

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Our Parasha contains the first mitzvos (commandments) given to the Children of Israel as a nation, including the prohibition against doing "work" on Yom Tov (Shemos 12:16). Although "all work cannot be done," the exception made is work done for "ochel nefesh," i.e. preparing food. The Talmud (Megilla 7b) discusses the details of this exception, bringing two opinions. The first opinion (the Tanna Kamma) says that the only types of work permitted on Yom Tov that are prohibited on Shabbos are those needed for the actual food preparation, such as cooking. Rabbi Yehuda, on the other hand says that even things needed to prepare for the preparation (such as sharpening the knife to cut the food) are permitted. The Talmud then proceeds to explain the basis for each of these opinions.

The verse ends by saying "it alone can be done for you." The Tanna Kamma understands the limiting word "it" as excluding any preparation not done directly to the food and the word "for you" to exclude doing even that for anyone but you (i.e. you can't cook food for a non-Jew on Yom Tov, since they can prepare it themselves without having any issues of violating Yom Tov). Rabbi Yehuda says that the word "for you" comes to include anything you need to prepare the food, even the preparatory steps, with the limiting "it" coming to exclude those that could have been done before Yom Tov. So, for example, if a knife was already dull and could have been sharpened before Yom Tov started, one could not sharpen it on Yom Tov. If, however, it

was sharp, but became dull on Yom Tov itself, according to Rabbi Yehuda it could be sharpened even on Yom Tov.

Since this issue affects how we understand these words in the verse, Rashi alludes to it in his commentary. "It (food preparation) [is permitted], but not the preparation that could have been done before Yom Tov." Rashi is explaining the verse according to Rabbi Yehuda, that as long as the preparation could not have been done before Yom Tov, one is permitted to do it on Yom Tov itself. Had Rashi wanted to explain the verse according to the Tanna Kamma, he would have said "it (direct food preparation) [is permitted], but not any other kind of preparation," for according to the Tanna Kamma, even if it could not have been done before Yom Tov other preparations would not be allowed.

However, Rashi continues by explaining that the word "for you" excludes preparing food for a non-Jew! The Talmud seems to imply that this is only true according to the Tanna Kamma, as according to Rabbi Yehuda "for you" serves a different purpose, telling us that even non-direct preparation is allowed on Yom Tov. How can Rashi explain one part of the verse like Rabbi Yehuda and the other part like the Tanna Kamma?

There is an alternative version of Rashi that derives the exclusion prohibiting preparing for a non-Jew on Yom Tov from a different, earlier word, "only." This version follows one opinion in the Mechilta, and would allow the word "for you" to remain the source for allowing non-direct preparation. However, if Rabbi Yehuda learned this exclusion from the word "only," we would have expected the Talmud to tell us so. Additionally, the Mizrahi and the Taz both prefer the version of Rashi that uses "for you" as the source (since that is Rabbi Akiva's source in the Talmud, and Rashi is following his opinion that because the non-Jew can prepare his own food we cannot cook for him on Yom Tov, while we can cook for our animals who depend on us to feed them). Even the Baalay Tosfos (e.g. Chizkuni), who have the version of Rashi that uses the word "only" as the source, add that Rashi really relies on both words, one to teach us that we can't cook specifically for a non-Jew on Yom Tov, and the other to teach us that even if we are cooking for ourselves we can't add more food to be cooked for the non-Jew. If the word "for you" (according to Rabbi Yehuda) teaches us that non-direct preparation is allowed, how can Rashi use it the way the Tanna Kamma does instead?

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There are certain activities, such as harvesting, that are prohibited on Yom Tov even though they are done directly to the food. Rashi explains (Beitza 23b) that they are prohibited because they could have been done before Yom Tov. There is a discussion (see Penai Yehoshua) whether Rashi means that they are prohibited for this reason Biblically or Rabbinically. If Rashi means that they are Biblically prohibited, then we can redefine the dispute between the Tanna Kamma and Rabbi Yehuda. Everyone agrees that nothing that could have been done just as effectively before Yom Tov can be done on Yom Tov. The only question is about an activity that normally can be done before Yom Tov but in this case could not have been. There is no advantage (from a cutting perspective) of sharpening the knife immediately prior to its use than a day earlier. Therefore, normally, everyone agrees that it is prohibited on Yom Tov. But if this particular knife got damaged on Yom Tov, having sharpened it before would have made no difference. Only now, on Yom Tov, does it become relevant. According to the Tanna Kamma, the word "it" negates the possibility of sharpening it now, since it is not food. Rabbi Yehuda, however, says that "for you" comes to include even this type of preparation.

Now let's go back to our Rashi, reading it a little differently. "It (direct food preparation) [is permitted], but not preparation that could have been done before Yom Tov." This is true even according to the Tanna Kamma, if the reason certain direct food preparations are Biblically prohibited even on Yom Tov is because they could have been done earlier. And if Rashi is explaining the verse according to the Tanna Kamma, there is no longer any problem with explaining "for you" according to the Tanna Kamma as well.

However, if according to Rashi it is only Rabbinically prohibited for this reason, he obviously can't mean this when explaining a Biblical verse.

The Rashba and the Ritva say that Rabbi Yehuda using "for you" to include indirect preparation does not preclude his agreeing that it also comes to exclude preparing for those who aren't "you." The implication is that while the purpose of the word is to expand the definition of what is permitted, by its very meaning it also necessarily excludes those who aren't "you." The Sheeta Mekubetzes adds that if the Torah meant to exclude (indirect) preparation that could have

been done before Yom Tov because it avoids doing an otherwise prohibited activity on Yom Tov, it necessarily will also exclude doing it for a non-Jew, as he can do it for himself and thereby avoid having a Jew do the prohibited activity. Either way, if Rabbi Yehuda agrees with the Tanna Kamma regarding this exclusion, and can derive it from the same source, there is no longer any contradiction between using "for you" like the Tanna Kamma and "it" like Rabbi Yehuda. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Parsha of Bo discusses the fact that children and grandchildren, later generations, will ask questions of the previous generations as to the reasons for Judaism, and Jewish practice and rituals. The Torah states that this questioning will occur as a matter of fact. It is a certainty to happen. And the Torah in its own cryptic way provides the guidelines that are to be employed in giving the proper answers to these questions. There are different types of parents and teachers in the world. There are those who are authoritarian and dogmatic in their approach, who resent questions in the home and the classroom and who in effect feel that their role as a teacher and parent is challenged by the propensity of the young to question the value system and knowledge of the older generation. On the other hand, there are parents and teachers who encourage and appreciate probing questions from the young. They are stimulated by the questioning, challenged to find meaningful and convincing answers to those questions and thereby create an atmosphere of learning and understanding.

From the Torah's perspective, I believe that the latter course is the wiser one. There are those who do not know how or what to ask. But sad as that situation is, it is even sadder to live in a society that does not allow one to ask. Mankind's bitter experience of the twentieth century when hundreds of millions of people were living under totalitarian regimes that allowed no questioning of megalomaniacal rulers, testifies to the evils of a world where no questions are allowed and therefore no answers need be provided.

In the Jewish world, especially in the religious and faithful Jewish world, asking good questions has become a rarity. Dogmatic belief in individuals and policies has almost become the norm over the entire spectrum of religious Jewish society. Many students have complained to me that in their schools and classrooms they are simply not allowed to ask questions about basic ideas and values of Judaism. This take-it-or-leave-it attitude produced disastrous results for the Torah world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I find it hard to understand why it should continue to be perpetuated currently in our homes and schools. To a certain extent this

encouragement of no questions reveals a terrible insecurity about the faith of Judaism and the Torah. It becomes an admission, G-d forbid, that the Torah really does not have any answers to these questions and therefore the questions are forbidden per se. But our Torah and beliefs that have stood the test of time, that have encountered all ideas, philosophies and popular movements and triumphed over them should never be placed in this position of not allowing questions, discussions and the clash of ideas.

"Know what to answer the non-believer" is the mantra of the rabbis of the Mishap in Avot. Even the evil son is entitled to a question and an answer, albeit a harsh and brutally frank one. The continuity of Jewish generations is built upon the discussions, questions and answers that form the relationship between one generation and its succeeding generations. So, be prepared to be questioned and accept that fact gracefully. More importantly, be prepared to answer wisely, patiently and in harmonious faith. © 2006 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's portion, the Torah begins to present commandments given to the Jewish people. One wonders why so many commandments are proscribed in such detail.

The Sefer Ha-Hinukh (13th century) offers a comment that reveals a basic message about the purpose of commandments. He writes, "Know that human beings are influenced by their actions and their intellectual and emotional life is conditioned by the things they do, good or bad." In other words, what we do very much influences what we feel.

Hundreds of years later, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler offers an understanding of love that reflects the Sefer Ha-Hinukh's sentiments. While all people walk a type of balance between giving of themselves to others, and taking from others, by and large, Rabbi Dessler argues, each person can be categorized as either a "giver" or a "taker." Rabbi Dessler insists that the cornerstone of love is the capacity to give to the loved one. And he adds, it's not necessarily the case that one first loves and from the loving comes the giving. The reverse is equally true, and even more powerful. One gives, and from the giving comes loving. The more one gives, the more one loves. In fact, the real test of love is not only what I feel towards you, but what I am prepared to do for you.

What is true in personal relationships involving love of others is also true about ritual commandments, religious observance, which connects us and expresses our love to G-d. Perform the ritual and, from the act, this

feeling may come. Hence, Jews at Sinai first proclaimed, "we will do." Only then did they say, "we will listen."

A story illustrates this idea. My mother of blessed memory and father, may he be well, made aliyah in the late 70's. Whenever my parents flew to New York, it was my responsibility to meet them at the airport. One time, my father called me to inform me that at the last moment their arrival was moved up by 24 hours. Professing my deep love for my parents, I insisted that I couldn't change my schedule on such short notice. "You became a hot shot Rabbi," my father responded, "and don't have time for your parents?" "I love you deeply," I protested, "but it's difficult to alter plans at the last moment." I'll never forget my father's response. "Don't love me so much, just pick me up at the airport!"

Not coincidentally, the root of ahavah, love, is the two letter Aramaic word hav, to give. It reflects the point made by the Sefer Ha-Hinukh that "actions shape character." It is nothing more than what my Abba said: "don't love me so much, just pick me up at the airport."

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah 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 Yoshiyahu 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" (Shmos4:24). 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. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Moses said to the nation, Remember (Zakhor) this day when you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery, since with the force of power did the Lord take you out from that place; leavening (Hametz) may not be eaten... Matzot shall be eaten for seven days... And you shall tell (Vehigadeta, Haggadeh, a retelling) your child on that day (the yearly anniversary of the exodus, the evening of the 15th day of Nisan, the first of the seven day festival), saying 'It was because of this (these ritual acts surrounding the festival of Passover) that G-d wrought (miracles) for me when I went out of Egypt'" (Exodus 13:3,7,8).

It is with this stirring commandment to remember that the Bible concludes the first phase of the historical, seminal experience of Hebrew enslavement in and exodus from Egypt: Zakhor, Remember. Indeed there are seven commandments to remember significant incidents in our history, two of which refer to the Egyptian event ("And you shall remember - Tizkor - the day in which you went out from the land of Egypt all the days of your life" Deuteronomy 16:3); and many Prayer Books (Siddurim) even publish these seven

"remembrances" at the conclusion of the Daily Morning Prayer Service, since the Kabbalistic Sages ordain that those verses of remembrance be repeated every day.

Apparently, our Bible deems it significant - even crucial - that we remember. And the Bible is right, for, after all, it is memory which forms identity. The fundamental response to the existential question "Who am I" is that "I am the sum total of my past memories and future aspirations." Very few individuals are as tragic as an Alzheimers patient; an individual devoid of memory is an individual devoid of self. Just as a house cannot stand without a foundation, so a person who has lost his past cannot even begin to contemplate a meaningful future.

Hence, it becomes so very important for individuals - and nations - to continue to record and remember significant moments of personal and national history, in writing, in photographing and in video taping. Any event which is not recorded and not remembered, did not really happen - so that forgetting becomes tantamount to destroying, even to murdering. No wonder that the national outcry which emerged from Auschwitz and Treblinka was "not to be forgotten and not to be forgiven," and the Hebrew letters of Zakhor figure most prominently in the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum.

But our Bible and our religious texts do not merely command remembrance; they teach us how to remember and what to remember. Mark how our great philosopher - legalist Maimonides defines our Biblical portion's command to remember the day of our exodus from Egypt: "It is a positive commandment of the Bible to recount the miracles and wonders that were wrought to our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth day of Nissan, as it is stated, 'Remember (Zakhor) this day when you went out from Egypt' (Exodus 13:3), just like it is stated 'Remember (Zakhor) the Sabbath day' (Exodus 20:7). And how do we know that this (remembrance) is to be on the night of the fifteenth? The Bible teaches us so by saying, 'And you shall tell your child on that day saying "It was because of this (these ritual acts)' - that is, at the time when the Matzah and Maror (bitter herbs) are placed before you'" (Maimonides, Laws of Hametz and Matzah, 7,1).

The Rambam is explaining that the command to remember what happened in Egypt is not merely cognitive; it is also cognitive, which is the intent of the verse "And you shall remember the day in which you went out of Egypt all the days of your life (Deut 16:3)" and so we do mention our exodus twice daily in the Shema prayer, but it is not only cognitive. On Passover we must actually re-live, re-experience the slavery as well as the freedom, the affliction as well as the redemption.

This is the point of the Maimonidean comparison of our remembering the exodus to our remembering the Sabbath, both emphasizing Zakhor (with a Kametz): we do not merely mention that G-d

created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, but we actually re-experience the primordial week of creation every week of our lives by our working on the six days and resting on the seventh. In like manner do we eat the matzah bread of affliction, taste the bitter herbs, drink the wine of freedom, and sing the praises for our redemption on the first evening of Passover, since "it is incumbent for each individual to see himself (or show himself) as though he himself came out of Egypt" (Haggadah text). In other words, true remembrance entails transforming national historical past into present and personal individual experience. When we do this, our memory truly lives - because it affects our lives today! And if the historical event is truly internalized into existential experience, there is a chance that we will learn from it to "love the stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt," to fight for the freedom of others because you know in your very being the sufferings of the enslaved.

And our Sages also censure, funnel and direct our memory, interpret the past in a way that it will properly and meaningfully impact on our future. Hence, when our Sages record the miracle of Hanukkah - both in the Talmudic citation of Megillat Taanit (BT Shabbat 21) as well as in the Al Hanissim prayer - they begin with the entry of the Greek-Syrians into the war against the Maccabees, neglecting to start at the beginning, which was a Civil War of the religious Maccabees against the secular Jewish Kohanic government of Judea. Clearly our Rabbinical tradition does not wish us to remember - and thereby eternalize - a Civil War of Jew against Jew.

Similarly does our Bible and Rabbinic tradition urge us to remember and eternalize our enslavement in Egypt - but only within the context of our exodus from Egypt and redemption from slavery. From this perspective, it behooves us to carefully examine our method of remembering the holocaust, through hundred of millions of dollars expended on holocaust memorials and Holocaust Study University Chairs. Despite all of this and despite the 7,000,000 hits the word holocaust provides on Google, 63% of passers by in Orlando, Florida could not even begin to define what or where Auschwitz was. Did the world learn anything from the lesson of the holocaust? Has even the United Nations properly responded to the carnage in Rowanda, Cambodia, Bosnia and Darfur, or to European and Islamic Fundamentalist anti-Semitism? ("Stop Teaching the Holocaust," Elliot Jager, Jerusalem Post, January 9, 2005).

Why do we continue to see Jewish consciousness plummeting, intermarriage and assimilation rising, despite all of this heightened holocaust communication? Is it not possible that repetition of mass slaughter can often desensitize human consciousness to human destruction? Remember that Chaim Nachmon Bialik wrote his tragic poem "The City of Destruction" after the Kishinev

Pogrom - when (only!!) thirty six people were killed. Many studies have been made to show that the plethora of violence and bad language on television only serves to make such conduct and vocabulary words part and parcel of our daily life. And even more to the point, a holocaust which emphasizes a "victim" psychology and a "battered wife" syndrome often serves to make people believe that we Jews must have deserved the treatment we received at the hands of an unfeeling world. After all, how many people desire to identify with the underdog? No wonder the Biblical concept of remembering Egypt insists on emphasizing our exodus from Egypt.

If we learn to remember and eternalize the holocaust from our remembrance and eternalization of Egypt, if we look to our Seder celebration as a model of our means of remembrance, then at the same time that we mourn over Auschwitz we must rejoice over the establishment of the State of Israel only three years later. The G-d of our Bible is first and foremost a redeemer who eventually brought Pharaoh to his knees and redeemed His nation. Our bible never minimizes the suffering which evil brings to the world. At the same time, however, our Bible emphasizes our eventual extrication from exile and servitude into the light of freedom and peace in our own homeland. © 2006 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

At the end of the plague of darkness, Pharaoh descends to a new depth in his negative attitude towards Moshe: "Pharaoh said to him, go away from me, beware not to come to see my face again, for the day you see my face you will die" [Shemot 10:28]. Moshe seems to have seen how serious Pharaoh was in his declaration, and he therefore replied, "What you say is right, I will not see your face again" [10:29]. However, immediately afterwards, the Almighty tells Moshe that the plagues against Egypt have not yet finished. "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt, and then he will send you out from here" [11:1]. Moshe turns to Pharaoh and tells him about the plague of the firstborns, ending with, "and all your slaves will come to me and bow to me, saying: leave, you and the entire nation at your feet. And then I will leave." [11:8]. This declaration, announcing the plague of the firstborns, seems to contradict what Moshe agreed to after the plague of darkness, that he would never see Pharaoh again. How can Moshe's declaration about the plague of the firstborns be reconciled with his earlier promise?

It seems that Moshe's decisive promise to Pharaoh was not in accordance with the wishes of the Almighty. And that is why G-d says to Moshe, "I will bring one more plague." That is, the time for leaving Pharaoh has not arrived, there is one more plague yet

to come. According to the Midrash, this newest revelation by the Almighty took place on the spot, while Moshe was still with Pharaoh. In an unusual way, the revelation took place in Pharaoh's palace, so that the last plague could be brought on Pharaoh without causing Moshe to break his word. "The Almighty said: I still want to tell Pharaoh about one more plague! So G-d immediately came to him, as it were entering Pharaoh's chamber because of Moshe, who had said, 'I will not see your face again,' so that he would not be a liar." [Shemot Rabba 18]. See also the Midrash Hagadol, "The Cloud of Glory wrapped itself around Moshe's head and said to him, there is one more plague that I will bring on this evil man, but since you said 'I will not see your face again,' I will bring it on him at the sea." Thus, it appears that Moshe's words were out of place, and they forced G-d to enter Pharaoh's palace in order to tell Moshe about the remaining plague. Perhaps this explains why at the end of the announcement about the plague of the firstborns, it is written, "And he left Pharaoh in anger" [11:8] -- Moshe's anger stemmed from his realization that his promise to Pharaoh without asking for permission was not the proper way to act.

The lesson that we can learn from this event is that the redemption from Egypt was a wondrous and miraculous process, completely under the control of the Almighty. No human being-even including Moshe himself-could predict the path that this process would take. Not only couldn't Pharaoh declare, "beware not to come to see my face again, for the day you see my face you will die," Moshe himself could not make a promise, "I will not see your face again." The only one who could accurately predict the path of the future was the Almighty, who would say to Moshe much later on, "You cannot see my face, for no human being can see my face and live" [33:20]

The Secret of the Mitzvot and Redemption

by Rabbi Yechezkel Frankel, Michlelet Orot Yisrael, Elkanah

Two comments by our early sages can serve to clarify the processes of our redemption from Egypt and the redemption in current times. Both comments are connected to the relationship between man and the mitzvot, and therefore- on a broader level-to the nation and the Torah.

The "holy mechanism" of enhancing the sanctity of Yisrael by performance of the mitzvot and decreasing their sanctity as a result of sin is a mystical link related to the spiritual and physical aspects of humanity. Some of this can be seen in this week's Torah portion, based on the comment by the Chinuch (Mitzva 16), who notes the remarkable truth that "the heart follows the trend of the actions." The Almighty has imbedded within the mitzvot the ability to influence the spirit of man-mitzvot are an influence for good, while sins are the opposite. The conclusion is that the ability

to see the light of G-d's face depends on our own actions.

In fact, G-d's will is stronger than this holy possibility, and He can redeem us even if we are at the lowest of the 49 levels of spiritual impurity. However, the significance of the giving of the Torah to us is as a permanent way of enhancing the sanctity and decreasing evil. The Almighty is capable of bringing about redemption based on the intrinsic holy essence of Bnei Yisrael and as a way of enhancing the love of G-d, but this would be an "eruption" of sorts, beyond and above the nature of the Torah.

The two paths, based on the mitzvot or on the intrinsic value of the people, are intertwined with each other. Even in times of a sudden and speedy redemption, as occurred in Egypt, our actions can delay the process. They can also speed it up, as we hope for in our times-that during the process that proceeds "in due time"-slowly, bit by bit-we will be privileged to a redemption that is "hasty" (see Yeshayahu 60:22). This is what the Ramban explains with respect to the question of why the exile in Egypt was increased from the original 400 years, as was promised to Avraham, by 30 years more, as is written, "The time that Bnei Yisrael dwelt in Egypt was 430 years" [Shemot 12:40]. After discussing several possibilities, he notes that the most straightforward explanation is that the sins of the generation in Egypt led to an increased time of exile, just as later the sin of disdain for the land brought on a punishment of remaining in the desert for forty additional years.

The ideas of the Chinuch and the Ramban imply that there are concentric cycles for the individual and the community as a whole. If one chooses to do evil, it has an effect not only on his own personal rewards in the current world and the world to come but even on the community as a whole, possibly leading to a delay in redemption or a retreat from the salvation of the Almighty at a given time. This is the ethical criticism of the nation that is a recurring thread among the words of all the prophets of Bnei Yisrael.

Thus, the main lesson to be learned is related to the trait of fear of heaven: On a public level, the approach of fear of G-d should be of utmost importance to the sectors of the nation which emphasize the desire to follow the will of G-d, while the responsibility for the nation and the land should be the main emphasis of the personal path through which every individual serves G-d.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

In this week's parsha we have the finale of the ten plagues. Pharaoh at long last breaks under the weight of all the first-born in Egypt dying. He reluctantly allows the Jews to leave his country. Before they leave the Israelites are instructed several times to be sure to

"borrow" jewelry from their Egyptian neighbors (and former taskmasters).

"Please speak to the ears of the People that they should borrow, each man from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor, artifacts of silver and of gold." (Exodus 11:2)

"Please speak-RASHI: The word 'na' (in Hebrew) can only mean [here] 'please.' [G-d is saying] I beseech you [Moses], please instruct them about this (i.e. that the Israelites should take the silver and gold vessels of the Egyptians), so that the righteous man, Abraham, should not say 'He fulfilled [the promise] 'and they will enslave and afflict them' but [the promise] 'and afterwards they will go free with great wealth' He did not fulfill.'"

Let us begin this analysis by first understanding what Rashi is saying. First, he says that the word "na" in our verse means "please." He certainly doesn't mean that this is what the word always means. We know that the word "na" can also mean "now," as when Avram speaks with Sarai, his wife, and says, "Behold, now ("na") I know that you are a beautiful woman." (Genesis 12:11) The word can also mean "uncooked" as, "Don't eat from [the Pascal offering] ("na")uncooked." (Exodus 12:9). So Rashi is telling us that in this verse the word means "please."

He then explains why G-d was beseeching ("please") Moses to tell the Israelites to take the silver and golden vessels from the Egyptians. The reason: So that Abraham won't have a complaint against G-d.

Now, we're ready for your questions on this Rashi-comment. What would you ask here?

A Question: Why does Rashi offer this remote drash (taken from the Talmud Brochos 9a)? What is wrong with the simple meaning of the verse i.e. G-d is asking Moses to tell the Israelites to take the silver and gold from their Egyptian masters before they depart Egypt? Hint: Are the words in the dibbur hamatchil appropriate in our context?

An Answer: G-d is pleading ("please") with Moses to tell the people to take "reparations" from the Egyptians, their valuables. The problem is, why the need to say 'please,' as if G-d were asking them to do Him a favor? Taking the precious vessels should be all too readily appreciated by Moses and by the freed slaves. The poetic justice of despoiling the Egyptians after the all the years that the Egyptians had despoiled them-physically, monetarily and morally-would certainly cause the Israelites to fulfill this mitzvah without any prompting. Why then the need for the term "please"? How does Rashi's drash deal with this problem?

An Answer: Rashi tells us that this was a special request from G-d, Who wanted the freed slaves to take the gold and silver so that Abraham would not accuse Him of not keeping His word completely.

Does that make sense to you? It shouldn't! What would you ask on this midrash which Rashi quotes?

A Question: If G-d promised Abraham that his offspring would leave Egypt with great wealth, why is G-d concerned that his promise be fulfilled only "so that the righteous man, Abraham, won't complain"? If G-d promised Abraham, then He should keep his promise whether Abraham would complain or not. Is G-d concerned with Abraham's opinion more than He is with His moral obligation to keep His word?

Do you have an answer? Think! The answer depends on common sense. Hint: The source of this drash, as we pointed out above, is in the Talmud, Tractate Brachos page 9a. If you look it up, you will see the continuation of the drash. This should answer the question. What does it say there?

Answer: The drash continues (after the part quoted by Rashi): "They (the Israelites) said to him (Moses, after he told them to take the vessels): 'Oh! That we ourselves should get out of here!' This is similar to a man who was in jail and they said to him 'we will free you tomorrow and then you will receive a lot of money.' He answered them 'I beg you, free me now and I'll gladly forgo the money.' " In light of the completed midrash can you now answer the question?

The Answer: The parable of the man in jail makes it abundantly clear that the Israelite slaves wanted to get out of Egypt as soon and as sure as possible. They would have gladly forfeited the "great wealth" promised Abraham, just to get their freedom NOW.

In that case, it was not a question of G-d keeping His promise or not, since the beneficiaries of that wealth would have willingly forfeited it, just to escape as soon as possible from their imprisonment in the Land of Bondage. Had G-d allowed them to leave without the wealth, they would have been grateful and would not have complained. This would not be interpreted as G-d renegeing on His promise.

However, since G-d wanted to be faithful to Abraham and to the promise He made to him, He therefore beseeched ("please") Moses to convince the people to take the time and effort to take the wealth from the Egyptians so "that the righteous one, Abraham" would have no complaints to G-d. © 2006 Dr. A. Bonchek & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, rishon hu lachem / the first of the months of the year it shall be for you." (12:2)

The yotzer / additional prayer that some congregations recite on Shabbat Parashat Hachodesh (the Shabbat before the month of Nissan) says: "rishon hu lachem / The first it shall be for you, for G-d to pass over you, to be sanctified among you- the Holy One! lachem hu rishon / for you it shall be the first, you who are guarded like the apple of the eye..."

Why does the first stanza say, "rishon hu lachem / The first it shall be for you," while the second reverses the order of the words and says, "lachem hu rishon / for you it shall be the first"? R' Shalom Elchanan Halevi Jaffe z"l explains: In the verse quoted above, Hashem taught Moshe the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon to begin each month. That first month was sanctified by Hashem Himself; He showed Moshe what the new moon looks like. Thereafter, Hashem turned over this responsibility to man. From that time on, even if the bet din were to err in its declaration of the new moon, Hashem will observe the holidays on the day when the bet din says they will fall. [For example, Hashem will judge man on the day which the bet din says is Yom Kippur, even if Yom Kippur really should have fallen on the following day. (See Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:9)]

This explains the change between the two stanzas: Hashem sanctified the first month—"rishon hu lachem / The first it shall be for you." It was "first" before it was "for you." Thereafter, "lachem hu rishon / for you it shall be the first." It is "yours" to make the "first."

Why did Hashem sanctify that first month Himself? R' Jaffe explains: The Torah states (Vayikra 20:7-8): "You shall sanctify yourselves and you will be holy, for I am Hashem, your G-d. You shall observe My decrees and perform them—I am Hashem, Who sanctifies you." These verses teach us that Hashem has previously sanctified us, and only because He did so can we sanctify ourselves further. Why did He sanctify us? Because He knows that we will follow His initiative and continue to sanctify ourselves.

Similarly, the gemara (Shabbat 88a) teaches that Hashem forced Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai to accept the Torah. Why did He force them, whereas he did not force the descendants of Esav and Yishmael? Because He knew that Bnei Yisrael would later reaccept the Torah willingly.

In the same vein, Hashem sanctified the first rosh chodesh because all sanctity must begin with Him. However, He then turned this responsibility over to us because He knew that we would continue to sanctify the months. (Sichah Sheleimah p.190)

"And it shall be when your son will ask you at some future time, 'What is this?' (13:14) This is the question that the Haggadah associates with the simple-minded son. Why, asks R' Moshe Feinstein z"l, is this question presented in the Torah before the question of the wise son (Devarim 6:20): "What are the testimonies and the decrees and the ordinances that Hashem, our G-d, commanded you?"

He answers: This is how one should approach Torah study. Before one can start inquiring into the Torah on a deep level, he must ask: "What is this?" Only after one knows the entire Torah, writes R' Feinstein, can one ask the deeper questions. (Darash Moshe) © 2000 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org