

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In looking at the passages about the redemption from Egypt, we can see significant differences between G-d's commands to Moshe and the commands that Moshe passed on to Bnei Yisrael. The Almighty commanded, "Let them take part of the blood and place it on the two doorposts and the lintel in the houses where it will be eaten" [Shemot 12:7]. But Moshe told Bnei Yisrael, "Take a bundle of hyssop and dip it into the blood at the threshold, and you shall reach with this blood onto the lintel and onto the doorposts. And none of you shall leave the entrance of his home until morning." [12:22]. Thus, Moshe added two new elements. First, he emphasized twice that the blood should be placed on the door by dipping into the blood "at the threshold." In addition, Moshe added a new prohibition that had not been mentioned before by G-d— not leaving the house until the next morning. Evidently these two elements are linked to each other. Placing the blood at the threshold serves as a reminder not to go beyond the entrance of the house. The question still remains: Why did Moshe add these details to his commands?

It would seem that the differences are related to the different approaches to G-d's actions in Egypt that night. The Almighty said to Moshe, "And I will pass through the Land of Egypt that night and I will strike every firstborn in the Land of Egypt... And the blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and I will see the blood and pass over you. And there will be no mortal plague among you when I strike Egypt." [12:12-13]. According to this, the reason that G-d passed over Egypt was to strike the firstborn, and the blood on the houses served as a sign of someone who was not included in the decree. Moshe, on the other hand, described the events differently. "And G-d will come to strike Egypt, and if He sees the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, He will pass over the entrance and He will not allow the destructive angel to come to your houses to cause harm." [12:23]. This implies that the decree was originally meant to apply to all of Egypt, and the purpose of the blood was as a signal for the Almighty to protect the occupants of certain houses from the angel. According to Moshe's description, at first everybody was in danger and the

blood would provide protection for Bnei Yisrael. It is therefore reasonable to emphasize the danger of leaving the house, which was the area that the Almighty would protect by His holy presence.

These two different approaches can be linked to two different meanings of the word "pasach," to pass over. Rashi explains, "passing over means to skip and jump across—I will pass over' means that G-d jumped from the houses of Bnei Yisrael to the houses of Egypt." This corresponds to what G-d said to Moshe, implying that the firstborn of Bnei Yisrael were not included in the original decree. However, there is another meaning to this word, in the sense of protection, as is written, "Protect and rescue, pass over and allow to escape" [Yeshayahu 31:5], as interpreted by Saadia Gaon and others. This corresponds to the words of Moshe, "He will pass over the entrance and He will not allow the destructive angel to come to your houses to cause harm."

Thus, the two descriptions, the one by the Almighty and the one by Moshe, provide an insight into the double meaning of the events of the night. It was a night when the Almighty not only struck the firstborn of Egypt but also saved the firstborn of Bnei Yisrael, thereby showing that they belong to Him:

"For every firstborn is mine, on the day that I struck every firstborn in Egypt I sanctified every firstborn in Yisrael for me." [Bamidbar 3:13].

Place Me as a Seal on Your Heart

by Rabbi Efraim Zik, Head of Torah Mitzion Kollel and Community Rabbi, Lima, Peru

The mitzva of Tefillin is mentioned four times in the Torah: twice in this week's Torah portion ("Kadesh" and "Vehaya ki yevi'ach") and twice in the book of Devarim ("Shema" and "Vehaya im shamo"). It is surprising to see that the Sefer Hachinuch does not list the mitzva of Tefillin in this week's portion of Bo but only in Devarim, in the portion of Va'etchanan. It is usually assumed that a mitzva should be listed the first time it appears in the Torah, and in fact the Ramban—who taught the author of the Chinuch— does indeed refer to the mitzva of Tefillin in this week's portion, while in Devarim he refers the reader back to what has already been mentioned. Why, then, did the Sefer Hachinuch delay the discussion of this mitzva?

It seems to me that the reason is related to the root of this mitzva, as described in the Sefer Hachinuch. "Since a man is a material being he will of necessity be

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drawn to desires, for it is the nature of material beings to want all of these pleasures... unless the soul with which G-d graced him will help with all of its power to prevent him from sinning. But since it is far away from its natural place, the heaven, the soul will fail, and the material forces will always prevail. The soul therefore needs many guards to watch over it... And the Almighty wanted to benefit us as a holy nation, so He commanded us to surround ourselves with powerful guards, which we were given so that we will never cease the words of Torah day or night. These are the tzitzit on the four corners of our garments, the mezuzah at the entrance to the house, and the Tefillin on our hands and our heads. And everything is to remind us to refrain from the desires of our hands and not to chase after our eyes and the lusts of our hearts." Thus, the Sefer Hachinuch lists this mitzva in close proximity to the other "guards and reminders"— the study of Torah (Mitzva 418), reciting "Shema" (419), and mezuzah (421). These are all mentioned in the portion of Va'etchanan.

The Ramban explains the mitzva of Tefillin in a different way. "You shall write on your hand and between your eyes about the redemption from Egypt and always remember it, so that G-d's Torah will always be in your mouth, in order to observe His mitzvot and His commands, for He is the master who has redeemed you from a House of Slavery." The Ramban then continues with the importance of remembering the redemption from Egypt, which was a symbol of renewal in the world and a reminder about the knowledge of G-d and His constant guidance. Thus, according to the Ramban's approach, Tefillin should be listed at this point, near the events of the redemption from Egypt and the mitzva of the Pesach sacrifice.

We also note that there are two dangers which might turn a Jew away from the proper path: doubt and routine. Doubt can chip away at the mind and cause a

person to erroneously deny his own faith, while routine can lead to boredom and an increase in the power of the evil inclination, trying to turn a person towards sin. Acting as if He were a skilled physician, the Almighty provided protection in advance: Tefillin on the head to protect the mind, and Tefillin on the hand to protect the heart and physical actions. These serve on one hand as a restraint and on the other hand as a binding of love. "Place me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm" [Shir Hashirim 8:6].

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

There are glaring questions that arise from the exodus of the Children of Israel out of Egypt. From the very outset it is clear that G-d's intent is to take the nation out for good, and bring them to the land that was promised to our forefathers. When Moshe was first given the role as savior, G-d says to him that He has heard their cries "and will go down to save [them] from the hand of Egypt and to bring [them] up from that land to [the] land flowing with milk and honey, to [the] place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Emorites and the Perizites and the Hivites and the Yevusites" (Shemos 3:8). The four expressions of redemption that are represented by the four cups of wine at the Passover Seder, which were said to Moshe after he complained that the nation was not yet saved, included bringing them out of the "burdens of Egypt" (6:6) to the land promised to Avraham, Yitzchok and Ya'akov (6:8). How then could G-d have only demanded that Paro (Pharaoh) allow a three-day's journey pilgrimage (5:3), rather than that he let them go completely? Isn't it inappropriate for the True and Just G-d to purposely mislead the king that He is eventually going to hold responsible for not letting them go?

Additionally, how can Paro be accountable for not letting them go if without G-d having "strengthened his heart" (9:12, 10:1, 20) he would have? If punishment is the consequence of misusing free will, how can Paro be punished despite his free will being removed?

Rabbi Eliyau Dessler, z"l (Michtav Me'Eliyahu I, pg 113), describes the concept of "nekudas habechirah" (lit. "the point of free will"). He compares our battles with our evil inclination to a real war, where the battle is actually only waged on the front line; behind that battle point, each side has control over their respective areas. If one side wins the battle, and advances, a new front is created; what was once in doubt is now controlled by one side, while what was controlled by the other side is now in doubt. Similarly, our internal struggle between right and wrong does not occur on all fronts simultaneously, but in specific areas. There are things that are wrong that we are not yet ready to (or necessarily aware of the eventual need to) overcome, and things that are right that we do not need to struggle to maintain. Free will is not at issue here, as there is no

struggle between which side to choose. Only things within our "nekudas habechirah" can be affected by our ability to choose.

For example, for some, it may be a struggle to keep kosher (or maintain a high standard of kashrus). They must "choose" whether to have two sets of dishes, or which food to bring in to the home, or what and where they eat. Others, though, would never consider putting anything into their mouths that they were not completely confident was kosher. For them, it is not a "choice," as there is no other option being considered. Others, still, may have never even thought about keeping kosher, so they also aren't making a "choice" vis-a-vis kashrus.

There are other areas that they must make real choices about, and those choices will impact not just those areas, but determine which areas will become part- or no longer be part- of their "sphere of free will." Rav Dessler says that the concepts of "mitzvah goreres mitzvah" (one good deed brings about another good deed) and "aveirah goreres aveirah" (one sin brings about another sin) stem directly from the concept of "nekudas habechirah," as after choosing to do good, other good deeds that until now would not have even been considered can now be fought for, while bad deeds that used to be a struggle to overcome are now second nature to avoid. Similarly, giving in to the evil inclination allows previously unfathomable actions to become a battle (and positive things that had been second nature to be called into conflict).

Paro had an entire nation as his slave laborers. He never would have considered just letting them go free; this wasn't within his sphere of free will. But he might have considered giving them a few days off, if they would return refreshed and ready to keep working. This was the option G-d gave Paro, numerous times. And each time he chose to refuse G-d's request. Had he chosen otherwise, it would have forced him to realize that he was not fully in charge of the nation, as he had to give in to G-d's request for a temporary reprieve. After having used his free will to do the right thing, it would not have been as foreign an idea that he didn't have the rights of ownership to keep them as slaves at all. Choosing to listen to G-d in this first instance would have allowed him to (eventually) let them go completely, which was what G-d had intended from the beginning.

Instead, Paro said no. Even when a plague was threatened, and he (temporarily) agreed to let them take a few days off, it wasn't going to be under G-d's terms, but under his own terms. Either they couldn't go too far (8:24), or only the adult males could go (10:11), or they had to leave their animals in Egypt (10:24). Although Paro could have chosen to let them go under G-d's original terms, he chose not to.

Choosing to let them go completely, though, was never an option (and wouldn't become one because of his other poor choices). G-d never really took away his free will vis-a-vis full emancipation, as the

only reason he would have given in was due to the threat of plague. The lone issue was which direction of non-free will things would go - not letting them go free or letting them go at gunpoint.

When G-d finally let Paro "give in" under duress, He made it clear to Moshe that it would not be only for a few days, but forever (11:1). And Moshe relayed this to Paro, telling him that the Egyptians would all ask them to "get out" (11:8), not just to "go out" (which implies returning after an excursion). Paro does tell them to "get out" (12:31), but leaves himself some wiggle room by adding "and go serve G-d as you have spoken." This sets the scene for chasing after the nation he had just set free, and Egypt's ultimate downfall. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As the Jews are leaving Egypt, God commands them to sacrifice the Paschal lamb. Following that commandment, a strange rule is spelled out. The Torah describes how a slave may partake of the offering. In the words of the Torah, "And every man's servant that is bought for money, thou may circumcise him and then he may eat thereof." (Exodus 12:44) After experiencing the horrors of slavery and entering a state of freedom, it would seem most logical for the Torah to outlaw the institution of slavery altogether.

In order to understand why the Torah permits slavery, it must be recognized that slavery was universally accepted in Biblical times. Rather than ignore that reality, the Torah deals with slavery in an extraordinarily ethical way.

First, as R. Samson Raphael Hirsch notes, "no Jew could make any other human being into a slave. He could only acquire by purchase, people who, by the then universally accepted international law, were already slaves." Hence, coming into a Jewish household - with its greater sensitivity towards the welfare of a slave - is considered a step up.

Secondly, a slave (eved Canaani) is mandated to keep all the commandments, except for those affirmative commandments that are time-based, and this for obvious reasons - slaves by definition have little control over their own time. From this perspective, it follows that the halakhic system views an eved Canaani as closer to being Jewish than even a ger toshav (resident alien) who is only expected to fulfill the seven laws of Noah. As such, the eved Canaani is a respected member of our community.

Thirdly, the Torah tells us that, if the slave wishes, he may be circumcised. The Talmud quotes the opinion that once circumcised and immersed (thereby becoming fully Jewish), the former slave can participate in eating the Paschal sacrifice. This is precisely the point of our aforementioned Biblical verse. (Yevamot 48b)

Fourth and most important is the alternative view found in the Talmud, which insists that if any Jew has a slave who is not circumcised, not even the owner himself may partake of the Paschal lamb. In other words, when the Torah states "then he may eat thereof," the "he" refers to the owner. Indeed, this Talmudic opinion is making the stunning statement that it is incongruous for a Jew to celebrate Passover by eating the Paschal lamb - the symbol of freedom - while having a slave in his home. (see the commentary of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch)

The Torah has been criticized for supporting the institution of slavery. In point of fact, it attempts to make ethical an already well-entrenched institution. The ethical sensitivity displayed by the Torah reveals that the concept of "eved" has nothing to do with slavery as understood in contemporary times. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The appearance of this parsha on the calendar is always a heartening sign to me. The Torah reading of the story of the Exodus from Egypt means that Pesach is on the way and that the winter doldrums will eventually end with another beautiful Jerusalem springtime. The Exodus from Egypt is the single defining moment in our national history, surpassed only by the revelation and granting of the Torah at Sinai. But Sinai could not have occurred without first having the Exodus from Egypt. And it is no wonder that with the performance of mitzvot we always say *zeicher l'yetziat mitzrayim* - as a remembrance of our Exodus from Egypt. But that is the starting point and not an end goal. At the beginning of his mission, Moshe was told by God that the Exodus was only the prelude to Israel worshipping God at Sinai. I will be so bold as to say that even Sinai was only a beginning point for Israel's story as a unique people in the world. The mission is always ahead of us. The Exodus from Egypt only poses the challenge to us - what now? What shall we do with our miraculously obtained freedom? It took the revelation at Sinai and forty years of wandering in the desert for the Jewish people to come up with a positive answer to this question. Without such a positive answer, the Exodus from Egypt would only be a historical curiosity, devoid of further meaning and any cosmic importance.

In our time, the Jewish State of Israel has come to life against all odds and opposition by much of the world. It is an important and breathtaking achievement all by itself. Yet all of us realize that it is only the beginning of the challenge of national Jewish rebirth that faces us all. We should look at our future in the light of our past national experiences. This attempt at Jewish statehood and a vibrant Jewish society has to judge itself in the light of *zeicher l'yetziat mitzrayim*. The story and lessons of Israel in the desert and our two

previous attempts at establishing Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel should not be ignored. Past mistakes should not be repeated. A wise man once said that insanity is doing the same thing over again and somehow expecting a different result to occur. I think that is why the Torah is so detailed in telling us the story of the Exodus from Egypt and of the events of Israel in the desert. They are not only important to us as history; they are also signposts on the road to our future. We are therefore in need of constant reminders of the Exodus. This parsha of Bo is one of these necessary reminders and signposts. We should listen to what it has to say to us very carefully. It will help us get into the proper frame of mind for Pesach, which is no longer that far off. More importantly, it will light the path for our own national future. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“And Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said to him, 'So says the Lord G-d of the Hebrews....If you refuse to let My people go I shall tomorrow bring locusts upon your borders.' (Exodus 10:3,4)

This week's Torah portion of Bo brings the Ten Plagues to their zenith, ultimately convincing Pharaoh to give the Jews their freedom after the plague of the slaying of the first born of the Egyptians. Included in the list of ten are natural disasters as well, such as the plague of locusts and hail and total darkness. Emerging from these plagues as well as from the story of the flood is the prevalent notion—even logical to most religionists—that natural disasters are a special sign of Divine displeasure with human conduct, a punishment from the Almighty for our sins on earth. This notion becomes even more relevant just a few weeks after the tragedy of the Tsunami which claimed close to 150,000 lives and leaving many more wounded, homeless and bereft of material possessions off the shores of Asia. When we realize that many of the victims of the Tsunami were innocent children and very ethical and upstanding adults, it becomes difficult to understand how a beneficent G-d of compassion and loving-kindness could cause such punishment to blameless individuals.

When we examine the Talmudic sources which discuss natural disasters, a very different theological picture may well emerge. Although there certainly are statements in the Talmud suggesting a cause and effect relationship of sin and punishment regarding such phenomena (J.T. Berachot 9,2), there is a major source which bears further study. The Mishna teaches, "... upon witnessing an earthquake (zvaot)... one recites the

blessing, 'Blessed art Thou... whose strength and power fills the world' (Mishna Berachot 9,2)." Rabbenu Ovadia Bartenura, probably the most well known of classical Mishna commentaries, offers an alternate blessing, "Blessed art Thou... the Creator of the world", based upon an alternate reading of the Mishna. Our legal code enables the individual to choose whichever blessing he prefers (Shulchan Aruch Orah Haim siman 227, seif 1). What is the difference between these two blessings conceptually and theologically? Moreover when the Talmud attempts to explain the earthquake phenomenon, one reason given is, "When the Holy One blessed be He is reminded of the great pain of His children suffering under the heels of their Gentile oppressors, He sheds two tears into the Mediterranean Sea whose sound is heard from one end of the world to the other. That is what we call an earthquake" (B.T. Berachot 59a) This too seems like a strange comment.

Let us return once again to this morning's Torah reading and the very first commandment given to the Jewish People: "This renewal of the moon shall be for you (the festival of) the New Moons..." (Exodus 12:2). We are commanded to mark the New Moon, witnesses must peer the black in the sky until they see it's first glimmering light and must even transgress the Sabbath to quickly arrive at the Sanhedrin and report on their sight, and we even have a monthly ritual in which we sing songs of praise and dance in a circle while gazing up at the New Moon. Why such moon fascination?

The beginning of the answer stems from the midrash, which sees the emergence and subsequent waxing of the moon as the ultimate symbol of world redemption. This harks back to a verse which describes the original creation of the orbs of the sky: "And G-d made two great lights: the great light to rule by day and the small light to rule by night" (Genesis 1:16). Why does the verse begin with two great lights and conclude with one which is great and one which is small? Rashi ad loc sites the Midrash: "They were created equal, but G-d lessened the moon (cut her down to size) because she was critical and said that it was impossible for two kings to wear one crown. The moon was jealous of the sun; since she wanted to be the major light, G-d made the sun the major light.

I believe that this midrash is teaching that G-d built jealousy—the source for all sin—into the very fabric of the creation. He punishes the moon, but allows her—as well as all of the subsequent creations, especially the human being—the ability to choose evil. It is our hope that eventually all of creation will return to G-d, perfect itself and perfect the world. In effect, nature reflects human beings; as long as human beings sinned with the fruit of good and evil, as long as human society remains imperfect and undisciplined, nature will likewise be undisciplined and imperfect. The prophet Isaiah expresses this very well: "I create light and I make darkness, I make peace and create evil; I am G-d who does all these things..." (Isaiah 45:7). The picture of the

prophet is of a world with darkness not only light, with chaos not only order. G-d has chosen human beings to be his partners—not his puppets—with the freedom of choice to perfect the world under the Kingship of G-d and to help bring about world redemption. G-d guarantees that this will eventually happen; but when and precisely how depends on us as much as it depends on Him.

G-d is not always pictured as being happy with the nature of the world that He has created. Indeed the great talmudic sage Reish Lakish suggests that G-d even brings His own sin offering on the day of the New Moon for having created an imperfect world of free choice and tragedy, of good things that happen to bad people and bad things that happen to good people. (B.T. Shevuot 9a). I believe that this is why the Almighty weeps and it is His tears—not his might which produces earthquakes and Tsunamis. From this perspective the more appropriate blessing upon seeing such a disaster is praise to the G-d of Creation rather than to the G-d of power. And we are certainly heartened by the ultimate vision of Isaiah, who promises us that when humanity perfects itself G-d will perfect all of nature. At that time, "When the wolf and the lamb live together.... and when there is no evil or destruction in the mountain of My holiness" there will be no more earthquakes and no more Tsunamis. But we cannot escape our responsibility; at the end of the day it depends on us.

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah reflects the painful reality that people do not learn from the past and history will undoubtedly be repeated. The setting is the Babylonian destruction of the Egyptian empire. The prophet Yirmiyahu states in the name of Hashem, "I will direct my attention to the multitudes of Alexandria and to Pharaoh and all of Egypt...I will deliver them into the hands of their killer, Nebuchadnezar, the King of Babylonia." (46: 25,26)

The Radak explains that these passages refer to a massive massacre predicted for Egypt and her Pharaoh. Radak reminds us that the Egyptian people have a long history of hostility towards the Jewish nation. After an extended period of calm following her devastation at the Sea of Reeds, Egypt resumed her hostility towards her Jewish neighbors. It resurfaced during the reign of the Egyptian premier, Shishak, who invaded the Land of Israel shortly after the demise of Shlomo Hamelech. During this vulnerable Jewish era, Shishak forced his way into Israel and cleared out the treasury of the king. Our Chazal (quoted in Rashi's commentary to M'lochim I, 14-6) cite that Shishak even had the audacity of stealing the glorious throne of Shlomo Hamelech. Egypt continued her hostility towards Israel and, after receiving heavy sums from Israel in exchange for military protection, betrayed her

Jewish "ally" and abandoned her. But Egypt's final crime came when Pharaoh N'cho executed the pious King Yoshiyah because he refused to allow Pharaoh's army to enter Israel enroute to Assyria.

Because of this full record, Hashem decided that the time had arrived to repay Egypt for all her cruelty. Although, in truth, she had previously received forty years of exile, apparently this was not sufficient treatment for her. This time, a massive massacre was being planned and an appropriate execution was awaiting her Pharaoh. With this, Hashem would remind Egypt of the very special relationship He maintained with the Jewish people. Hashem's historic lesson to the earlier Pharaoh was characterized in His opening statement that the Jews are "My son, My first-born" (Shmos 4: 24). Through these words Hashem warned Egypt at the outset that her hostility toward His chosen nation would be repaid in full. And now, nearly a thousand years later, the time had come for Egypt to review this lesson. Egypt would soon be massacred in response to her cruelty and hostility towards Hashem's first born, the Jewish people.

It is interesting to note the particular analogy Yirmiyahu uses when predicting the Babylonian army's invasion. He says "They cut down her forest, for the enemy could not be counted; they exceeded the locusts, beyond any imaginable limit." (46: 25, 26) Yirmiyahu compares the Babylonians to locusts invading the land in unimaginable proportions. In fact, he describes the totality of this massacre as even greater than the work of the locusts. This analogy seems to bring us back to the historic plague of locusts in this week's parsha. It suggests a corollary between the Egyptian plague in earlier times and the invasion of Egypt by the king Nebuchadnezzar in later times.

The explanation of this may be gleaned from the insightful words of the Kli Yakar in this week's sedra. He notes the Torah's introduction to the plague of locusts and explains it through a shocking Egyptian phenomenon. The Torah introduces the plague and states, "I have hardened the hearts of Pharaoh and his servants in order to place My signs in his midst. And for you to tell your children and grandchildren how I played with Egypt." (Shmos 10: 1, 2) "Why," asks the Kli Yakar, "was this introduction chosen for the plague of locusts and not for any other plague?" He responds by citing the testimony of Rabbeinu Chananel regarding an indisputable fact about the land of Egypt. Rabbeinu Chananel testifies that there has never been a locust invasion in Egypt since the massive plague of locusts sent to her by Hashem. Nowadays, even when all surrounding countries are infested with locusts these devouring insects will not penetrate the Egyptian borders. And if they remotely filter into Egypt they never destroy the existing crop.

He explains that this miraculous phenomenon was meant to serve as an everlasting testimony about the plague of locusts. In response to Moshe Rabbeinu's

plea for the removal of locusts the Torah states, "There did not remain one locust throughout the entire Egyptian border." (Shmos 10:19) Apparently, this passage became an everlasting statement and from that point and on locusts would never remain in the land of Egypt. This indisputable testimony reminds the world of Hashem's harsh response to Egypt for all the cruelty she showed His chosen people. The plague of locusts therefore deserves a special introduction stating the purpose for all the plagues, to tell of their occurrence to our children. Because, in fact, the plague of locusts and its everlasting testimony were to serve as the perfect vehicle through which to remember Hashem's revelations in Egypt.

We now appreciate the perfect analogy of Yirmiyahu regarding the Babylonian invasion. The prophet was hinting to the fact that Egypt's attitude towards the Jewish people could not be condoned. They, more than anyone, should have anticipated the consequences of their cruel actions. The total absence of locusts from Egypt should have been a constant reminder to them of their past experiences for mistreating the Jewish people. Obviously no one could claim that Egypt hadn't been fairly warned. However, typically, people do not learn their lesson and history must undoubtedly be repeated. If the historic plague of locusts was not a sufficient reminder for them then the present Babylonian "locusts" would do the trick. Hashem therefore ordered a full scale massacre for Egypt to repeat their earlier experience. They would once again realize that the Jewish people are very dear to Hashem and hostility towards them is certainly not a welcomed policy. Eventually Hashem will protect His people and respond to all hostility in a most befitting fashion. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & www.toras.org

RABBI RODNEY WEISS

National Council of Young Israel

This week's Parshah culminates the events that have been the focus of this Sefer until now, the exodus from Egypt. In fact, the Maharal says that believing in the exodus from Egypt is the foundation of faith in Judaism. When the Ribono Shel Olam revealed Himself to us at Mount Sinai, He proclaimed that I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt, once again emphasizing at the most significant spiritual moment, the concept of the exodus of Egypt. The commentaries grapple with the question of why focus on the Exodus and not the creation of the world. The Kli Yakar says that creation can easily be denied because we were not there to see it. The story of the Exodus is quite different; all who stood by Mount Sinai were eye witnesses to the great salvation that took place. The Kli Yakar continues that this reality obligated us to accept the Torah.

The Or Hachaim offers a novel approach to this idea and explains that there was a transformation taking place at Mount Sinai. One of the great tragedies of Galus Mitzraim was the spiritual abyss into which many people had sunk. The Torah is telling us that the revelation at Mount Sinai was the true exodus, not physically but spiritually, as now the souls were cleansed of the defilement of Egypt and are now prepared to come and spiritually connect with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, by accepting the Torah.

The Ibn Ezra explains this idea while answering a different question: why are our lives more restricted and subject to all of the Mitzvos than the other nations, after all, HaShem is the creator of all people? He gives three answers which also explain the text of the Aseres Hadibros: first, we were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; and the L-rd brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; the emphasis is the great kindness that HaShem has done for us, which compels us in return to serve Him even at times where the commitment defies logic and understanding. The second answer he gives is that observance of mitzvos is to our benefit, and the third is to help us inherit the world to come. What the Ibn Ezra is elucidating here is that there is a very deep connection between receiving the Torah and the Exodus from Egypt. The whole concept and understanding of the idea of Naseh VNishmah, we will do and we will listen is based on the experiential notion that the people had with G-d. This experience created a trust in the Ribbono Shel Olam that led to an unquestioned Kabbalas HaTorah. Although hearing and studying the Torah is a significant mitzvah, the act of receiving it, is symbolic of the faith we had due to the Exodus from Egypt.

The Gemorah in Megilla 14A asks the question: Why don't we recite Hallel on Purim? One of the answers given is that we don't recite Hallel on a miracle that took place outside of Israel. The Gemorah inquires about Pesach and explains that this rule began only after the land was inhabited by the Jewish people.

Perhaps based on the above understanding we can offer another answer to the Gemorah's question. It is clear that the receiving of the Torah is a result of the Exodus from Egypt. The exodus provided the tools necessary for the Jews to be on a spiritual level to receive the Torah. The notion of saying Hallel for a miracle that took place is based on the idea that a person recognizes that there is a Creator who plays an active role in history. We express our gratitude when we say Hallel not only for the miracle itself but for the fact that we are His chosen people, which is why we are worthy of such miracles, simply because we received the Torah. As Rashi points out in the third chapter of Shemos: I have a great purpose in bringing them out: for they are destined to receive the Torah on this mountain three months after they go out of Egypt. The message is very clear: the merit of the Torah, which is the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt, allows us to

form a deep connection with HaShem. For this reason, it is only appropriate that we say Hallel on Pesach because this is our inauguration to nationhood which is founded on the idea that our purpose is to connect to the Ribbono Shel Olam.

One of the Mitzvos associated with the exodus from Egypt is the Mitzvah of Tefilin. This mitzvah, which is a daily reminder of this event, is also referred to as an Os or sign between the Jewish people and HaShem. A person who neglects to perform this mitzvah is called a *poshaya Yisroel bgofo*, a person who sins with their body. Why is it necessary to describe such a person in such harsh terms? Why not simply say that they are sinners? The Sefer HaChinuch explains two purposes to this Mitzvah. One is a constant reminder to focus on Torah and Mitzvos, which will be a safeguard against illicit thoughts. The second is that each Parshah of Tefilin contains two major themes accepting the Kingdom of HaShem and belief in the Exodus from Egypt. If one rejects this mitzvah, he is denying the foundation of faith which defines such an individual as a person whose body lives in sin.

The Halacha is that Tefillin must be worn when a person recites Shema in the morning, which is also the time that we fulfill our obligation to mention the Exodus from Egypt by day. What is common to all three Mitzvot is the appreciation of the role that the Ribbono Shel Olam plays in the world. First of all, He took us out of Egypt and gave us the Torah and brought us to this point. These are concepts that can be taken for granted. The Mitzvah of Tefilin, in conjunction with saying Shema is a protection for these ideas. The Tefilin on our hand is symbolic of the outstretched hand that HaShem used to take us out of Egypt, and the Tefilin on our heads is the symbol of our intellect which helps us focus on these concepts.

In conclusion, certainly our lives would be meaningless without receiving the Torah and one might think that believing in the events of Mount Sinai would be considered the foundation of faith, but upon closer look one realizes that anything we believe in is deeply rooted in the belief that HaShem took us out of Egypt, a concept that the Torah obligates us to mention every day. © 2005 Rabbi R. Weiss & National Council of Young Israel

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

The final plague, the killing of the first-born Egyptians, strikes every home in Egypt. Pharaoh awakes in panic and finally is brought to his knees as he agrees to free the Jews. We read the following cryptic Rashi-comment. It is a subtle one-word comment that highlights the drama of the text.

"And Pharaoh arose at night, he and all his servants, and all of Egypt. And there was a great outcry in Egypt for there was no home in which there was no dead." (Exodus 12:30)

"And Pharaoh arose"—RASHI: "From his bed." You must have a question here!

A Question: At first glance this looks like a strange comment. On the one hand, this is such a mundane piece of information (that Pharaoh got up from his bed; after all, it was the middle of the night—where else would he be?!), we would ask: Why does Rashi trouble himself to tell us this?

A second question would be: What difference does it make?

We note that this is a very brief comment. It looks like a Type II comment, meaning that its purpose is to help us clarify matters. We won't ask "What's bothering Rashi?" Rather, we'd ask: "What is Rashi clarifying?"

An Answer: Here is a subtle point. The word "Vayakam" in Hebrew literally means "and he rose up," but frequently it is used to indicate the beginning of another action. As in Genesis 4:8, where it says: "And Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." Or in Exodus 2:17 when Moses meets Yisro's daughters at the well, it says: "And Moses rose up and saved them etc." In these, and many similar cases, the word "Vayakam" does not mean to rise up to a standing position, but rather to prepare to take further action.

How does Rashi know that in our verse the word is to be taken literally, actually to rise up?

An Answer: Rashi points out that here the word is to be taken literally, i.e. that Pharaoh actually, physically, arose. Rashi, being sensitive to this use of the word, realizes that when the word "Vayakam" is not followed by another verb (as in the case of Abel, "and he killed him"), he then draws his deduction that here it means literally to stand up. Thus his brief comment.

From where did he arise? From his bed, naturally.

What about our second question: What difference does all this make? Why must Rashi, and the Torah, tell us this trivial fact?

An Answer: The sense one gets when one pictures Pharaoh jumping out of his warm, secure, king-size bed in the middle of the night, is one of all-consuming panic and confusion. See the other Rashi-comments on this verse and we see clearly that Pharaoh was terror stricken by the outcry from all these sudden deaths. The Torah, with Rashi's help, quietly conveys this message by mentioning that "Pharaoh arose from his bed at night..."

While literary style is not the Torah's purpose, it certainly makes use of style in a most sophisticated way to convey its messages. © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek and aish.org

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrاند

The pasuk in Shir HaShirim says, "Behold the sound of my Beloved is coming" [2:8]. The Medrash there cites the following narration: Moshe came to the

Jewish people and told them that the current month would be the first of months for them, for this was the month in which they were about to be redeemed. They asked, "How will we be redeemed—we have no good deeds to our credit?" Moshe responded, "Since He wants to redeem you, He will not look at your evil deeds."

This Medrash is revealing an amazing insight: When G-d wants to bring about our redemption, he will not stop to worry about our evil actions. There is a pre-ordained time, when G-d has made up his mind that redemption will arrive, regardless of anything. We can not ask "How can it be that redemption did not arrive in the generation of the Rambam or the Vilna Gaon or the Chofetz Chaim and yet it might come in our generation?" This Medrash is saying that when G-d's pre-ordained time for redemption arrives, redemption will come.

Rav Pam quotes from Melachim II, Chapter 14: Yeravam ben Yoash was a wicked King. The prophet testifies that Yeravam did not deviate from the sins of (his namesake) Yeravam ben Nevat, who caused Israel to sin. He promoted idolatry, he sinned, and he caused the nation to sin. And yet, the Navi says that he extended the borders of Israel from Levo Chamas until Yam Ha'Aravah. This wicked King was successful in extending the boundaries of the Land of Israel far beyond those enjoyed by his predecessors. The pasukim there explain how it was that he was able to accomplish this despite his wickedness: "For HaShem had seen that Israel's suffering was very severe, with none surviving and none remaining, and there was no helper for Israel." Things were so dark and so bad that HaShem saw the redemption had to come. Through whose hands did it come? It came through the hands of Yeravam ben Yoash.

Rav Pam said that this chapter must be a tremendous source of inspiration and solace for us. We look around and see the status of the Jewish people—intermarriage rates, anti-Semitism, and a host of other problems. There is none surviving and none remaining! We ask the question that the Jewish people asked thousands of years ago: How can we be redeemed? We have no good deeds to our credit! What is going to be with us?

As the Medrash points out, since G-d wants our redemption, he will not look closely at our deeds. When the Master of the World wants our deliverance to come, he will bring it about, not because of who we are, but despite who we are. We can never say that the situation is spiritually hopeless and therefore we are doomed. It is no worse than it was in the days of Yeravam. When G-d sees that the situation is hopeless, He knows that He must bring the redemption—may it come speedily in our days. © 2004 Rabbi Y. Frand and www.torah.org
Transcribed by David Twersky, Technical Assistance by David Hoffman