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**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

The Lord, so to speak, according to Rashi and the Talmud, longs for the previous generations of the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel who seemingly bore their trials and difficulties without complaint even though God's revelation to them was in a lesser level than was the case with Moshe. Yet we do find that the patriarchs, Avraham and Yaakov did challenge God at moments of crisis.

Avraham says to God; "What can you grant me as I go childless?" And Yaakov says to God: "And You promised me that You would be good to me [and now Eisav threatens to destroy me.]" So why is the Lord disturbed by Moshe's statement that the lot of the Jewish people in Egypt has not yet been improved? Where do Moshe's words differ radically from those of Avraham and Yaakov? And why does God, so to speak, long for the previous generations over the behavior of the current generation? And according to the aggadic interpretation of the verses in the parsha, Moshe is punished for asking that obvious question as to why the Jewish situation has shown no improvement even though Moshe is apparently fulfilling God's mission accurately and punctually. Where is the shortcoming that provokes such a critical response from Heaven?

I think that the answer perhaps lies in recognizing the difference between the individual Jew as an individual and the belief in the fate of the Jewish people as a nation and community. The individual Jew, Avraham, Yaakov, you and me, regularly face crises and difficulties in our lives as individuals. We have no guarantee that the Lord will extricate us from our difficulties.

As Yaakov put it; "Perhaps my sins will have cancelled out any Heavenly promises of success and aid." Avraham realizes that perhaps God's promises to him can also be fulfilled through his faithful disciple and servant Eliezer. The doubts of the patriarchs are personal, not national. They never for a moment waver in their belief in the ultimate survival and triumph of the Jewish people, of the truth and justice of their cause and code, and of the validity of the mission of the Jewish people. Moshe's moment of complaint is not only personal, but it is national. Maybe this people will never leave Egyptian bondage. Maybe the Jewish people as a nation will not be able to come to Sinai and accept the Torah and become a kingdom of priests and a holy people. Maybe they are not worthy of the grandiose promises made to them.

Moshe is forced to account for doubting the people and implying that God has not chosen well, for the troubles of that people have not subsided. One can doubt one's own place in the story of Israel. One can never doubt the validity of Israel and the Heavenly promises made to it itself.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

**Freedom and Truth**

**Vaera**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

Why did Moses tell Pharaoh, if not a lie, then less than the full truth? Here is the conversation between him and Pharaoh after the fourth plague, arov, "swarms of insects"[1]:

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land." But Moses said, "That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the Lord our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? We must take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, as He commands us."

Exodus 8:27-28

Not just here but throughout, Moses makes it seem as if all he is asking for is permission for the people to undertake a three-day journey, to offer sacrifices to God and then (by implication) to return to Egypt. So, in their first appearance before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron say:

"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let My people go, so that they may hold a festival to Me in the wilderness.'"

Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go."

Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or He may strike us with plagues or with the sword."

Ex. 5:1-3

God even specifies this before the mission has begun, saying to Moses at the Burning Bush: "You and the elders of Israel will then go to the king of Egypt. You must tell him, 'The Lord, God of the Hebrews, revealed Himself to us. Now we request that you allow us to take a three-day journey into the desert, to sacrifice to the Lord our God'" (Ex. 3:18).

The impression remains to the very end. After the Israelites have left, we read:

The king of Egypt received news that the people were escaping. Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds regarding the people, and said, "What have we done? How could we have released Israel from doing our work?"

Ex. 14:5

At no stage does Moses say explicitly that he is proposing the people should be allowed to leave permanently, never to return. He talks of a three-day journey. There is an argument between him and Pharaoh as to who is to go. Only the adult males? Only the people, not the cattle? Moses consistently asks for permission to worship God, at some place that is not Egypt. But he does not speak about freedom or the Promised Land. Why not? Why does he create, and not correct, a false impression? Why can he not say openly what he means?

The commentators offer various explanations. Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzatto (Italy, 1800-1865) says that it was impossible for Moses to tell the truth to a tyrant like Pharaoh. Rabbi Yaakov Mecklenburg (Germany, 1785-1865, Ha-Ktav v'ha-Kabbalah) says that technically Moses did not tell a lie. He did indeed mean that he wanted the people to be free to make a journey to worship God, and he never said explicitly that they would return.

The Abarbanel (Lisbon 1437 – Venice 1508) says that God told Moses deliberately to make a small request, to demonstrate Pharaoh's cruelty and indifference to his slaves. All they were asking for was a brief respite from their labours to offer sacrifices to God. If he refused this, he was indeed a tyrant. Rav Elhanan Samet (Iyyunim be-Parshot Ha-Shevua, Exodus, 189) cites an unnamed commentator who says simply that this was war between Pharaoh and the Jewish people, and in war it is permitted, indeed sometimes necessary, to deceive.

Actually, however, the terms of the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh are part of a wider pattern that we have already observed in the Torah. When Jacob leaves Laban's house, with all his family, we read: "Jacob decided to go behind the back of Laban the Aramean, and did not tell him that he was leaving" (Genesis 31:20). Laban protests this behaviour:

"How could you do this? You went behind my back and led my daughters away like prisoners of war! Why did you have to leave so secretly? You went behind my back and told me nothing!"

Gen. 31:26-27

Jacob again has to tell at best a half-truth when Esau suggests that they travel together after the brothers' reunion: "You know that the children are weak, and I have responsibility for the nursing sheep and cattle. If they are driven hard for even one day, all the sheep will die. Please go ahead of me, my lord" (Gen. 33:13-14). This, though not strictly a lie, is a diplomatic excuse.

When Jacob's sons are trying to rescue their sister Dina who has been raped and abducted by Shechem the Hivite, they "replied deceitfully" (Gen. 34:13) when Shechem and his father proposed that the entire family should come and settle with them, telling them that they could only do so if all the males of the town underwent circumcision.

Earlier still we find that three times Abraham and Isaac, forced to leave home because of famine, have to pretend that they are their wives' brothers not their husbands because they fear that otherwise they will be killed so that Sarah or Rebecca could be taken into the king's harem (Gen. 12, Gen. 20, Gen. 26).

These six episodes cannot be entirely accidental or coincidental to the biblical narrative as a whole. The implication seems to be this: Outside the promised land Jews in the biblical age are in danger if they tell the truth. They are at constant risk of being killed or at best enslaved.

Why? Because they are powerless in an age of power. They are a small family, at best a small nation, in an age of empires. They have to use their wits to survive. By and large they do not tell lies but they can create a false impression. This is not how things should be. But it is how they were before Jews had their own land, their one and only defensible space. It is how people in impossible situations are forced to be if they are to exist at all.

No-one should be forced to live a lie. In Judaism, truth is the seal of God and the essential precondition of trust between human beings. But when your people is being enslaved, its male children murdered, you have to liberate them by whatever means are possible. Moses, who had already seen that his first encounter with Pharaoh made things worse for his people – they still had to make the same quota of bricks but now also had to gather their own straw (Ex. 5:6-8) – did not want to risk making them worse still.

The Torah here is not justifying deceit. To the contrary, it is condemning a system in which telling the truth may put your life at risk, as it still does in many tyrannical or totalitarian societies today. Judaism – a religion of dissent, questioning, and “arguments for the sake of heaven” – is a faith that values intellectual honesty and moral truthfulness above all things. The Psalmist says:

“Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord and who shall stand in His holy place? One who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not taken My name in vain nor sworn deceitfully.”

Psalms 24:3-4

Malachi says of one who speaks in God's name: “The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips” (Malachi 2:6). Every Amidah ends with the prayer, “My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from deceitful speech.”

What the Torah is telling us in these six narratives in Genesis and the seventh in Exodus is the connection between freedom and truth. Where there is freedom there can be truth. Otherwise there cannot. A society where people are forced to be less than fully honest merely to survive and not provoke further oppression is not the kind of society God wants us to make.

[1] Some say the arov was a plague of wild animals.

[CS -late breaking dvar torah from torahweb added:

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### **Rabbi Mordechai Willig Sharing the Pain**

I "These are the names of the sons of Levi in order of their birth: Gershon, Kehas, and Merari" (Shemos 6:16). The Shelah asks, why does it say "the names of" regarding Levi's sons and not regarding Reuven and Shimon's sons (6:14:15)? The Shelah explains that Shevet Levi did not suffer in galus. Levi knew this and wanted to include himself in the distress of the community (l'hishtateif b'tza'ar ha'tzibbur). Therefore, he called the names of his sons after the galus: Gershon, as they were geirim (strangers) in a land not theirs (see Breishis 15:13); Kehas, as their teeth were kaihos - set on edge (see Rashi Vayikra 26:20); and Merari, as the Mitzrim embittered (vayamararu) their lives (Shemos 1:14). From here one learns to join in the pain of the community even if the suffering does not touch him.

These names were given before galus Mitzrayim (Breishis 46:11). Presumably, Levi was not only privy to the ensuing galus, but also to the fact that his descendants would be spared (see Rashi Shemos 5:4).

II The phrase "in order of their birth" (letoldosam) is also unique to Shevet Levi. Perhaps, the three names reflect the three stages of galus. The galus lasted two hundred and ten years (Rashi Breishis 42:2). As long as Levi himself was alive, there was no slavery (Rashi Shemos 6:16). This period, which lasted ninety-four years (Sifsei Chachamim), is represented by Gershon, as they lived in a land not theirs. The remaining one hundred and sixteen years of slavery were not identical. Initially, their teeth were set on edge from the hard labor (Shemos 1:11), corresponding to Kehas. The bitterness intensified thirty years later, the third stage represented by Merari. Amram, son of Kehas, named his daughter Miriam (from mar), because of the increased bitterness. This period lasted eighty-six years, which was Miriam's age at yetzias Mitzrayim (Yalkut Shimoni 165, see Zayin Ra'anan note 8).

III The legacy of Levi, passed down to Kehas and Amram, who named Miriam based on the suffering which did not reach him, extended to Moshe Rabbeinu as well. On his first very first foray outside of Pharaoh's house, Moshe saw the suffering of his brethren (Shemos 2:11). He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over them (Rashi). Remarkably, in his comment on "G-d (Elokim) saw B'nai Yisrael, and G-d knew" (Shemos 2:25) Rashi uses a similar expression: "He focused His heart upon them, and did not hide His eyes from them." Hashem was responding to the crying out of B'nai Yisrael because of their suffering (Shemos 2:23). Similarly, "He will call me and I will answer him, I am with him in distress (imo Anochi b'tzara)" (Tehillim 91:16). Thus, Moshe fulfilled imitatio dei, by being in distress over Am Yisrael's suffering.

IV The very next passuk (3:1) begins: Moshe was grazing the sheep of Yisro. The Medrash Raba (2:2) relates the Moshe had mercy on a wayward sheep and carried it on his shoulder. Hashem said, as a result, "You will shepherd my flock Yisrael". Earlier, Moshe saved Yisro's daughters from the shepherds who drove them from the well (Shemos 2:17). They reported to Yisro, "A Mitzri man saved us from the shepherds" (2:19). The Medrash (Breishis Raba 36:3) teaches: Moshe is greater than Noah. Noah descended from "ish tzaddik" (Briehis 6:9) to a drunkard - "ish ha'adama" (9:20). Moshe ascended from "ish Mitzri" (Shemos 2:19) to "ish Elokim" (Devarim 33:1), a man of G-d. The Meshech Chochma (Breishis 9:20) explains the contrast: Noah was self-absorbed in his righteousness and did not rebuke his generation. Moshe was forced to flee Mitzrayim because he did intervene to save a fellow Jew (Shemos 2:11-15, see Rashi 2:15). [Alternatively, he saved Yisro's daughters who called him ish Mitzri] Logically, one focused on his own service of Hashem would reach greater heights than one who sacrifices himself for the needs of others. Yet, the Medrash teaches, the opposite is true. Noah, the "tzaddik in peltz", who ignored his surroundings, became a drunkard. Moshe, who cared for anyone who suffered: Bnai Yisrael, a victim of a Mitzri's beating (Shemos 2:11,12), damsels in distress, and even a wayward sheep, reached the highest level attainable, a man of G-d. In contrast to Noah, he saved his entire generation (Medrash Devarim Raba 11:3).

V Today, 22 Teves 5785, marks exactly sixteen months since the pogrom of 22 Tishrei, Simchas Torah 5784, Oct. 7, 2023. The atrocities of rapacious murderers are unprecedented since the Holocaust. Ever since then, the soldiers and citizens of Israel have suffered terribly: lives and limbs lost, homes abandoned, missiles and drones from faraway foes forcing millions into protected rooms. As Mitzrayim of old, they, our enemies, have embittered our lives. Now, as then, we have cried out to Hashem to end our suffering. We, American Jewry, like Levi, must include ourselves in the suffering of our embattled Israelis, even if it does not reach us. Like Moshe, we must focus our eyes and hearts to be distressed over them. The exponential rise in antisemitic acts and rhetoric reminds us that we, too, are in galus. We represent Gershon, strangers even in this kingdom of kindness (Igras Moshe, Choshen Mishpat 2:29), notwithstanding unprecedented wealth and prominence. All our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land have suffered, in vastly varying degrees, during these difficult wartime months, set on edge reminiscent of Kehas. And thousands of acheinu B'nei Yisrael, batzara u'bashivya, in distress and in captivity, and their families, are victims of

life-ending and life-altering terror, tragedies corresponding to Merari. May Hashem respond to the sincere crying out of worldwide Jewry sharing the distress, past and present, in Eretz Yisrael, as He did in Mitzrayim. May He focus His heart and His eyes upon Klal Yisrael, even as we focus ours on the victims of terror and trauma. "As in the days when you left the land of Mitzrayim show them (Am Yisrael and/or our enemies) wonders" (Micha 7:15, see MHK edition).]

[CS -late breaking dvar torah from R' Frand added:

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Rav Frand

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Parshas Vaera

The Key to Solving Personal Challenges Is to Help Someone Else With That Challenge

print

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1321 – Should You Make a Bracha on Seeing President Donald Trump? Good Shabbos!

The Key to Solving Personal Challenges Is to Help Someone Else With That Challenge

A wealthy Jew who had fallen on hard times once came to the Chasam Sofer (Rav Moshe Schreiber 1762-1826; Pressburg) and asked him for a bracha (blessing) or an eitzah (idea) to help him recoup his money. The Chasam Sofer told him that he should give money to another Jew who has fallen on hard times.

This Jew was not thrilled with the eitzah given him by the Chasam Sofer. He suggested: Maybe the honorable Rav did not hear what I said. I said that I have fallen on hard times. I need an eitzah and I need a bracha. What are you telling me? To give out money now? I don't have any spare money at this time! I am facing bankruptcy as it is.

The Chasam Sofer told him that there is a pasuk in the Torah that teaches us that this is the appropriate eitzah when a person has fallen on hard times. Which pasuk in the Torah? The pasuk in Parshas Vaera says, "V'gam (And I have also) heard the screams of the Children of Israel" (Shemos 6:5) The Chasam Sofer asked what the word v'gam implies. Who else heard it other than the Ribono shel Olam? What does it mean "And I also heard...?" The Chasam Sofer answered that it must be that in Mitzrayim, every Jew, when he heard his fellow Jew cry out in pain from the work, felt badly for that other Jew. He then cried not only for himself, but he cried for the other Jew as well.

Therefore, "I also heard the crying..." means that I heard Jews crying for the pain of other Jews. The Chasam Sofer said that we see from here that the path to inspire the Ribono shel Olam to have mercy and save a person from the troubles he is in, is to become a partner and to feel mercy and try to do something about someone else's problems. That is the segula – to give to someone else. You will get out of your financial hole however you will get out of it. But the eitzah is that "v'gam ani sha'mati."

The Meshech Chochma (Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk 1843-1926) says the same idea in different words and in a different context. The pasuk says "Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon and commanded them regarding the Children of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." (Shemos 6:13) Chazal say that Moshe commanded them regarding the law of freeing slaves (after six years). While still in Mitzrayim, the Ribono shel Olam gave Moshe the parsha of shiluach avadim! The Meshech Chochma notes that this seems like a most inappropriate context for commanding these yet-Jewish slaves to send their own slaves free! Who had avadim? The Meshech Chochma says that wherever the Yiden (Jews) found themselves, there have always been wealthier Yiden and less wealthy

Yiden. There is always someone who figures out an angle how to make more money. The wealthier Yiden in Mitzrayim bought Jewish slaves from the Egyptians. These Jewish slaves worked for their Jewish owners. Moshe Rabbeinu tells these people, do you know how the Ribono shel Olam is going to emancipate us? When you go ahead and free your slaves, that will elicit from the Ribono shel Olam to free His slaves as well.

This is the same idea that the Chasam Sofer expresses. A person needs to do more than be aware of his brethren's pain. He must actually feel that pain and do something about it! This is the way to elicit that same response from the Ribono shel Olam for yourself.

An incident is brought from the Rebbe of Zlotshov. After a day of hard work in a concentration camp, the Rebbe came to his barracks and was about to eat his daily ration of bread. He noticed another Jew lying on his 'bed' who was literally dying of hunger. This Rebbe took his own portion of bread and gave it to this Jew. The Jew gave him a bracha: "I bentsh you that you should get out of this place alive."

This was no minor act of sacrifice on the part of the Rebbe. It is not like if you skipped supper one night, you could make up for it with a larger meal for breakfast the next morning. Now the Rebbe was lying there on his bed, famished. He said to the Ribono shel Olam "I received a bracha from this person, but I am not going to make it either!"

At that moment, a kapo walked into the barracks and saw the Rebbe of Zlotshov and noticed the dire condition he was in. The kapo had a sack of sugar cubes in his pocket and he gave the sugar cubes to the Rebbe. The Rebbe said that those sugar cubes saved his life, and he felt that the bracha of the Jew to whom he gave the piece of bread was fulfilled. He received those sugar cubes in the merit that he shared his last piece of bread with that other person. "Anyone who has mercy on his fellow creature, has mercy upon himself from Heaven." (Maseches Shabbos 151b).

This is the same concept as the Rabbinic teaching: "Someone who prays on behalf of his friend and he needs the same thing – he will be answered first." (Bava Kamma 92a). If your daughter needs a shidduch, daven that someone else's daughter should find a shidduch. If a person needs a refuah, pray for the refuah of someone else. The nature of human beings is not to do that. "I have enough tzores (suffering). I have my own problems!" However, that is not the right attitude. The right attitude is that even if you have your own problems, the 'key' to getting out of those problems is to do something for someone else.

This is the lesson of "v'gam (and also) I heard the cries of Bnei Yisrael."

\Current Pain Sometimes Mitigates Much Greater Pain Later

The beginning of Parshas Vaera is really a continuation of the end of Parshas Shemos. Parshas Shemos ends with Moshe Rabbeinu saying to the Ribono shel Olam "From the time I came before Pharaoh, he has made matters worse for this nation and You have not saved Your nation." (Shemos 5:23). The Ribono shel Olam's response to Moshe's complaint is at the beginning of Parshas Vaera: The Avos (Patriarchs) did not have such complaints (when things were apparently not going as I promised) and you complain about such matters.

The Medrash says, on the pasuk where Moshe complains that matters have been made worse, that the Ribono shel Olam responded to Moshe with a pasuk from Koheles: Tov achris davar m'reishiso. (Koheles 7:8) The literal interpretation of this pasuk is that the end of something is better than its beginning. However, the Sefas Emes interprets differently. The Sefas Emes says that Moshe Rabbeinu was correct. "What You are doing to this generation of people is too much! You have caused too many bad things to happen to these people." The Sefas Emes concurs: The people did not deserve all these tzores (suffering). So why did the Ribono shel Olam do it? He did it because He knew that the tzores now would mitigate or erase future tzores. Therefore, in the larger picture, it was worth it for them to suffer now beyond what they deserved, in order to save future generations from even worse tzores.

We shared a similar thought several weeks ago: When Yosef met Binyomin, he started crying because of the Beis Hamikdash that would be destroyed in the future. At that time, we asked why Yosef was crying

THEN about the Beis Hamikdash? He is finally reunited with his brother Binyomin after all these years. Why is he thinking about the Beis Hamikdash at specifically that moment? We mentioned an insight from the Sefas Emes along the same lines: If Yosef would have been able to hold out longer and put the shevatim (tribes) through greater pain and anguish, the Batei Hamikdash would not have been destroyed.

This means that the shevatim had been experiencing a kaparah (atonement) for what Klal Yisrael was destined to undergo in future generations. Had they suffered more now, then in the future, Jewish history would have been different. They would no longer have needed to endure the tzores that came to them in later generations. But since Yosef could not hold back any longer, their tzores at his hands was capped and the balance was held in abeyance for the times when the Batei Mikdash would be destroyed.

This is the way the Ribono shel Olam sometimes works. One generation needs to suffer or one person needs to suffer or one family needs to suffer to save them from far greater tzores. Even though the pain right now is terrible, it saves them from worse pain in the future. Sometimes a person needs to undergo a very painful operation but it saves him from future pain. If he does not undergo this medical procedure now, it is going to be much worse for him in the future. On a very basic level, this is the case with inoculations. A person receives a flu shot or a pneumonia vaccine. It hurts now, but that pain pales in comparison to what would be if someone would not receive the shot. This is a very simplistic example, but it is the reality: The pain now sometimes precludes much greater pain.

This, the Sefas Emes explains, is the meaning of this pasuk in Koheles: *Tov achris davar m'reishiso*. The *achris* (end of the story) is sometimes better because of what happened earlier on. This is what the Ribono shel Olam says to Moshe Rabbeinu: You are right. I have dealt out too much punishment to this nation. They don't deserve it. But this is saving Klal Yisrael from terrible things in the future.

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The First Commandment: Find the Courage to Heal

"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 Vaera:

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 interpretation, 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 slaves 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 simple and moving, and is vital to the understanding of liberty in Judaism.

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 being free? That you learn to confer freedom on others.

The dictator, the control freak, or the abusive spouse or parent does not know how to give others freedom. He or she feels compelled to force others into the mold that he/she 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, insecurity, and confinement.

When I do not confront the parts in me that are wounded, my animal-soul consciousness which has developed myriads of coping mechanisms, emotions, drives, instincts, and belief systems to keep it safe and in control, will be running my inner operating system. Without even noticing it, I am trying to control the people around me through all types of creative and sometimes brilliant ways so that I can feel superficially safe and comfortable. My relationships and emotions are shaped by my internal wounds and terror—the need to survive in a scary and unsafe world.

In such a situation, how can I give up control? How can I celebrate otherness? How can I remain vulnerable, present, regulated, feeling your heartbeat with no agenda, when I need to put my heart on lockdown in order to survive, or I need to control you?

I am simply not capable of truly celebrating another person's life and individuality because I am desperate each moment for emotional oxygen; all I can think of is how to remain protected in a world that is dangerous. I may be aware of this, but I do feel the anxiety of manipulation.

Who is powerful? He who truly knows how to empower and trust. 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 internally the presence and heartbeat of the other? Can you enjoy the soaring success of your loved ones and constituents? Do you encourage them to spread their wings and maximize their potential? Can you allow others to shine?

Pharaoh may set you free physically. But former slaves can become present tyrants. People who were abused sometimes 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 could go to Pharaoh to let them go free was: One day you will be free. Remember that freedom is a gift; use it to free others.

As it turns out, this is a remarkable Talmudic insight. The first commandment ever given to the Jewish people was: Don't internalize what the Egyptians have done to you. Find the spark of freedom, the inner Divine core, that no trauma can tarnish or paralyze; that part has remained free and will cherish conferring it upon others.

Footnotes [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. ]

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## **This week's parsha mentions the marriage of Aharon and Elisheva... A Layman's Guide to Marriage**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question #1:

"A friend's son in Yeshiva in Israel got engaged to a local girl, and my friend was told that there will be a tena'im. I thought only chassidishe families do this."

Question #2:

"I was told that I should not include quotations from pesukim on my daughter's wedding invitation. Yet I see that 'everyone' does! Could you please explain the halacha?"

Question #3:

"I wish someone could walk me through all the halachic steps that we need in planning our daughter's wedding. I am afraid I'll forget to take care of something."

From the Engagement to the Wedding

Mazel tov!! Mazel tov!! Your daughter just became engaged to an amazing Yeshiva bachur from a wonderful family. You are in seventh heaven!

Virtually everyone plans some type of formal celebration when his or her child becomes engaged. Some call it a "lechayim," others a "vort," and still others a "tena'im." Since these differences are not inherently halachic, I am going to note only one point about this part of the simcha: Does one sign a tena'im shortly after announcing the engagement? In chassidishe circles, and in Eretz Yisrael even among "Israeli Litvishe" families, it is accepted that one finalizes the engagement by signing tena'im, which is an agreement between the two sets of parents what each will provide their child before the wedding and to conduct the wedding before a certain agreed-upon date. The climax of the engagement celebration is when this document is signed, read aloud, and the two mothers break a plate together. Those who want to know why we break a plate at a tena'im and a glass at the chupah are referred to the commentaries who discuss this issue. (See Pri Megadim, 560: Mishbetzos Zahav 4 and Keser Rosh #114.)

In "American" non-chassidishe circles, these arrangements are more informal, and the two parties usually do not sign any formal tena'im. Some sign a type of tena'im at the wedding prior to the chupah.

Invitations

There actually are a few halachos about printing invitations. One may not quote any pesukim in invitations and, according to most authorities, the wording of an invitation should not use kesav ashuris, the Hebrew writing used for Sifrei Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzos (Shu"t Rav Pe'alim, Yoreh Deah 4:32). This is because kesav ashuris has sanctity and should not be used for mundane matters (Shu"t Radbaz 1:45; Rama, Yoreh Deah 284:2; Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 283:3). We should note that the Kesav Sofer writes that his father, the Chasam Sofer, permitted using kesav ashuris in wedding invitations and did so himself, contending that since making a wedding is a mitzvah, the invitation to the seudas mitzvah is not considered a mundane use. Nevertheless, the Kesav Sofer concludes that it is better not to use kesav ashuris for invitations (Shu"t Kesav Sofer, Even HaEzer #22 at end).

Shomrim

Why do the chassan and kallah require shomrim? From what time do the chassan and kallah require shomrim?

The Gemara says that three people require a shomer: an ill person, a choson and a kallah (Berachos 54b). Although many people have the custom of providing shomrim from the ufruf Shabbos, technically the choson and kallah require shomrim only from the wedding through the week of sheva berachos. The prevalent practice is that this includes only when they leave their house. This means that during sheva berachos week, the choson may attend minyan only if someone escorts him from his house and he may leave his bride without a shomer when he does, although some hold that a choson can go to shul without a shomer (told to me in the name of Rav Moshe Feinstein).

Notwithstanding what I wrote immediately above, it is common practice to provide the choson and kallah with shomrim on the day of the wedding also.

Things to Bring to the Wedding

The following can function as a useful checklist of items that should be brought to the wedding:

(1) Kesubah

From personal experience, I suggest bringing not only the kesubah one intends to use, but also several blank extra forms.

(2) Kittel

If the choson will wear one.

(3) Candles and Matches

Four candles for the shushbinin, who are the two couples that will escort the choson and kallah to the chupah, and matches with which to light the candles. The matches are also useful in the creation of ashes that will be placed on the choson's forehead before he walks to the chupah.

(4) Wine

Many deliberately bring a bottle of white wine, a position that I advocate, to avoid concerns of red wine staining a white wedding dress.

(I am aware of some poskim who prefer that one use red wine at a chupah. However, I prefer white wine, since it spares the worry of a stained gown.)

#### (5) Berachos

Cards, or something similar, with all the berachos for the various honorees.

#### (6) Ring

The wedding ring. This should be a ring without a precious stone (Even HaEzer 31:2). Some rabbonim prefer that it have no design at all. It is important that the ring be the property of the choson. In other words, the choson must either purchase it with his own money, or whoever purchased it must have given it to the choson as a gift and the choson picked it up to acquire it. So, if the bride wants to use her late great-grandmother's wedding ring, the current rightful owner of that ring must give it to the choson with no strings attached, prior to the wedding, and he must make an act of kinyan, halachic acquisition, to possess it, such as by picking it up with this intention.

#### (7) Glass

A well-wrapped glass that will be broken. (Note that the Rama [Even HaEzer 65:3] states that the choson should break the glass that was used to hold the wine of the wedding beracha. Although I have seen this actually practiced, it is definitely not the common contemporary custom.)

#### (8) Key

Also, make sure that someone has the key to the yichud room, or that it is left unlocked!

#### (9) Choson and kallah

Of course, someone should make sure that the choson and the kallah get to the wedding.

Wow!! We have actually gotten all the way to the wedding! What happens next?

#### The Choson Tish

If the tena'im were not performed earlier, some people make a tena'im now. If the tena'im will take place at the wedding, one should have a plate handy that one intends to break.

The kesubah is filled out and signed at the choson tish. (In Eretz Yisrael, many follow the practice of not signing the kesubah until the chupah itself.)

At this point, we introduce the mesader kiddushin, the talmid chacham who is honored with making certain that the halachic aspects of the wedding are performed correctly. Although this should go without saying, one should make sure that the mesader kiddushin is qualified for his role, including the extensive laws regarding how to write the kesubah correctly. I emphasize this point because of the dozens of times that I have been at weddings in which the mesader kiddushin is not halachically qualified for the job.

#### Kabalas Kinyan

Following the instructions of the mesader kiddushin, the choson lifts up a pen, handkerchief, or other item as a means of kinyan in the presence of two witnesses. By doing this, he assumes the financial responsibilities of a husband and future father.

#### Should We Use the Same Witnesses?

There are two prevalent practices as to how many sets of witnesses are appointed, and which practice is followed depends on the preference of the mesader kiddushin. The more common American practice is that each part of the ceremony -- the signing of the kesubah, the kiddushin itself, and the yichud -- is witnessed by different sets of witnesses, in order to honor more people. In Eretz Yisrael, the common practice is to have one set of witnesses for all the stages. The Tashbeitz (2:7) explains that once one is honored with performing a mitzvah, we encourage that he perform the rest of the mitzvah (hamaschil bemitzvah omrim lo gemor). Other reasons for this custom are provided by the Eizer MiKodesh (end of Even HaEzer 42) and Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach.

#### Signing of Kesubah

After the choson makes the kabalas kinyan, the witnesses carefully read through the kesubah and then sign it (Rama, Even HaEzer 66:1 and

Choshen Mishpat 45:2). If they are attesting to something by signing, they must know what it is.

#### Choson Signing Kesubah

Many have the practice that the choson also signs the kesubah beneath the witnesses' signatures. This practice dates back to the times of the Rishonim and demonstrates that the choson approves what the witnesses are signing (Rashba, Bava Basra 175; Eizer MiKodesh 66:1 s.v. hayah ta'us).

#### Bedeken

The choson, escorted by the two fathers and accompanied by the celebrants, now goes to badek the kallah, by pulling the veil over her head. At this point, the kallah's father and perhaps others bless her. The celebrants then proceed to the chupah.

#### The Chupah

The chupah itself should ideally be open on all four sides (Eizer MiKodesh). This is reminiscent of the tent of Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu, whose tent was accessible from all four directions of the globe so as not to inconvenience any potential guests. We are conveying blessing upon the bride and groom that the house they build together should be as filled with chesed as was the house of Avraham and Sarah. Immediately prior to walking to the chupah, the mesader kiddushin places some ashes on the choson's forehead. The ashes are placed where the choson wears his tefillin, and are immediately removed, and serve to remind the choson that even at this moment of tremendous joy, he should remember that our Beis HaMikdash lies in ruins. This literally fulfills the verse in Yeshayah (61:3) Lasum la'veilei tziyon laseis lahem pe'er tachas eifer, To place on the mourners of Zion and to give them splendor instead of ashes -- the Navi promises that in the future we will replace the ashes that currently remind us of the churban (Even HaEzer 65:3).

#### Chupah Under the Stars

The prevalent Ashkenazic practice is that the chupah is conducted outdoors or under an open skylight in order to provide a beracha for the marrying couple that their descendants should be as numerous as the stars (Rama, Even HaEzer 61:1). However, if a couple prefers to hold their chupah under a roof, the mesader kiddushin should still perform the wedding ceremony for them, since there is no violation to perform the chupah this way (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Even HaEzer 1:93).

#### Jewelry at the Chupah

There is a common custom that the kallah removes all her jewelry before she goes to the chupah. Some explain that this custom is based on the Mishnah that after the Churban of the Beis HaMikdash, Chazal decreed that the choson and kallah should no longer wear the crowns that they were accustomed to wearing before that time (Sotah 49a). Although removing jewelry may be associated with this idea, most authorities contend that this is only a custom borrowed from this idea, but is not really required. If it were required, then wearing jewelry would be prohibited from the night before the wedding until the end of sheva berachos (see Mishnah Berurah 560:17). The accepted practice is to prohibit only jewelry of silver, gold or precious stones that are worn on the head (Mishnah Berurah 560:17, quoting Pri Megadim; however, note that the Yam shel Shelomoh, Gittin 1:19, rules that a kallah may not wear any silver or gold jewelry the entire sheva berachos week.)

#### Wearing a Kittel

The common practice among Eastern European Jews is that the choson wears a kittel at the chupah. The reason for wearing the kittel is that the wedding day is his personal day of atonement and the choson is encouraged to do teshuvah on this day.

When does he put on the kittel? There are two common practices; some have the choson wear the kittel under a coat or folded up under his suit jacket, whereas others have the kittel placed on top of his suit as soon as he stands under the chupah. The kittel is removed either immediately after the chupah or in the cheder yichud.

The accepted practice is that the shushbin places the kittel on the choson. His "dressing" the choson reinforces the idea that the wedding day is a day of teshuvah and atonement -- when the choson puts on his kittel for the first time, he is reminded of when he will be wearing his

kittel for the last time – and that, at that time, he will not be putting it on himself (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 147:4).

#### Who Walks Them Down?

The choson and kallah are escorted by two couples, called the shushbinin, who are usually their parents. There was an old custom that the two shushbinin couples should both be couples who are in their first marriage (cited by Eizer MiKodesh 68:2, who says that he is uncertain about the origin of this custom). Some have the custom that a woman who is visibly pregnant should not serve as shushbin (Shearim Hametzuyanim Bahalacha 147:12). Since these practices are custom and not halacha, when following them may create a dispute, shalom is more important.

There are two common practices as to who specifically escorts the choson and who escorts the kallah. Some have the custom that the choson is escorted by the two male shushbinin and the kallah by the two female shushbinin, whereas others have each escorted by a couple. To decide what to do, I quote a well-known practice of Rav Yaakov Kamenetski, who at three of his children's marriages had the shushbinin walk as couples and in the other three the fathers escorted the choson and the mothers escorted the kallah. His rule: I do whatever the mechutan prefers.

#### Kallah in the Right

Based on a verse in Tehillim (45:10) that teaches that the place of honor for a princess is to be stationed on the right, the kallah stands to the right and the choson on the left.

#### Standing at the Chupah

In America, the guests usually sit throughout the chupah ceremony, whereas in Eretz Yisrael the standard practice is that everyone stands throughout the chupah. The latter practice, or, more specifically, that everyone stands at the wedding while the sheva berachos are recited, is quoted in the name of the Zohar (see Shu"t HaElef Lecha Shelomoh, Even HaEzer #115).

#### Erusin and Nesuin

There are two stages to a Jewish wedding. The first stage is called kiddushin or erusin (not to be confused with the Modern Hebrew word erusin, which means "engagement"), and revolves around the choson giving the wedding ring to the kallah. The second step is called nesuin. In Talmudic times, these two stages were conducted separately – often as much as a year apart. After kiddushin, the couple is married, but, in earlier days, they did not yet live together.

Today, the two stages are conducted as one long ceremony.

#### Is the Kallah's Face Covered?

The Rama (31:2) cites an old Ashkenazi custom that the kallah's face is covered at her chupah. The Rama does not say how thick the veil is, and we find a dispute among later authorities about this. Some authorities object strongly to the kallah wearing a veil that is so thick that the witnesses cannot identify her (Mabit, quoted by Pischei Teshuvah 31:5). Others rule that it is not problematic for the veil to be this thick, and therefore in many places the custom was that the kallah wore a very thick veil.

The mesader kiddushin recites the beracha of borei pri hagafen on behalf of the choson and the kallah. They should have in mind to be included in his beracha and not to interrupt before they drink the wine (see Afikei Yam 2:2). According to the Noda Be'Yehuda (Shu"t Even HaEzer #1) the choson should also have in mind to be included in the birchas erusin, but Har Tzvi (Orach Chaim #44) quotes Tevuos Shor, R. Akiva Eiger and several others that the birkas erusin is not a chiyuv of the choson. The choson and kallah then sip from the cup. The most common practice is that the mesader kiddushin gives the choson to drink and then hands the cup to the kallah's mother, who gives the kallah to drink. The choson and kallah need to drink only a small sip of the wine (Be'er Heiteiv, Even HaEzer 34:6; Amudei Apiryon page 71).

#### Yichud Eidim

On behalf of the choson, the mesader kiddushin appoints the two witnesses, and then asks the witnesses, within earshot of the kallah, whether the ring is worth a perutah, which is only a few cents. The

reason for this strange conversation is so that the kallah agrees to be married even if the ring is worth so little (Rama, Even HaEzer 31:2).

According to many authorities, the witnesses must see the choson place the ring on the kallah's finger (Shu"t HaRashba 1:780; Rama, Even HaEzer 42:4). Although most authorities rule that this is not essential, the accepted practice is to be certain that the witnesses see the actual placing of the ring on the kallah's finger (Pischei Teshuva, Even HaEzer 42:12).

#### Reading the Kesubah

At this point, the kesubah is read to interrupt between the erusin and the nesuin, and then the sheva berachos are recited. Although some authorities question how one can divide the sheva berachos and not have one person recite them all, the accepted practice is to divide them among six, and in some places seven, honorees (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Even HaEzer #94; cf. Har Tzvi).

#### Out of Order

Mistakes are commonly made in the order in which the sheva berachos are recited. One should be careful to make sure that each person being honored knows which beracha he is reciting. If the wrong beracha is recited such that the berachos are now recited out of order, one should not repeat a beracha, but recite the skipped beracha and then proceed to recite the remaining berachos that have not yet been said. Similarly, if the honoree began reciting the wrong beracha, including Hashem's name, he should complete the beracha he has begun, the omitted beracha should then be said, and then proceed to recite the remaining berachos. If someone began reciting out of order either the beracha of Sos tasis or Samayach tesamach, which do not begin with Hashem's name, one should correct the situation and recite the correct beracha (Amudei Apiryon page 76).

#### Putting his Foot down

After the sheva berachos are completed, the choson smashes a glass (Rama, Even HaEzer 65:3). (According to an alternative practice, the choson smashes the glass earlier in the ceremony -- immediately after the kiddushin are completed.) Many have the custom that prior to breaking the glass the choson recites or the audience sings the pasuk, "Im eshkachech Yerushalayim tishkach yemini." This custom has sources in Rishonim (Sefer Hachassidim #392).

The choson and kallah are then escorted with music and dancing to the yichud room. Two witnesses, called the eidei yichud, see that there is no one else in the yichud room, and then post themselves outside for the amount of time that the mesader kiddushin instructs them.

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### Va'eira: Hamotzi - For all Times

#### Rav Kook Torah

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

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

#### Hamotzi — Past or Future?

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

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

What is the difference between motzi and ha-motzi?

The Talmud explains that this disagreement is based on how the verse in Exodus should be understood. According to Rabbi Nehemiah, the word ha-motzi implies the future. The Jews were still slaves in Egypt, and God assured them that He would take them out in the future. The future

tense, however, is not appropriate for the blessing over bread. We recite this blessing in recognition of the wheat that has already come out of the earth. The word motzi, on the other hand, refers to the past, and is therefore more suitable.

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

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

#### Contemplating God

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

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

Rabbi Nehemiah, by preferring the word motzi, concurred with the first approach. Before eating bread, we need to raise our intellectual awareness of the event that occurred: this bread was baked from wheat that God brought forth from the earth. The word motzi is a verb, referring to an event that has taken place. Rabbi Nehemiah stressed the importance of the past tense, since appreciation of God's greatness is achieved by objectively analyzing God's hand in history and past events. The other scholars disagreed. The blessing should be ha-Motzi, "the One Who brings forth." Ha-Motzi is not a verb but a descriptive phrase. We do not only observe the event itself, but we attempt to look beyond it to the Cause of the action. This is a supra-scientific, intuitive approach, relating to God according to His actions. The scholars held that the blessing over bread is not just a way of contemplating the process of wheat growing out of the earth. We must concentrate on the Source of this process, and form a corresponding mental image of God.

#### Beyond Time

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

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### Perceptions

#### By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Parshas Vaera

Not What It Looks Like

HE LED FOR one term. But when he refused to turn against the Jews, they got rid of him and forced him from office. But when he decided he liked being king more, he accepted the role and made the lives of the Jews a living hell. The ally had become the enemy.

Sound familiar? Donald Trump? Perhaps one day. But in the meantime, it had certainly been Pharaoh back in the time of this week's parsha, and it begs the question, how does such a "180" occur?

Then, there is the part about Moshe Rabbeinu. I cringed after reading the end of last week's parsha again, which spilled over into this week's. I mean, can you imagine how Moshe felt when his good news turned into the worst news, and his attempt to free his people further enslaved them? It was completely demoralizing, and he took that out on God at the end of last week.

Adding tons more salt to the wound was having to face the enemy and their cronies on the way out. They laughed at the Jewish leader while celebrating their great "victory" over him, his God, and his people. Also, sound familiar? The Palestinians and their allies? Yes, but also Moshe Rabbeinu and the Arabs of his time.

And yet, unbeknownst to everyone was that not only was God in charge the entire time, but He was making it all happen. And not only was God making it happen, but He was making it occur in consonance with the overall plan of Creation. And not only were the events in consonance with the purpose of Creation, but they were the ideal path to fulfill it...from GOD'S perspective.

That was easy to see while it was only God and Moshe on Mt. Sinai discussing the upcoming redemption from Egypt. There were references to Pharaoh, but miles away, he was only "two-dimensional," like a fictional character in a book. On Mt. Sinai, Moshe could not hear the cracks of whips or the screams of people being beaten. And there certainly wasn't any social media to distract and mislead him about what was happening.

It's a completely different reality once you enter the world in which it is happening. Sensory overload. We need to understand. We want to maintain control. We want a happy ending and at minimal cost to us. There is intelligence out there, but it is also mixed with tremendous ignorance and, in many cases, complete stupidity. Egos are everywhere, greatly clouding history.

Now, more than ever, it is hard to know the facts about anything. Once upon a time, the news was a way to do that but has since become so unreliable. Social media is in the hands of good and bad people, and it is not always so easy to tell who is who. I have been shocked by things people have told me that they buy into because of something they "learned" from one social media or another.

This, coupled with the fact that people don't think as clearly as they once did, makes for a very confused society and very warped opinions. The fears that William Bennett, the Secretary of Education from 1985 to 1988 under President Ronald Reagan, had about the direction of the American mind have since come true, and then some. The intellectual descent seems unstoppable, though the amount of knowledge available to the average person is unprecedented.

The Gemora predicted all of this over 1500 years ago. How did it know so long ago what would happen at the End of Days when it was impossible to even know what would exist at this time? Did they just project the trend of their time? Or, also being the greatest kabbalists of their time who knew so much about God's plan for Creation, they knew what that plan would require, somewhat, to get to the Messianic Period.

It is one of the most important lessons of the Exodus. Amazingly, though we read these parshios every year and celebrate redemption from Egypt every Pesach, we overlook the most important message necessary to spiritually survive, and in some cases, even physically survive, Jewish history. That message? Only God knows the full plan of history and, therefore, He is the only One Who can know what history needs at any given moment in time to fulfill it.

For this reason, sometimes what God does might make sense to us, and oftentimes does not make sense to us at all. When Iyov questioned God's actions, He responded by pointing out that Iyov's judgment was based only upon what he knew of God and history. And that was based upon what God allowed him to know, which was only a fraction of a fraction of a fraction, etc., of what he needed to know to understand how what was confusing in the short run was completely logical in the long run.

And by long run, we don't mean a year from now, or even a millennium from now. We won't see the full extent of God's master plan until much later in the World to Come. By then history will have been what it was meant to be since Day One, and everything in between will fall perfectly into place like pieces of a large puzzle.

In the meantime, we learn Torah to guide us and perform mitzvos to help us stay on track during the confusing part of history. God gave them to us with the full knowledge of His plan in mind and that, together with Divine course corrections when they are necessary, helps us to



participate in the fulfillment of Creation even while lacking a sufficient understanding of where all of this is heading, and why.

Check out my new Haggadah, b"H, called "The Wise Son Says." You can see it here: <https://www.shaarnunproductions.org/lwise-son-says-haggadah.html>, and take advantage of the special offers available at this time. Pesach is closing in on us fast, b"H, so please check out my new Haggadah while the special lasts. It's Torah for the entire year...and possibly life-altering.

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## **Drasha**

### **By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

Parshas Vaera

Hail to the Chief

Some people just never learn. For almost a year Pharaoh was literally plagued by every conceivable misfortune, yet he refused to let the Jewish people leave his land. Of course, he pleaded with Moshe during every plague to stop the great inconvenience, pain, and disaster that were befalling his country. He would even promise to let the Jews go, yet he never admitted guilt. He would beseech Moshe to stop the various plagues. "Pray for me and remove the frogs! I will let you serve your G-d in the desert (Exodus 8:4)." Sometimes he would offer unrestricted freedom, only to renege when the plagues ceased. Never, except on one occasion, did Pharaoh admit that G-d was correct and he was corrupt.

That exception was the plague of hail. In fact, the plague of hail was so powerful that even Hashem Himself categorized it in a unique way. Moshe quoted Hashem to Pharaoh: "This time I shall send all my plagues against your heart, upon your servants, and your people so that you shall know that there is none like Me in the world" (Exodus 9:14). Why did Hashem consider the hail a more powerful act than His turning water into blood, or delivering pestilence, or wild animals or frogs? True, the hail did miraculously contain a fire ensconced in the ice, but all the plagues had miraculous attributes to them. Turning the Nile into blood is not an everyday occurrence either! What characteristic did the hail have to label it "all my plagues?"

Even more troubling is Pharaoh's response. After the plague strikes Egypt he calls Moshe and Ahron and he tells them "this time I have sinned, Hashem is righteous and I and my people are the wicked ones" (Exodus 9:27) What caused Pharaoh to utter those submissive words at this particular time? Didn't he already see blood, frogs, pestilence, boils, wild animals, and a host of different miraculous misfortunes that befell his people? What was so special about the fire and ice that fell from the heavens that charred even this man's cruel temper?

Radio commentator, Paul Harvey, relates the following story: William and his Aunt Caroline were constantly feuding. Actually, William was jealous of his aunt's popularity and social status in the New York of the late 1890's. Compared to her, he was considered a social outcast, and was never invited to any of her lavish parties. That would have been bad enough. Having to live next door to her was too much for William to bear. The sight of elegant carriages arriving and departing made him seethe. Yet he could do nothing. At least he did nothing until the family fortune was distributed and he received 100 million dollars. Then he knew what to do. He decided to rip down his mansion and build a monstrosity. It had 530 rooms, 350 baths, and a whopping 970 employees. It would be the grandest, most elegant guest house of it's kind. More carriages would pull up to his home in a day then to his aunt's mansion in a month! Her home would pale in comparison, and the tumult of it all would force her to move.

William was right. Aunt Caroline moved way north of the shadow of her nephew's hotel. And then she ripped down her old home. With the mere 50 million that she received, she too, decided to build a hotel on the site of her old mansion! It would be even more elegant, with nicer rooms and better service than her nephew's. Two adjacent, competing hotels would have been built right next to each other if not for the wisdom of William's own hotel manager. He got the two feuding relatives together and explained that hostility is not the way to success.

"If you two could just work together and adjoin the two hotels as one, it would become the most outstanding and influential accommodation on earth," he explained. They listened and followed his instructions. He even advised them to make sure that every opening between the structures could be sealed again in case of a renewed falling-out. But in the end, William Waldorf and his aunt, Caroline Astor decided to bury the hatchet and replace it with a hyphen. And the world's most luxurious accommodation was built — The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

There are many opposing forces in the world. However, when they work in tandem, they are the most powerful force possible. During this plague, fire and ice, two opposing forces in the world of nature disregarded their differences all in the service of the Supreme Commander. When Hashem announced that He will send all of His plagues, he was referring to conflicting forces that work harmoniously. After that, even Pharaoh was sensible enough, albeit for a short moment, to see his frailty and delusions. When even the worst of men see fire and ice dance together on one mission, there is nothing he can do but watch in amazement and admit, "Hashem is the righteous one and I and my people are the wicked ones." When opposing opinions gather for one objective – to do the will of Hashem – they are as unstoppable as the hail that brought Pharaoh to his knees.

Dedicated by Ben and Beth Heller in memory of Sidney Turkel  
Good Shabbos!

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## **Inauguration and Extortion, Pageantry and Pain**

### **By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg**

Why are we so captivated by a presidential inauguration?

In 1797, after John Adams was inaugurated as second president of the United States, succeeding George Washington, he wrote to his wife Abigail, "When the Ceremony was over, [Washington] came and made me a visit and cordially congratulated me and wished my Administration might be happy, successful and honourable." Four years later, in 1801, the transfer of power from Adams to Jefferson was significant as it was the first transfer between political opponents. It was uncomfortable, but it was successful.

With the inauguration of a new American president, we have come to expect a peaceful transfer of power, a hallmark of American democracy. Whether you are excited or disappointed in the outcome of this election and no matter your opinion on who rose his hand to be sworn in, we should all be grateful and proud that this week we experienced a peaceful transfer of power. Perhaps what is so captivating is the celebration of the democratic process itself and the comfort we take in it. As all of America inaugurated and many celebrated a new president, we may have felt like this exercise in American democracy is a given in our lives, since it is all we have ever known. But the truth is America is relatively young. This was only the 60th inauguration. Just two hundred and fifty years ago, there was no democracy called the United States of America.

In contrast to America's relative youth, God promised the land of Israel to Avraham Avinu almost 4,000 years ago. He made good on that promise when the Jewish people marched into the land with Yehoshua 3,430 years ago. Almost 2,500 years ago, we returned to Israel with Ezra and Nechemia. After a long and bitter loss of sovereignty in our homeland, just over seventy-five years ago, we returned to govern and defend ourselves in the modern State of Israel.

The Jewish connection to Israel is sixteen times longer than America has existed, and nevertheless, while America celebrated its 60th inauguration, Israel is still fighting for its very right to exist. Over the last year and a half, our brothers and sisters in Israel have been facing enemies on seven fronts, all bent on Israel's demise, all denying the Jewish right to the Land of Israel. As President Trump addressed his inaugural parade, families of Israelis being held hostage for 472 unimaginable days stood behind him holding posters of their loved ones and draped in symbolic yellow scarves as the arena chanted, "BRING THEM HOME!"

While America's leadership was attending ceremonies with pomp and circumstance and changing outfits between inaugural balls, Israel's

leaders were making impossible decisions and concessions and fighting to keep its coalition alive.

The Jewish world couldn't be more grateful or joyous to welcome Emily Damari, Romi Gonen, and Doron Steinbrecher home from captivity, but that joy is severely tempered by the cost of their release and by how many remain behind.

As Alan Dershowitz neatly put it:

The decision by the Israeli government to make significant concessions to the Hamas kidnappers should never be called a "deal." It was an extortion. Would you call it a deal if somebody kidnapped your child and you "agreed" to pay ransom to get her back? Of course not. The kidnapping was a crime. And the extortionate demand was an additional crime.

So the proper description of what occurred is that Israel, pressured by the United States, capitulated to the unlawful and extortionate demands of Hamas as the only way of saving the lives of kidnapped babies, mothers and other innocent, mostly civilian, hostages.

This was not the result of a negotiation between equals. If an armed robber puts a gun to your head and says, "your money or your life," your decision to give him your money would not be described as a deal. Nor should the extorted arrangement agreed to by Israel be considered a deal. So let's stop using that term.

Agreeing to be extorted may be the right decision but it is a deeply tragic one. It is painful for the entire Jewish people and should be for decent people everywhere. But it is also painful for God Himself. When wickedness exists in the world, when it triumphs it is a chillul Hashem, a desecration of God and His name.

In Tachanun on Mondays and Thursdays, we ask, "עד מתי עורך בשבי צר ונתפארתיך ביד צר Hashem, how long will You allow Your strength be held hostage? How long will You let Your glory be in the hand of the enemy?" Is there a greater galus, a darker exile, than God Himself seeming to be in captivity?

When I think about the majesty and excitement of a presidential inauguration, it makes me think about what we are really davening for when we ask Hashem to redeem us from this galus. On the one hand, America's continuous government for almost 250 years strikes as captivating, impressive, and in a way more remarkable than Israel's 76-year history. However, when you consider the miracle of two thousand years of dispersion, persecution and attempts at systematic extermination, the return of the Jewish people to our homeland and the revival of sovereignty and self-autonomy in our country, with all of the challenges and problems, it is hard to think of a greater miracle.

In the introduction to his siddur, Rav Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) describes that our very survival through galus, our mere existence, is the greatest miracle, greater than the miracles we read about in the Torah and Tanach. He wrote: "By the life of my soul! When I contemplated these wonders, they appeared greater to me than all the miracles and wonders that HaShem Yisbarach performed for our forefathers in Egypt, and the wilderness, and the Land of Israel."

The Talmud (Berachos 19b) quotes R' Elazar bar Tzadok who said, "I and my fellow Kohanim would jump over coffins of the deceased in order to hurry towards kings of Israel to greet them." And they did not say this only towards kings of Israel, but they said this even towards kings of the nations of the world, so that if one will be privileged to witness the redemption of Israel, he will distinguish between kings of Israel and kings of the nations of the world.

As we watch the 60th American inauguration, and pay homage to its pomp, circumstance and pageantry, we do so knowing that one day, the people being extorted and fighting for its very existence will welcome the King Moshiach and that day will put to shame the pomp and circumstance of today.

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**Rabbi Yochanan Zweig**

**This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Leon Brickman, z"l Eliezer ben Chayim Menachem HaLevi.**

Close to You

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maharal, in the introduction to his work Tiferes Yisroel, explains that this is the meaning of the verse "and this is the Torah that Moshe placed in front of Bnei Yisroel" (Devarim 4:24). We weren't forced to take the Torah, it was placed in front of us and we chose to come and take it. In other words, when you're trying to get someone to develop in a certain area you cannot force them to change, they need to choose to want to change and take positive steps in that direction.

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

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

In the Presence of the King

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

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

remove the plague. Moshe informs him that he will leave the city and beseech Hashem to remove the plague.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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