out the pasuk in Tehilim 22,2:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And in the last century the Shoah, which is beyond the understanding of our spiritual leaders, followed by the establishment of the Medina marking the beginning of the oncoming great salvation.

In our time the cacophony of opinions among religious leaders on most subjects leaves one with confusion. It is probably the foremost reason for young people leaving a life of Torah and mitzvot asking "where is HaShem?"

History teaches that human intelligence cannot provide us with clarity when the forces of confusion band together; and this occurs prior to a period of supra-natural events when HaShem, as it would be, is telling our leaders to curtail their activities and give room for the great miracles which HaShem alone will shortly provide for His chosen people.

The narrative in the Pesach Haggadah makes no mention of Moshe Rabbeinu, to the contrary, it emphasizes that HaShem alone brought the Jewish nation out of Egypt.

There was total confusion and consternation among the people. Eighty percent of the nation was dying because of their refusal to leave, and the surviving 20 percent saw no choice but to depart into the threatening desert wilderness. There was confusion and perplexity; the options of not following Moshe into the desert or following Moshe held little promise for the future.

It was on this background that HaShem alone suspended the "Laws of Nature" which He Himself had mandated for this world.

We can extrapolate from the Exodus experience to our own today. The options which are available for the Jews in galut are becoming fewer: to remain in galut with a questionable future or to leave – but leave to where? And the options for us here in the holy land are drawing further away from peace and tranquility.

This is the perfect background for HaShem to hasten the final redemption of our nation, may it be very soon.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Yitzchak ben Moshe.

Group Therapy

And Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, and gave them a charge to Bnei Yisroel [...] (6:13).

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashana 3:5) derives from this possuk a fascinating teaching: R' Shmuel son of R'

Yitzchak asked, “With what did he charge Bnei Yisroel? He charged with the mitzvah of shiluach avadim (freeing one’s slaves).” Remarkably, according to the Talmud Yerushalmi, the very first mitzvah that Hashem asked Moshe to command the Jewish people was to free their slaves.

At a glance, this can be difficult to comprehend: Why would the mitzvah of freeing one’s slaves have the importance of being the first mitzvah given to the nation as a whole? One would expect that perhaps the mitzvah of Shabbos or keeping kosher or family purity laws would take precedence.

Furthermore, none of the Jews had any slaves at this point nor could the law even be observed until they settled in their homeland of Eretz Yisroel! Why charge them with a mitzvah that cannot be fulfilled at that time and why give it the importance of being the first mitzvah they are commanded to do?

Psychological studies show that those who were abused as children have a tendency to become abusers themselves. Obviously, not everyone abused as a child becomes an abuser; but studies show that there is a threefold higher risk for abused children to become abusers later in life. Psychologists have offered a few possible reasons for this link. One of the prevailing theories is that children rationalize this abuse by thinking that abuse is normal behavior. So as they mature they don’t fully understand that abusive behavior is wrong, and therefore don’t have the same barriers in place to prevent such behavior.

This is problematic for a few reasons: 1) if someone experienced something difficult or painful he should be more sensitive to it, and thereby take extraordinary measure to ensure that he does not cause the same pain to another, particularly a child and 2) this reasoning doesn’t explain why they would have a stronger tendency toward deviant behavior. At some point in their lives they would certainly learn that society considers such abuse wrong. Why shouldn’t that be enough to stop them?

A much more compelling theory is that an adult who has unresolved issues from being abused as a child acts out as a way of coping with the feelings of helplessness experienced as a child. In other words, those abused become abusers to prove to themselves that they are no longer helpless victims. By becoming abusers, they psychologically reinforce within themselves that they are no longer the ones abused.

We see this in many other instances as well. Smokers who are finally able to quit for good often become crusaders and feel compelled to lecture others to quit smoking; overweight individuals who manage to lose weight are suddenly weight loss experts and have no problem sharing their opinions about how much you should weigh; religious leaders struggling with their own demons become virulent anti-smut and lascivious behavior crusaders, yet nobody is surprised when scandals about them emerge. These

“crusades” are merely a coping mechanism for their unresolved issues.

This is exactly what Hashem is telling Bnei Yisroel. He is saying, you have been slaves now in Egypt for close to two hundred years. You need to emotionally deal with the fact that you are now truly free and no longer slaves. One of the ways to emotionally get past one’s own slavery would be to have and hold on to slaves of your own. But this is why you must observe the mitzvah of freeing slaves. The ability to no longer need slaves of your own is the ultimate proof that you have internalized your freedom and are in a healthy emotional place. At that point, you will be truly free.

It's All About Me

These are the heads of their fathers’ houses; The sons of Reuven the firstborn of Yisroel; Hanoch, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the families of Reuven [...] (6:14).

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by why the Torah suddenly finds it necessary to record the genealogy of Yaakov’s family right in the middle of the story of the Exodus. Rashi goes on to explain that the Torah wanted to record the yichus (lineage) of Moshe and Aharon; and once it mentioned Moshe and Aharon, it begins from the firstborn of the family – Reuven.

This is unusual for a few reasons. Generally, when the Torah records the lineage of an individual, the Torah begins with the individual and works its way backwards (e.g. Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aharon the Kohen). So why did the Torah begin with Yaakov? Moreover, why does the Torah mention the families of Reuven and Shimon at all?

Sometimes during the speeches at a simcha, the attendees are subjected to a detailed recollection and description of all the prominent antecedents in the family. While it is true that a family’s yichus does add, at least somewhat, to that individual and family’s prominence – as the possuk says, “the glory of children are their fathers” (Mishlei 17:6) – most people tend to forget the beginning of that very same possuk: “the crown of grandfathers are their grandchildren.”

In other words, the crowning achievement of one’s family isn’t in the past, it’s in the future. We have to develop ourselves into people who our forbearers would be proud of and become their crowning achievement. This means that all they did in their lives, their sacrifices, their own accomplishments, etc. are for naught if we fail to fulfill our own mission in life. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah – Toldos) says that the only reason Avraham was saved from the fiery furnace was because he would have a grandson named Yaakov. In essence, we can and must justify the lives of our ancestors.

This is an awesome responsibility to fulfill. While all of us are descended from a glorious past – that of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov – our personal obligation is to fulfill

their mission. If we, God forbid, fail to live up to that responsibility then all is for naught. As great as our forefathers (and all our forbearers throughout history) were, they need us in order for the world to come to its final culmination and fulfill the destiny of why all of us were created.

That is what the Torah is telling us here. Moshe was supposed to lead Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt and into Eretz Yisroel to the final purpose of why the world was created. Therefore, this is the story of Yaakov's family. That is why the lineage begins with him. Continuing with his first born Reuven and then Shimon, great as they were, they didn't succeed in fulfilling the family's mission. But Levi, through Moshe and Aharon, justified the entire family and their purpose in fulfilling Avraham's vision of bringing Hashem down to this world, and on to the final redemption.

Parashat Va'era - Who Can't?

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

23 Tevet 5783 January 16, 2023

This week's parasha, Vaera, tells us about a series of meetings between Moses and his brother Aaron – as G-d's emissaries to take the children of Israel out of Egypt – with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Before one of the first meetings, G-d instructed Moses and Aaron as follows:

“When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Provide a sign for yourselves,’ you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff, [and] cast [it] before Pharaoh; it will become a serpent.’ ” (Exodus 7, 9)

And indeed, when Moses and Aaron came to the meeting with Pharaoh, Aaron cast his staff down and it became a serpent. According to most commentators, it was some kind of snake. The Torah tells us that Pharaoh then called to the Egyptian sorcerers, the professional magicians of Egypt, and instructed them to perform for Moses and Aaron. The sorcerers managed through illusion to make their staffs turn into serpents, but Aaron's staff swallowed theirs.

A careful reading of Pharaoh's words to Moses and Aaron shows an interesting linguistic oddity. Pharaoh told them “Provide a sign for yourselves,” when the sign was meant for Pharaoh, not for Moses and Aaron. Had it been for them, it would have made sense for Pharaoh to say “Provide a sign for yourselves.” Pharaoh's idolatrous perceptions led him to believe that whoever could do the best magic was right. If he wanted the sign in order to be convinced that Moses and Aaron had actually come to him as part of a divine mission, why did he say “Provide a sign for yourselves”?

Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin (1887 – 1933; president of “Agudat Yisrael” in Poland, the head of the Chachmei Lublin yeshiva, and the initiator of the concept of “daf yomi”) offered a profound interpretation of Pharaoh's words. When Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and

demanding he let the Jewish nation leave for the desert to worship G-d, Pharaoh thought their request was surreal since he considered them slaves unable to worship any god. He saw them as tools in the service of the kingdom; slaves devoid of personalities. The demand brought by Moses and Aaron seemed to him completely illogical.

So, Pharaoh said “Provide a sign for yourselves.” Pharaoh did not tell them to perform just any magic, but to prove that their demand was possible, and that the Hebrew slaves could rise to the level of G-d worshippers. The sign was needed to prove that the words of Moses and Aaron were not surreal.

And indeed, the sign was the staff becoming a serpent and then going back to being a staff. Moses and Aaron proved with this sign that when there is “*siyata d'shmaya*,” help from Heaven, there is nothing that isn't possible. If G-d wants to take the Jewish nation out of Egypt and give them the Torah on Mount Sinai, then it is as possible as the staff becoming a serpent and then reverting back to being a staff. The redemption of the Jewish nation from Egyptian slavery and their becoming a nation who received the Torah involved an extensive and comprehensive change in consciousness. From slaves devoid of choice, they became the nation that stands for free choice; from people whose rights were trampled, they became “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” whose mission is to lead all of humanity toward a life of justice and morality. Could such a change even be possible?

The staff that became a serpent and went back to being a staff came to prove to Moses and Aaron, and to the entire Jewish nation, that this was a possible change. And it came to also teach us, learners of Torah thousands of years later, that we are not expected to do the impossible. What is expected of us is possible, because human effort that goes along with “*siyata d'shmaya*,” help from Heaven, can surprise even the most optimistic person and bring about accomplishments that seem hard to attain.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Va'eira : "Who Brings You Forth"

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

HaMotzi — the Blessing for Bread

As a rule, most of the blessings recited over food speak of God as the Creator. For example, we say: בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ (“Creator of fruits of the tree”), בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה (“Creator of fruits of the ground”), בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַנֶּחֱלָךְ (“Creator of fruits of the vine”).

But the blessing for bread does not fit this pattern. Before eating bread, we say HaMotzi — הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ — “Who brings forth bread from the earth.” Why don't we acknowledge God as “the Creator of bread,” following the formulation of other blessings?

It is highly significant that the wording of the blessing of HaMotzi mirrors the language used by God in His announcement to Moses:

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

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

The Special Role of Bread

The Earth contains an abundance of nutrients and elements, and through various processes, both natural and man-made, these elements are transformed into sustenance suitable for human consumption. However, when it comes to foods that are not essential to human life, it is difficult to know whether the nutrients and elements have attained their ultimate purpose upon becoming food. In fact, their utility began while they were still in the ground, and we cannot confidently state that they are now, in the form of a fruit or vegetable, more vital to the world's functioning.

Bread, on the other hand, is the staff of life. Bread is necessary for our physical and mental development. As the Talmud states, "A child does not know how to call 'Father' and 'Mother' until he tastes grain" (Berachot 40b). This emphasizes the importance of bread in sustaining life, setting it apart from other foods. The elements used to make bread have attained a significant role that they lacked when they were still buried inside the earth.

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

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

The elements that are used to make bread started as part of the overall environment — the Earth — and were then separated for their special function. So, too, the Jewish people started out as part of humanity. Their unique character and holiness were revealed when God took them out of Egypt. "I am the Eternal your God, Who brings you forth from under the subjugation of the Egyptians."

Like the blessing over bread, God's declaration highlights two contrasting qualities: the interconnectedness of the Jewish people to the rest of the world; and their separation from it, for the sake of their unique mission.

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

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פרשת וארא תשפ"ג

קח את מטך והשליך לפני פרעה

Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh. (7:9)

What "merit" did the *mateh*, staff, have that it was used as the medium for carrying out some of the plagues against Pharaoh and the Egyptian people? Rabbi Go'el Alkarif suggests a powerful *mussar*, ethical lesson, to be derived from here. Prior to Horav Yisrael Salanter's public emergence as the preeminent founder of the *mussar* movement, he lived quietly in Memel, Germany, with an idea, an idea that would transform the Jewish world. His innovation was to focus on *mussar* also. In addition to studying *Gemorah*, Jews should also work on their *middos*, character traits, refining and honing them, so that they would become better people, better Jews.

At that juncture in time, the *mussar* concept was not accepted in the *yeshivah* world. He needed to establish a *yeshivah* whose guiding principles would include the study of *mussar* in its curriculum. Unfortunately, his dream did not coincide with the reality of finding an appropriate venue and supporting such an endeavor. Obtaining a physical structure was at best difficult. One day, a Jewish carpenter in Memel, a simple, unlearned man who had heard of Rav Yisrael's plight, made him an offer: "I will give the Rav a small room to be used for his *yeshivah*. I will make tables and chairs for the students to study. This room could serve as the cornerstone of his honor's *yeshivah*." Indeed, that little room, provided to him through the good graces of this carpenter, was the foundation of his *yeshivah*, upon which the *mussar* movement was founded.

We are all aware that the *mussar* movement transformed the *yeshivah*/Jewish world. It changed the way we think and the way we act, enhancing our interpersonal relationships and, ultimately, our *avodas hakodesh*, service to the Almighty. Rav Yisrael once commented, "What did that carpenter really give?" A small room with some simple furniture. Nonetheless, all of the *Toras ha'mussar* which exists in the world is in his *z'chus*, merit! (This was expressed 170 years ago. The amount has since increased exponentially.) Every *mussar shmuess*, ethical discourse, will be for him a source of spiritual reward for posterity. Every *mussar* thought, innovation, inspiration is built upon his meager foundation: a small room and some furniture. All of this is because he lived in Memel, heard about the need and took action. His simple act of kindness transformed the world!

Returning to the *mateh*, staff, Hashem sought to teach that a simple staff – a wooden stick – can also be used *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven. It can be the medium for eliciting *kiddush Shem Shomayim*. One should never put down even the smallest, most insignificant entity, especially a person. The *mussar* movement taught us the significance of actions which appear to be insignificant.

When astronaut Neil Armstrong landed on the moon, he stepped out of his space capsule and made the first human step on the moon. His quote at the time was immortalized, “That’s one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind.” We often go through life thinking, “I am just a cog in a large machine. What contribution can I make? What can I do that will change the world? What can a little guy like me achieve?” The carpenter in Memel made one small step. It altered the lives of countless Jews.

Three aspiring *yeshivah bachurim* in Baltimore, Maryland, wanted to go to Europe to study in *yeshivah*. It was prior to World War II. At the time, they had no reason to believe that learning Torah in Europe would ever be a problem. Their desire to learn was great. One impediment prevented them from realizing their dream: money. They had already been accepted—two had been admitted to Telshe, and one to Slabodka. Money was tight in America. Jews who observed *Shabbos* had an even greater challenge. Yet, some *yechidim*, individuals, were willing to take that “one step” for *Yiddishkeit*. A Jewish grocer in Baltimore, Philip/Uri Gundersheimer, had, despite tremendous financial pressure, refused to remain open on *Shabbos*, even during the depression years. He came forward and undertook the responsibility to pay for all expenses incurred by the three young men. They went to *yeshivah* all because a simple Jew took that first step.

Philip Gundersheimer died in 1943, at the age of ninety-five years old. He never did see his investment achieve complete fruition. Surely now, ensconced in *Gan Eden* receiving his just reward, he is unaware of what his one step accomplished. The three young men were: *Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl*, Telshe *Rosh Yeshivah*, who transformed the lives of thousands of *yeshivah bachurim*; *Horav Aharon Paperman, zl*, who, while serving as an army chaplain, inspired thousands of Jewish soldiers. This was followed by *rabbanus* in Plainfield, New Jersey, a principalship in Scranton, Pennsylvania, being Executive Director of Telshe Yeshivah and Director of Chinuch Atzmai; and *Rav Mendel Poliakoff, zl*, a *Rav* in Baltimore.

It is our task to act. Hashem determines the significance of our actions. One never knows.

**אמר אל אהרן נטה את משך והך את עפר הארץ והיה לנכים
Say to Aharon, “Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the land; it shall become lice. (8:12)**

Rashi explains that Moshe *Rabbeinu* could not bring the plague of lice on Egypt, because it meant striking the ground, something Moshe could not bring himself to do. The dust of the earth protected him from being discovered when he used it to conceal the corpse of the Egyptian whom he had killed. For Moshe to have struck the land would have been a blemish on his attribute of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. *Chazal* teach that whoever denies the favor he benefitted from his fellowman will not stop there. He will also one day deny Hashem’s favor as well. One whose character is deficient is blemished across the

board. He will not restrict his abysmal behavior to human beings. He will also manifest his ingratitude to Hashem.

Hakoras hatov actually means recognizing the good that one bestows on me. One cannot appreciate what he has not acknowledged as good. He must first concede that he has been a beneficiary, and afterwards he can demonstrate his gratitude. Unfortunately, acknowledging a favor received is probably more difficult and less common than acting gratefully. Sadly, we tend to look for any opportunity to ignore the favor and the benefactor.

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, relates the following anecdote. One of the cities in eastern Europe held a raffle. People from all over the country purchased raffle tickets. The mere thought that a dollar ticket could win a million dollars was mind boggling. A kind-hearted grocer who was known for his acts of *chesed*, kindness, attempted to reach out to Yosele, a man plagued with abject poverty, who lived on whatever scraps he could gather.

“Yosele, why do you not purchase a raffle ticket? Who knows? You might win and become a millionaire.” Yosele thought that his friend, the grocer, had lost his mind, “I am unable to scrape together the few pennies necessary to buy some stale bread, and you expect me to buy a raffle ticket? Have you taken leave of your senses?” The grocer was not deterred, “But look at how much you might win. Your financial problems would be solved.” This went back and forth until Yosele finally said, “Good, I will buy a ticket if you tell me where I can get the money for it.”

“I will lend you the money,” the grocer replied. “This might be the opportunity of a lifetime. I want to help you.” Yosele countered, “What if I lose? How will I ever pay you back?” “Do not worry,” replied the grocer. “If you lose, you owe me nothing. If you win, you will have more than enough money to pay me back.” Yosele would have to be a total fool to pass up such an offer. He agreed to buy a raffle ticket. After all, it was a “win-win” situation. A few days passed, and the lottery occurred. The grocer kept Yosele’s ticket for him. One can only begin to imagine the shock and excitement that overtook the grocer when he saw that Yosele’s ticket had the winning numbers! There were no phones (and even if there were, Yosele could not have afforded the service). The grocer decided he would notify Yosele of his good fortune. It was a freezing night in the dead of winter. A blizzard was pelting the city with snow that was quickly piling up. Yet, the kind-hearted grocer went out in search of Yosele, who, due to his poverty, lived in a broken-down, ramshackle hovel on the outskirts of town.

It took the man a few hours trudging along in waist-deep high snow to reach Yosele’s home. It was pitch dark, not a fire, not a candle to illuminate the house. It was past midnight. Yosele was probably sleeping, but the grocer was sure that he would welcome being woken up to hear the exciting news. He kept on knocking and knocking.

When this did not work, he tried screaming. Finally, Yosele called out, quite upset, “Nu, tell me.” “Do you expect me to stay outside in this frigid cold? Let me in, so that I can warm up.” “Absolutely not,” Yosele said. “It is the middle of the night. I need my sleep. Tell me what you have to say.”

The grocer saw that Yosele was a hard sell. His wretched life had affected his character, and he was not about to let anyone into his “home.” “Ok, Yosele, I will tell you the great news while I am freezing out here. You won! You won the lottery! You are no longer a poor man. You are a millionaire, probably the richest person in the city.”

A few minutes passed, and Yosele came to the door. The grocer thought that he would finally be allowed into the house, maybe even get a hot drink to warm his bones. How shocked he was to hear Yosele berate him, “I cannot understand you,” he began. “Nu, everyone knows me as Yosele, the poor man, who lives a wretched life. They treat me abysmally because they look at me negatively. That is the way (some) people are. You, however, know (now) that I am a millionaire. How dare you come and wake me up in middle of the night! Where is your respect? You should be ashamed to come banging on my door as if I were still living a life of poverty!”

This is human nature. We pray and pray, and, as soon as we receive a positive response, we stop praying. We forget to Whom we had been praying and for what reason. Husbands forget all they benefitted from their wives during their marriage. They ignore the *hakoras hatov* imperative. If one does not maintain a sense of gratitude to his/her spouse, how can he/she expect to appreciate what Hashem does for him/her?

ולא יכלו החרטמים לעמד לפני משה מפני השחין ... ויחזק ד' את לב פרעה

The necromancers could not stand before Moshe because of the boils ... Hashem strengthened the heart of Pharaoh. (9:11,12)

Concerning the previous plagues, the Torah writes that Pharaoh personally strengthened/hardened his heart. Regarding *makkas shechin*, boils, the Torah attests, *Va'yichazek Hashem es lev Pharaoh*, “Hashem strengthened Pharaoh’s heart.” What had transpired to catalyze this change? *Ramban* explains that as long as he was surrounded by his magicians, Pharaoh was ashamed to concede the truth: he had lost control. Hashem was stronger. The Jewish people should be permitted to leave. Pharaoh the *rasha*, wicked, would never allow anyone to observe him in a moment of weakness. It might denigrate their perception of him as a deity. When Egypt was stricken with boils, however, even the magicians left the palace. They were in pain and emitting a noxious odor from the ugly boils that covered their entire bodies. Pharaoh was now alone, with no one to impress, no peer pressure. He was about to concede defeat, to admit that Hashem was righteous and the Jews should be allowed to

leave. Hashem was not yet prepared to allow them to leave. Four more plagues awaited the Egyptians, and then the Jews would leave. In order to prevent Pharaoh from capitulating, Hashem strengthened his heart.

For the first five *makkos*, Pharaoh was compelled to put on a show to demonstrate to his followers that nothing and no one could sway him. He was the strongest. When *makkas shechin* struck, he was alone and could finally confess that he was powerless against Hashem. The Almighty, however, had different plans for the despot.

Horav Nissim Yagen, zl, draws a distinction between the likes of Pharaoh and his ilk and our Torah leaders. Yehudah was confronted with the greatest challenge to his leadership. Tamar had proof of their liaison. The woman that Yehudah (as head of the *Bais Din*) had ruled guilty of an indiscretion and sentenced to death by fire was actually carrying his twin sons. He, too, was involved. When he realized this, he proclaimed, *Tzadkah mimeni*, “She is right. It is from me” (*Bereishis* 138:26). We are called *Yehudim* because of Yehudah’s act of confession. He did not cover up his mistakes (as has become so common in today’s society). Yehudah could have secretly come to Tamar and said, “Look, I see what you are intimating. You understand, of course, that to admit my involvement publicly may harm my reputation. I will *pasken*, rule, that you are not to be executed, and we will go our separate ways. Nobody gets hurt.”

Yehudah, our namesake, was not like that. In the presence of his father, Yaakov *Avinu*, and his brothers, the *Shivtei Kah*, Yehudah admitted that he had made a mistake. This is the symbol of greatness. Accepting one’s limitations is every bit as important as embracing one’s strengths. Our egos control us; thus, we think that our peers will view us askance, which is, of course, unacceptable to us. We, therefore, look to Yehudah for guidance and inspiration, because, after all, we are *Yehudim*.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, writes, “It is the *teva ha’adam*, nature of a person, to justify himself even if he is wrong, because the idea of admitting without being ashamed (*Rashi*, *Vayikra* 10:20) is difficult and intimidating.” (‘I am sorry’ are the most difficult words to express.) The following story demonstrates that *hodaah al ha’emes*, conceding the truth, regardless of how unpleasant the ramifications may be, defines not only *malchus*, monarchy, (as it did Yehudah) but it is also the barometer of *mentchlichkeit*, humaneness.

On June 2, 2010, Armando Gallaraga pitched what seemed a perfect game, an achievement attained by only twenty pitchers in major league baseball’s 130-year history. This young man was going into the history books. The entire stadium watched with bated breath as the last play of the game was about to occur. The umpire, 65-year-old Jim Joyce, erroneously called the runner safe at first base. It was obviously a mistake, but rules are rules. After the game, realizing the mistake he made and its

ramifications to the young pitcher, he walked over to Gallaraga and, with tears in his eyes, apologized profusely. He admitted that he had made a terrible mistake. The pitcher graciously accepted his apology saying, "Nobody is perfect. Everybody is human." From a Torah perspective, I would say, "Hashem decides what should happen. We are the players. He decides our roles."

Va'ani Tefillah

ישלח עזרך מקודש ומציון יסעדך – *Yishlach ezricha mi'kodesh u'mi'Tzion yisadeka*. May He dispatch your help from the Sanctuary and support You from Tzion.

We supplicate Hashem to dispatch His help from the *Kodesh HaKodoshim*, the center of *kedushah*, holiness, rather than from unholy sources, such as gentile monarchs and their legions. Our greatest ally in battle is our *kedushah*, not the various "saviors" who come to our aid. The *pasuk* in the beginning of *Parashas Kedoshim*, *Kedoshim tiheyu*; "Holy shall you be," (*Vayikra* 19:2) is explained by the *Midrash*, "This coincides with the *pasuk*, *Yishlach ezrecha mi'kodesh*. What is *Chazal* teaching us? *Horav Shmuel Rozovsky, zl*, quotes the *Malbim* who explains *ezrah*, help, as reference to supernatural, miraculous assistance. How does one merit such extraordinary support? The answer is, *mi'kodesh*, from the holiness which you (man) generate through your actions. When our activities are focused on *kedushah*, when our lifestyle is one whereby we safeguard ourselves from exposure to the physical, base subcultures that will only defile us spiritually, then we can ask for and hope to receive, help from Hashem via supernal agencies.

משה יהודה ליב בן אשר אלתר חיים ז"ל נפטר כ"ד טבת תשס"ט
ר - לזכר נשמת' ת.ג.צ.ב.ה

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Fact Checking

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Moshe was hand selected to liberate us from Egypt and to introduce Hashem to a human audience which had previously ignored Him. Moshe possessed an impressive blend of personal qualities, each of which would serve him in his long and storied career. As a young baby he was graced with radiant good looks, which drew the interest of an Egyptian princess. Raised by royals, his palace upbringing endowed him with the confidence to challenge Pharo and his intimidating court of magicians. Moshe deeply sensed the pain of human suffering, endangering his own life to rescue a battered Jewish slave. He valiantly defended the weak against injustice, saving unknown shepherd girls from local tormenters. Recognizing the futility of petty squabbling, he challenged two quarrelling Jews to rise above their small-mindedness and spite and behave more gracefully. Loyal to his past, he delayed his

grand mission, first securing permission from his father-in-law and only afterwards, relocating the family to Egypt. Moshe's resume is brimming with leadership qualities. Additionally, Moshe was the consummate outsider: a Jewish baby, raised by an Egyptian princess, married to a Midyanite woman, his broad exposure and diverse experiences provided him with fresh perspective, and allowed his unbiased eyes to see the world large and whole. This future leader combined an impressive array of character traits with a wide range of experiences, and he appeared to be the perfect candidate for historical mission. Impaired Speech There was only one problem: this multi-talented man possessed a severe speech impediment. Acknowledging his own handicap, Moshe was initially hesitant to accept this complicated mission. How could he stand before Pharo presenting Hashem, when he could not speak clearly and emphatically? How could an inelegant tongue issue divine demands to monarchs, and utter divine commands to Jews. Yet, for some reason, this impediment did not disqualify Moshe from his mission. Evidently, his unusual mix of noble character traits was so rare that, despite his impairment, he was still the best candidate for these great tasks. He may not have been perfect, but he was still the best option. What is odd, is that he wasn't miraculously healed of his condition by Hashem. After all, Hashem pulled out "all stops" and performed epic and dramatic miracles to emancipate us from Egypt. Wouldn't it have made sense for Hashem to repair Moshe's tongue, empowering him to speak more capably? This minor miracle of improving Moshe's speaking abilities would have gone a long way toward advancing his ambitious agenda, yet Hashem preserved Moshe's speech impediment, dispatching him to his duties without impressive rhetorical skills. Evidently, Moshe's speech limitations did not impair his mission but, if anything, enhanced it. Had Moshe been a better orator, perhaps he would have been a worse leader. His impairment was an asset. Cultism Moshe freed us from Egypt and defeated the greatest superpower on earth, eventually navigating our people to the doorstep of history and the entrance to Israel. Along this journey he performed dazzling miracles and astounding supernatural feats. His rising popularity and expanding influence invited the unhealthy possibility of that a cult of personality would develop. Having been enslaved for two centuries, the former slaves were especially vulnerable to the influence of charisma and the peddling of personality. The impressionable young nation could very easily have been captivated by charisma and charm rather than being educated by values. The human imagination is always tempted by charisma, and Moshe's spectacular feats, coupled with the gullibility of a young nation, created a perfect storm for the emergence of a personality cult. Retaining Moshe's imperfect speech averted this danger. Our speech conveys ideas, but it also projects our personality and our charisma. Speech without

character and without passion is hollow and boring. Potent speech imbued with powerful spirit, grips a listener and penetrates the soul. However, at some point, passionate rhetoric conveys too much of own personality and enchanting the listener with the speaker rather than with some larger idea or content. Checking against this danger, Moshe's flawed speech assured that his charisma would never overtake his content. No one would ever be impressed with Moshe's eloquence or with his underdeveloped rhetoric, but instead, would be attracted to his nobility of character, his quiet humility, and his uncommon compassion. He would model moral traits such as courage, faith, dedication to nation, tolerance, and of course, dedicated Torah scholarship. Though he may never deliver booming speeches he will provide powerful but hushed moral lessons. There will be no cult of personality surrounding a speech-challenged leader. There will be, however, deep values, profound role modeling and enduring education.

Absolute Fact Additionally, Moshe's muted speech assures that a different voice will reverberate- the heavenly one. Moshe delivered the direct word of Hashem by brokering mass revelation at Sinai. That seminal moment at Sinai, when we heard the direct voice of Hashem forms the cornerstone of Jewish faith. For faith to endure, the accuracy of that mountain conversation must be unmistakable. The Jews at Sinai must be absolutely certain that they were listening directly to Hashem and not to a prophetic translation. Without that absolute certainty, Jewish faith would never survive. If Moshe were a more seasoned orator, the directness of our encounter with Hashem could have been questioned. Perhaps the commandments were a product of Moshe's imagination, or just flowery rhetoric, rather than a direct missive from Hashem. By positioning a heavy tongued speaker on top of the mountain, it was clear to all that all the content at Sinai was Hashem given. Sinai was based on absolute facts of direct revelation rather than on speculation, prophecy or human projection. Ironically, Moshe's speech limitations made it easier to separate these facts from his personality. The Swirl of Opinions In the 21st century we face our own struggle to separate fact from personality. It has become more and more difficult to obtain accurate information untainted by personal opinions. Social media has altered the flow of information, by providing a universal and easily accessible platform for strongly held opinions. Social media provides an endless buffet of personal opinion, but there isn't much fact on the menu. Furthermore, by carefully curating and selecting our sources of information, we trap ourselves in echo chambers, listening only to the views of those we agree with, and rarely encountering different views. News outlets are no longer information providers but loud and fanatical megaphones, patriotically broadcasting political agendas. In this storm of swirling opinions, it is impossible to

discern honest facts from personal observations. In the past, humanity had little need for "fact checkers" as accuracy was implicit in conversation. Our dependence upon factcheckers, who are assigned to monitor accuracy, is a sad reflection of the sunken state of human communication in the modern world of polarized politics and sharply divided outlooks.

Tragically, we become our own greatest victims. Honesty and deception are each contagious. The more honest our outside world is, the more honest our internal world becomes, and the more accurate we can be in self-assessment, self-awareness and personal growth. A world in which opinions masquerade as fact, erodes our ability to honestly assess our own experiences and behavior. Intellectual honesty and personal honesty have become rare commodities in a world which distorts fact and fiction. It is important to restore the balance between fact and opinion. It is vital to write and speak in a balanced fashion and to present fact as apart from opinion. We should value those who offer their opinion but also admit that other opinions can be drawn from identical facts. We should listen to those who "suggest" rather than those who attempt to convince or indoctrinate. We should value inner wisdom not cheap opinion. We need more quiet people like Moshe and fewer shrill bullhorns

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Insights into Halacha

For the week ending 2 February 2013 / 21 Shevat 5773

The Colored Water Caper

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Red Alert

Several months ago, pleasure seekers at Australia's famous Bondi (pronounced Bond-eye) Beach, located in the Sydney suburb of Bondi, were left high and dry when a Crimson Tide rolled in, effectively transforming its normally tranquil waters into the 'Red Sea'. This rare natural phenomenon, known as an algal bloom, occurs when there is a rapid increase or accumulation in the production of microscopic algae (dinoflagellates, usually toxic phytoplankton) in an aquatic system. This results in a visible coloration of the water, typically taking on a reddish hue. Apparently all was not "fair dinkum" for the Aussies. Not that it's any consolation for those robbed of a pleasure swim, nonetheless, at least this gives us an inkling of what Makkas Dam might have seemed like, as well as helping us understand an interesting halacha.

Colored Water?

The Shulchan Aruch[1] rules, as did the Tur before him, and based on a Mishna in Maseches Yadayim, that regarding Netilas Yadayim for eating bread[2], if the water's appearance has changed, whether by itself or due to something else falling inside it or due to its location, that water is pasul, disqualified for being used for washing purposes[3]. This would mean that it would be prohibited to use water during "red tide" to wash for Hamotzi.

Yet, many authorities argue on part of the Shulchan Aruch's statement. They point out that the Mishna does not actually mention the water color being changed "by itself" with no outside stimulus as making the water assur. The Mishna only mentions the other criteria, namely different types of inks and dyes falling in, for prohibiting colored water! Additionally, regarding such 'dyed water' for use as a mikva, only when the color has changed due to something else falling in would such a

mikva be invalidated, and not when the color has changed by itself[4]. It stands to reason that the rules of Netilas Yadayim, which are a Takanas Chachamim, cannot be any stricter than those regarding the Biblical mikva!

A further proof cited is that the Rambam[5], when codifying this halacha, omitted any mention of water whose color has been changed by itself being prohibited. Therefore, many halachic decisors, including the Taz, Magen Avraham, Gr"a, Pri Megadim, Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, and Mishna Berura[6] rule that water whose color has been changed by itself is perfectly permissible to be used for Netilas Yadayim. Accordingly, this would mean that 'red tide' water due to an algal bloom would in fact be permitted for Netilas Yadayim, as no one added anything and it is a natural phenomenon that actually occurs on a microscopic level.

Color Coded

However, other authorities disagree, concurring with the Tur and Shulchan Aruch's stringent ruling. They explain that there truly is no such thing as water changing color "by itself". It actually occurs when the water is sitting exposed to the elements, that it gets contaminated, possibly by (microscopic) organisms in the air, which change its color. It is only referred to as changing by itself because nothing was purposely added to the water that might change its color. Proof is that if someone would place water in an airtight sealed clear container, its appearance would remain unchanged.

These authorities argue that the Rema, who does not comment on the Shulchan Aruch's ruling, and perhaps even the Rambam, would actually agree to this. Although the Rambam did not mention water whose appearance changed "by itself", he nonetheless added that water whose color was changed "by the ground" is passul for use for Netilas Yadayim. These decisors opine that it is possible that this was his intent, referring to water sitting exposed on the ground whose appearance was changed naturally. Additionally, they point out that Chazal, and later the Shulchan Aruch, use extremely strong terms for the punishments awaiting those negligent with washing Netilas Yadayim properly[7]. Therefore, they maintain that one may not compare it to a mikva, which would not become invalidated with this type of water. In fact, many halachic authorities, including the Prisha, Chida, Ma'amar Mordechai, Shulchan HaTahor, Ben Ish Chai, Aruch Hashulchan, Kaf Hachaim, and Chazon Ish[8] rule that water whose color has been changed by itself is prohibited to be used for Netilas Yadayim. This would also seemingly include our 'Crimson Tide'.

Breaking Out the Bubbly?

This whole background will help us understand a more common case. Have you ever filled up your cup to wash for Hamotzi and found the water a bit whitish, cloudy or bubbly? Usually, the water settles down and returns to its normal appearance after a few seconds. A quite common question is whether one needs to wait for the water to settle down in order to wash, as it would have the status of water whose appearance changed "by itself", or whether this is not the same issue. Many contemporary poskim, including Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer, Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul, Rav Nosson Gestetner, and the Yalkut Yosef[9] rule that there is no reason to wait for the water to settle. They explain that the reason the water looks this way at first is due to air pressure in the pipes. Therefore, they maintain that this is not the same case as 'shinui mareh machmas atzmo' as the water's appearance did not truly change. They bring proof from the Shulchan Aruch himself who rules that if the water's appearance changed due to rocks and dirt getting mixed in, then it is still kosher for Netilas Yadayim[10]. Therefore, a temporary whitish tinge or bubbles in the water cannot be considered any worse for Netilas Yadayim. Yet, other authorities, including the Minchas Yitzchak, Rav Yaakov Blau zt"l, and the Netei Gavriel[11], still maintain that even though washing with such water would be permissible, it is nevertheless preferable to wait until the water clears before washing l'chatchila.

When one views the world through the lens of halacha, current events, Crimson Tides, and even simple tasks like hand-washing take on a whole other dimension.

Postscript[12]: There is another interesting related topic about whether water with bubbles has the halachic status of water: drinking seltzer during Shalosh Seudos (Seudat Shlishit). There is an obscure custom of not drinking water during Bein Hashmashos on Shabbos. This is

loosely based on the Rema's comment in O.C. 291, 2 about the dangers of drinking well water during this time period[13]. The Steipler Gaon, as well as his son Rav Chaim Kanievisky[14], maintain that this includes seltzer (which is intrinsically water with carbon dioxide added in), as the bubbles do not detract from the water's status. However, Rav Moshe Halberstam zt"l, citing many earlier authorities including the Maharsham[15], argues that seltzer is not included in the water category in respect to this minhag. A little fizz goes a long way.

The author wishes to thank his friend and talmid, renowned business consultant and marketing specialist Rabbi Issamar Ginzberg, whose sheilah was the impetus for this author's interest and research in this topic.

[1]Tur / Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 160, 1), Mishnayos Yadayim (Ch.1, 3).

[2]The Mishna Berura (158, 1; see also Shaar HaTzion ad loc. 1 & 2) gives an excellent summary of the sources and reasons why Netilas Yadayim is mandated before eating bread, one of them being that it is alluded to by the pasuk in Parshas Kedoshim (Vayikra Chapter 20, verse 7) "V'hiskadeeshtem, V'heyisem Kedoshim", "And you shall sanctify yourselves, and be holy". The Gemara (Brachos 53b) clarifies that "And you shall sanctify yourselves" refers to washing the hands before the meal, Mayim Rishonim, and "and be holy" refers to washing the hands after the meal, Mayim Acharonim. In other words, by washing our hands before making a bracha (in this case before eating bread), we are properly sanctifying ourselves. See previous article titled "Mayim Acharonim, Chova?". Another reason why we wash is to be akin to the Kohanim eating Terumah, who had to eat their food in purity. One should not make light of this obligation as the Shulchan Aruch writes (O.C. 158, 9) extremely strong ramifications for one who does, based on three separate maamarei Chazal (Mishnayos Ediyus Ch. 5 Mishna 6, Gemara Shabbos 62b, and Gemara Sotah 4b). See also Shmiras HaGuf VeHanefesh (vol. 1, Ch. 55 at length).

[3]This halacha is gleaned from the water in the Kiyor in the Beis HaMikdash, used to wash the Kohanim's hands and feet. Just as if that water's appearance was changed it would be rendered unfit for use, so too our water would - Ra'ah (Brachos 53b s.v. chamei), cited by the Beis Yosef (O.C. 161, 1 s.v. tzarich) and Mishna Berura (ad loc. 1).

[4]Mishnayos Mikvaos (Ch.7, Mishna 3), Rambam (Hilchos Mikvaos Ch.7, 12), Beis Yosef and Shulchan Aruch (Y"D 201, 25 - 27).

[5]Rambam (Hilchos Brachos Ch.6, 7).

[6]O.C. 160 ad loc. - Taz (1), Magen Avraham (2), Gr"a (1), Pri Megadim (M.Z. end 1), Shulchan Aruch HaRav (1), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (40, 8), and Mishna Berura (160, 2).

[7]See end footnote 2.

[8]O.C. 160 ad loc. - Prisha (2), Chida (Birkei Yosef 2), Ma'amar Mordechai (1), Shulchan HaTahor (1), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Kedoshim 1), Aruch Hashulchan (3, who writes that the appearance change is due to maggots and flies), Kaf Hachaim (5), Chazon Ish (O.C. 22, 7 & 13). Additionally, the Bach (end 1) who argues on this rule, nevertheless concludes that if at all possible it is preferable to be stringent. Similarly, the Machatzis Hashekel (end 2) who likewise refutes this rule still concludes that if after washing with the colored water one finds water whose appearance has not changed, it would be prudent to wash again without a bracha.

[9]Rav Elyashiv's opinion is cited in Shu"t Rivevos Efraim (vol. 6, 410), Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer (Shu"t Even Yisrael vol. 7, 11), Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul (Shu"t Ohr L'Tzion vol. 2, Ch. 11, 7), Rav Nosson Gestetner (Shu"t L'Horos Nosson vol. 4, O.C. 8), and the Yalkut Yosef (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch O.C. 160, 2). The Chazon Ish (O.C. 22, 9 s.v. sham) implies this way as well, regarding permitting water that got 'dirty' due to something small falling in that does not intrinsically change the water's actual color.

[10]Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 160, 9). It still must be water that a dog would drink. Although there are two different explanations why the Shulchan Aruch's ruling holds true, it is possible that both would apply here.

[The Pri Megadim (ad loc. M.Z. 1) explains that since in the end the water itself remains truly clear as the dirt and mud do not actually change the color of the water itself, it is not deemed a problem. The Shulchan Aruch HaRav (ibid.) maintains that since it is the derech of the 'gidul' of water to have dirt and mud mixed in, it won't affect the water's status. See also Mishna Berura (ad loc., 3).]

[11]Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak (vol. 9, 13), Netei Gavriel (Ch.66, 7, pg. 441). This author personally heard this psak of Rav Blau's zt"l, to be

choshesh l'chatchila for the Minchas Yitzchak's position, approximately a week before he was niftar. The Minchas Yitzchak held that the hetter of rocks and dirt mixing into the water was not a comparable case according to several opinions and therefore it would be preferable to wait until the water settled down.

[12]Thanks are due to Rabbi Yaakov Nissan for pointing out this related interesting machlokes.

[13]See Shmiras HaGuf VeHanefesh (vol. 2, 130) and Shu"t Divrei Moshe (O.C. 13) at length, explaining how this custom can be sourced in the Rema's enigmatic and seemingly unrelated ruling.

[14]The Steipler's minhag is found in Orchos Rabbeinu (vol. 1, 109). Rav Chaim Kanievsky's short responsa on topic, defending his father's

shitta, is printed in Shu"t Divrei Moshe (O.C. end 14). He concludes that it is "kasha lehakel b'makom sakana".

[15]Shu"t Divrei Moshe (O.C. 14) at length; Maharsham (Shu"t vol. 3, 375; Daas Torah O.C. 158 & Y"D 339, 5).

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda.

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לע"נ

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