

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### Wein Online

**M**oshe is overcome with disappointment that somehow G-d has not acted as predictably and swiftly as Moshe thought he would in the process of redeeming Israel from Egyptian bondage. His complaint to G-d that "You have not saved Your people" and that the situation has worsened instead of improving is an understandable one. Yet, even though the facts seem to bear out the correctness of Moshe's words, the Lord, so to speak, is disappointed in Moshe's statements and attitude. G-d longs for the attitude and faith of the Patriarchs: Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov who, when faced with disappointments, tests and reverses, never wavered or complained to Him about His as yet unfulfilled heavenly promises and commitments. That is the meaning, the Rabbis teach us, of the fact that G-d appeared to them in a less personal "Name" than he did when revealing Himself to Moshe.

It is precisely because Moshe achieved the level of "knowing" G-d through His ineffable and the most "personal" of G-d's names, so to speak, that Moshe is more disappointed than were the Patriarchs and allows himself to express that disappointment to the G-d that he feels he apparently "knows" so well. It is the greatness and personal closeness of Moshe, the greatest of all prophets, that paradoxically engenders within Moshe this feeling of depression and disappointment at the apparent delay in the implementation of G-d's promise to redeem Israel from Egyptian bondage. We are always more frustrated and disappointed by those that we think that we know best than we are by those who appear more distant to us.

The Talmud teaches us that Moshe's statement to G-d and his words of complaint would yet somehow cost him dearly. G-d told him that "Now you will see" the defeat of Pharaoh and Egypt but you will not live to see the entry of the people of Israel into the Land of Israel and the defeat of the Canaanites and their thirty-one kings. G-d, so to speak, admires patience. It is one of the attributes and virtues recorded about the Almighty in His Torah. It is G-d's sense of patience, so to speak, that allows for human life to exist as it does in front of us in our daily world.

In the imitation of G-d's ways that is the core philosophy and way of life of Judaism, patience is seen

as a supreme virtue. Patience with others, with one's own family members, with one's community and even with G-d Himself, is an essential hallmark of Jewish thought and attitude. If we review the lives of our Patriarchs we will readily see how patient an undemanding they truly were. They never insisted on "now" solutions and served G-d humbly in their unshakable belief in the validity of G-d's commitments to them and their future generations. By leading the Jewish people, Moshe will also learn the value of patience and we will not again hear insistent demands from him for immediacy and speed in the fulfillment of G-d's promises to Israel. © 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**I**n this week's portion, G-d tells Moshe to tell the children of Israel that he will soon take them out of Egypt. In the words of the Torah, "I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from their bondage and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm...and I will take you to me for a people. (Exodus 6:6,7)

Here, the Torah mentions four words related to the Exodus from Egypt. I will bring you out (vehotzeiti), I will deliver you (vehitzalti), I will redeem you (vega'alti), and I will take you (velakhti). In fact, the four cups of wine used at the seder table are meant to symbolize these four words of redemption. Wine is the symbol of joy and hence reflects these words which describe the joyous exodus from Egypt.

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin notes that the Hebrew term for words often used by the rabbis is leshonot, which literally means languages. For the Netziv, the terms in this portion denote the language of redemption rather than words of redemption. This implies that each term relates to a stage in the redemption process. The stages indicate that redemption is a process that is gradual.

This idea of process is especially important as it is very common for people, in times of desperation, to believe that the only hope is sudden change -the immediate coming of the Messiah. Note that after the

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destruction of the Second Temple the great Rabbi Akiva thought that Bar Kochba was such a leader. The belief that Shabtai Tzvi was the messiah came about in the 17th century as the decrees of the notorious Jew killer Bogdan Chmilniki took hold.

And in our portion, the Jews in Egypt were beaten, oppressed, persecuted and even murdered. They were desperate for salvation. They may have felt that the only solution is one that would come quickly and bring a fast transformation from bondage to freedom. And so G-d tells Moshe, according to the Netziv, that the process of leaving Egypt would not be fast. Indeed, even after the Exodus we spent 40 years wandering in the desert and many more years passed before the first Temple was built.

This idea is important especially in the post Holocaust period. On the heels of the Shoah, even as the State of Israel was born it is important for all of us to remember that redemption comes gradually. Messianism is often associated with the need for immediate salvation, but in reality, it is a goal that is in constant process. Indeed, the rabbis liken the Messianic era to the rising of the sun, it happens slowly, step by step-in rabbinic terms, kima, kima.

An important message especially during these difficult times in Israel. We believe that we are in the process of reaching towards that redemptive moment but that process has its pitfalls. Sometimes it moves forward but sometimes it stands still and even moves backward. The four languages of redemption teach us that no matter the obstacles, never to give up hope, for slowly the sun will rise and redemption will be upon us.

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### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah teaches us a profound lesson in arrogance and self dependency. Hashem instructed the prophet Yechezkel to deliver a crushing blow to Pharaoh and his Egyptian empire and predict its total destruction. Hashem said, "Behold I am sending the sword after you that will decimate man and animal. Egypt will lay desolate and ruined...in response to your saying, 'The river is mine and I developed it.'" (29: 8,9) Hashem held Pharaoh and Egypt fully

accountable for their arrogant approach to prosperity crediting their sustenance solely to their technology.

The background for this is that Egypt relies upon the Nile River for her basic existence. Rainfall in Egypt is so scarce and infrequent that she must maintain an elaborate irrigation system for her basic agricultural needs. Over the years, Egyptians grew accustomed to their highly effective system and viewed themselves self sufficient. They viewed the Nile River as their sole provider and regarded its developer, Pharaoh their deity. He was, in truth, responsible for the system's efficiency and was therefore considered by all, their source of goodness. Pharaoh gladly accepted his title and lured his foolish nation into recognizing him as their deity. Hashem responded to this arrogance and informed Pharaoh that Egypt's days were numbered. Her mighty empire would soon fall and her country would lay desolate for forty years.

Pharaoh's absurd status as Egypt's deity finds its parallel in the ancient Pharaoh of this week's parsha. Hashem repeatedly chose a special meeting place for Moshe and Pharaoh and instructed Moshe, "Go to Pharaoh in the morning; behold he is going out to the water." (Shmos 7: 15) Moshe Rabbeinu was sent to meet Pharaoh far from his palace-at the foot of the Nile River. Rashi (ad loc.) explains that Hashem chose this auspicious site in response to Pharaoh's arrogant claim to the masses. He proclaimed himself as a deity without common bodily needs. In order to preserve this myth, he secretly traveled early each morning to the Nile River to relieve himself there. Hashem therefore chose this perfect moment to send Moshe to remind Pharaoh of his mortality and disclose his secret identity.

In truth, the parallel lines between the Pharaohs extends much further. In our haftorah Yechezkel states in Hashem's name, "Behold I am turning against you and your river...Neither man nor animal shall pass through the land for forty years." (29: 10,11) The Sages place special significance on the number forty predicted here. They note the Biblical discussions between Yosef and Pharaoh wherein seven years of famine are mentioned six times. They explain that these refer to forty-two years of ordained famine for Egypt. (see Breishis Rabba 89:9) Tosfos explain that ultimately only seven years were decreed upon ancient Egypt. Yosef intervened on behalf of his household and asked Hashem to limit the famine to seven years. Hashem answered Yosef's request and Yosef subsequently limited Pharaoh's dream to seven years of famine. (see Baalei Tosfos to Breishis 41:27) Chazal add that, in reality, only two years of famine transpired. Soon after our patriarch Yaakov Avinu arrived in Egypt he blessed Pharaoh with prosperity and brought the famine to an immediate halt. (see Rashi Breishis 47:19)

Accordingly, forty years of famine remained to be seen. Those were reserved for a later period in

history when Egypt would deserve Hashem's harsh response. In Yechezkel's days, the time finally arrived and the remaining forty years were decreed upon Egypt.

Chazal's powerful insight suggests that Egypt was presently suffering for her ancient fault committed one thousand years before. Apparently, this decree of Egyptian desolation was Heavenly ordained many centuries earlier for a similar fault of hers. It follows logically that the earlier Pharaoh must have possessed a similar approach to prosperity to that of the later Pharaoh. Indeed, this was the case and we discover a similar scenario in the earlier Egyptian empire. The Midrash notes a discrepancy in Pharaoh's dream when expressing it to Yosef. In Pharaoh's true dream, the Torah reveals him standing above the Nile River. Yet when informing Yosef of his dream Pharaoh conveniently referred to himself standing next to the river. Chazal explain that Pharaoh took full credit for creating and developing his Nile River. In his dream he beheld himself standing above the Nile reflecting his position that, "the river was his and he developed it." He was, however, embarrassed to reveal this arrogance to Yosef and he carefully altered the truth. (Tanchuma Voeira 8)

We now see a direct corollary between the Pharaohs, both claiming to be the sole source of their prosperity. Hashem initially responded to this abhorrent arrogance and decreed forty-two years of Egyptian desolation. This decree would undoubtedly clarify to Pharaoh who controls prosperity and upon whom everyone must rely. The Nile River was soon to be of no use and Egypt would be forced to recognize Hashem as their ultimate provider. Pharaoh quickly learned his lesson. Mysteriously, once Yaakov came to Egypt and blessed Pharaoh the famine ended. This miracle convinced the ancient Pharaoh that Hashem controlled the world. Once Pharaoh learned his lesson the forty remaining years of famine were suspended. In the interim Egypt developed a hostile attitude towards Hashem and His people. On the heels of Egypt's recent lesson Hashem completed the process and destroyed the entire Egyptian Empire. It would take many years for Egypt to raise her head in pride and take credit, once again, for her accomplishments.

Now, nearly one thousand years later Egypt returned to her arrogant ways. After her massive devastating blows she finally rebuilt her empire. Pharaoh, in his height of success, began viewing his Nile River as Egypt's sole source of prosperity. He, like the earlier Pharaoh, maintained that he created the Nile and developed it. Hashem refused to tolerate this arrogance and when the first signs of this absurdity resurfaced Hashem responded harshly. The time had finally arrived for Egypt to experience her long awaited forty years of desolation. Through this, Hashem

displayed to Mitzraim and the world over that He controlled the world and provided their prosperity.

The above lesson reminds us never to forget our limited role in our personal success. We must never forget that Hashem is our true provider and He develops and secures our efforts with their ultimate success. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### **Shabbat Shalom**

**T**his coming Shabbat Parashat Vaera is my grandson's bar mitzvah. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you what I plan to say to him, to speak not as a rabbi but as a grandfather.

The Biblical readings of these early portions of the Book of Exodus deal with the emergence of the Jewish nation, from a proud family with a mission to an Egyptian enslaved and persecuted people and thereafter to a free and inspired nation of G-d. G-d initially chooses Moses as the liberator with the promise which includes not only the Exodus from Egypt but also the Divine revelation at Sinai: "And G-d said, 'I will be with you and this will be your sign that I sent you: when I take you with your nation out of Egypt you shall serve the Lord upon this mountain'" (Exodus 3:12). Clearly it is not sufficient that the Jews be freed; their freedom must lead to their being imbued with the mission which will express the manner in which G-d wants Israel-and ultimately all of humanity-to live. In effect, Israel is freed from Egyptian slavery in order that they may learn how best to serve G-d.

At the end of his life, Moses impresses upon the Israelites the crucial importance of that Bible which they received at Sinai and he expresses it in a very special way: "But guard yourselves and guard your souls very carefully lest you forget those Divine words which your eyes saw (at Sinai) and lest these words depart from your hearts all the days of your lives. You shall inform your children and your children's children concerning that day when you stood before the Lord your G-d at Horeb (Sinai-Deut. 4:9,10). Based upon this verse, the Sages of the Talmud teach in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua Halevy, "Anyone who teaches his child's child Torah is considered as if he received the Torah from Mount Horeb." (B.T. Berakhot 21b)

It is fascinating how both the Bible and the Talmud emphasize the third generation, the relationship between grandparent and grandchild. The fact is that Abraham is the first Jew-not Adam and not Noah-because Abraham communicated G-d's teaching to three generations. The animal world recognizes its young but not its young's young. Only human beings have relationship with grandchildren, with third generation; third generation begins historical continuity, and since G-d entered into a covenant with the nation, that third generation becomes critical. There is developed a great literature in modern times

concerning the question of who is a Jew. On the basis of what we have just seen, I would argue that from a sociological perspective a Jew is that individual who has Jewish grandchildren.

This theme of the three generations is iterated and re-iterated throughout our religious literature. For example, the Book of Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) teaches "Two is better than one, and a thrice strengthened thread cannot easily be torn asunder" (Ecclesiastes 4:9,13), and in our daily prayers we repeat every day, "My words which I have placed in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth and the mouth of your child and the mouth of your child's child, says the Lord, now and forever" (Uva Letzion). The Jerusalem Talmud takes this idea one step further: "whoever hears a Biblical interpretation from the child of his child it is as if he has heard it from Sinai". (Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin chapter 1, law 6)

G-d's message at Sinai is not only meant for us parents and grandparents to communicate to our children and grandchildren; G-d's message at Sinai is an internal one, which has the ability to speak to every generation and has the potential to be interpreted in a novel way to meet the needs of every generation. Our ability to teach Torah to the third generation as well as to learn Torah from the third generation is the greatest expression of the eternity of our Torah.

Built in to all of this is the fact that what G-d gave to us was not sky scraping pyramids or treasures of oil beneath the earth. What G-d gave to us as the secret of our eternity was words, Divine words which we must communicate to our progeny. This week's Biblical portion promises redemption, guaranteeing in the name of G-d that, "I shall bring you to the land which I have sworn to give to Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob; I shall give it to you as a morasha..." (Exodus 6:8). The Hebrew word morasha is usually translated as heritage and is found in the Bible in the two contexts of the Land of Israel and the Torah of Israel. (Deut. 33:4). The usual word for inheritance in Hebrew is yerusha not morasha. What is the difference between these two Hebrew terms? I would argue that an inheritance is an object, a house, a field, a diamond ring or a cash check. A morasha on the other hand is a word, a lesson, a concept, a guide for living. The Jews did not have sovereignty over Israel, and in large measure did not live in Israel for close to 2,000 years; but the message of Israel, the dream of Israel, the goal of Israel was communicated from generation to generation. And needless to say our Torah is our inheritance of words, Divine words which are seemingly of no substance but which have changed the world.

As a grandfather, I have very little inheritance to leave my grandchildren; but I truly hope that I have given over a heritage, a morasha. Perhaps the best way I can say it is through a Yiddish song I learned from my beloved cantor Sherwood Goffin:

When I was young and fancy free  
My folks had no fancy clothes for me.  
All I got was words

Thank G-d, G-d will provide  
Let us live and be well

I wanted acknowledged,  
I yearned for college  
But all I got was words

Have common sense, don't speak foolishly  
Torah is the best merchandise.

I wanted to travel far  
My parents couldn't provide a car  
All I got was words

Go in good health, drive carefully,  
Go with G-d.

As we grew older and our materialism grew bolder  
Once again-Words!  
Tell the truth, give charity  
Have compassion, be a mentsh

What I really got, and the best that I can give, is words. © 2006 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**D**espite the debilitating plagues that G-d brought on Egypt, Paro (Pharaoh) refuses to let the Children of Israel leave, even temporarily. There are moments, when faced with a life-threatening plague (see Or Hachayim on Shemos 8:4), that Paro considers letting them go, but it was not until after the 10th plague that he actually does. Even when he considered letting them go, he tried to negotiate what he'd allow. The wild animals scared him enough to call Moshe and Aharon back (8:21), but initially he only offered to give them time off to serve G-d in Egypt, not to leave the country. Before the swarms of grasshoppers arrived he offered to let the adult males go (10-11), but the women and children had to stay home. However, these negotiating tactics didn't begin until the 4th plague. His first offer (8:4), made to get Moshe to have the frogs removed, was to allow everyone to leave. Why was his initial offer better than his subsequent ones? If he was trying to give in to as little as possible, shouldn't his first offer have been the "lowest," to let them serve G-d in Egypt? How could he offer Moshe less if he had already offered more?

One possibility is that his initial offer was never really an offer. He never intended on letting the nation go after the plague of frogs, but was purposely

misleading Moshe to get him to have the frogs removed. Knowing that Paro wasn't impressed enough to seriously consider letting them go, Moshe asked Paro to choose a time when the plague would end, hoping that this would convince Paro to *really* let them go. Paro first considered actually giving in to get rid of the wild animals, and it was at this first serious offer that he started the negotiations, offering them only some time off without letting them leave the country.

The Malbim (8:21) explains that polytheism believed that the different G-ds had dominion over specific areas. There were Egyptian G-ds, but the G-d of the Children of Israel was not one of them (hence his "ignorance" of Him in 5:2). If Moshe requested that the nation take a 3-day journey into the desert to serve Him, that must be where He resides. Therefore, even the first time Paro offered to let them go, it was to go into the desert to serve G-d in His province. The 4th plague, though, did not affect the land of Goshen, proving that G-d has dominion everywhere, including in Egypt itself (8:18). Once Paro realized this, he didn't think there was any reason to leave Egypt to serve Him, and only offered to let them do so in Egypt itself. [Even though the first 3 plagues didn't affect the Children of Israel either, the Netziv explains that Paro might have thought that their G-d can do things in Egypt only regarding His people, but not others not under His dominion. When the wild animals didn't enter Goshen at all, and even Egyptians were able to run there to escape the plague, Paro realized that G-d's powers were greater than that, that He had control over (at least parts of) Egypt too.]

There might be another possibility as well. Paro may have thought that the reason Moshe requested that the nation travel into the desert before serving G-d was because Egypt was so full of idolatry and immorality. How could they serve G-d in a place of such "tumah" (spiritual impurity)? He saw that Moshe wouldn't pray to G-d to have any of the plagues until he left Egypt (see Rashi on 9:29), so understood that when the nation would engage in worshipping Him, they would also have to leave Egypt. But then came the 4th plague, where Goshen was not part of the decree against Egypt. Evidently the society that Yehuda set up at Yaakov's request as a protective barrier against the influence of Egypt was successful, and Goshen did not suffer from the same spiritual deficiencies as the rest of Egypt. If so, why leave the country to worship G-d when Goshen would suffice? (See 8:22 for Moshe's response.)

This might explain Rashi's comment that Paro told them to serve G-d "in the land." Rashi explains "in the land" to mean "in your place, without traveling into the desert." The commentators have been puzzled by this comment, as the words "in your place" seem to serve no purpose. We understand that Rashi is explaining that Paro meant "in Egypt" as opposed to "in

the desert," but why add that it should be "in your place?" Rashi may be telling us that seeing that the wild animals stayed out of the area, Paro realized that the "tumah" of Egypt must not have permeated Goshen, so told them to worship G-d "in your place." Even if the rest of Egypt was unsuitable, Goshen obviously was. Therefore, despite having previously offered to let them leave (before retracting), this time Paro started by only offering to let them serve G-d in Egypt, albeit in Goshen. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In this week's Torah portion, after Moshe repeats his earlier claim that he is tongue-tied (Shemot 6:12), the Torah pauses in the description of the developing story to give a long listing of the family relationships in the tribes of Reuven, Shimon, and Levi. Only at the end of this does the Torah return to Moshe's claim—"And Moshe said before G-d, my lips are blocked, why should Pharaoh listen to me?" [6:30]. And now the Torah gives us the reply of the Almighty, "You shall say everything I command you to, and your brother Aharon will speak to Pharaoh" [7:2]. In looking over the family relationships described in the passage, an interesting fact can be seen: There can be no doubt that the main reason for bringing this list is the tribe of Levi, but evidently even this has only been brought in order to emphasize Aharon's family!

It is very easy to demonstrate this fact. Three men are described in similar terms as having married women who bore them children. "And Amram took Yocheved his aunt as a wife, and she bore him Aharon and Moshe" [6:20]; "And Aharon took Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon, as a wife, and she bore him Nadav, Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar" [6:23]. "Elazar son of Aharon took from the daughters of Putiel as a wife, and she bore him Pinchas" [6:25]. The list ends with the summary, "These are the heads of the families of Levi" [6:25]. On the other hand, in this list we are not told at all about Moshe's family, neither his wife nor his children. It thus seems likely that the purpose of the list is to point out that the house of Aharon is the main branch of the tribe of Levi.

Actually, a hint of this same idea appeared in last week's Torah portion. There too, after Moshe noted that he had difficulty speaking, G-d told him, "Is not your brother Aharon, the Levite? I know that he will do the talking" [4:14]. This clearly implies that Aharon is the one who carries on with the name of the tribe.

What is the meaning of this phenomenon? Evidently it is a way for the Torah to emphasize Aharon's virtue, in that as opposed to Moshe he accepted the task given to him without hesitation. The sages have explained that the fact that Aharon was brought into the process was only because Moshe had

refused to accept the mission. "The same thing is true of Moshe. At first, he was worthy of receiving G-d's word exclusively, but when he said, 'Send whomever you will send' [4:13], he was told, 'Is not your brother Aharon, the Levite?' In this case too, he said, 'Behold, Bnei Yisrael did not listen to me' [6:12]. In fact, Moshe was worthy of performing all the miracles himself, but the word of G-d was given in the end to him and to Aharon, as is written, 'And G-d spoke to Moshe and to Aharon' [6:13]." [Shemot Rabba 7:1]. In order to make this point very clear, the Torah interrupts the story of redemption and gives a list which shows Aharon's reward, making his house the central one of the tribe of Levi. The consequence of this was that when the time came his family was appointed to the priesthood. "G-d said to [Moshe]: It would have been best if you were the Kohen and he remained a simple Levite, but since you refused my offer, you will be a Levite and he will be the Kohen." [Shemot Rabba 3:17].

### **The Little One Will Grow to Become a Thousand**

*by Dr. Eli Shusheim Chairman of Efrat Association, Encouraging Births in the Jewish Nation*

At the beginning of the book of Shemot, the names of Bnei Yisrael who went to Egypt are listed. Binyamin appears next to Dan. This is similar to the list in Bereishit of Yaacov's sons and their children when they went to Egypt, where again Binyamin and Dan appear close to each other (46:21,23). This juxtaposition emphasizes the sharp difference in the number of children that the two brothers had: Binyamin had the largest number of children, ten, while Dan had the lowest number, only one, named "Chushim."

The Talmud tells us about Chushim, the son of Dan (Sottah 13). When his sons arrived at the Machpelah Cave to bury Yaacov, Eisav came too and protested that the cave belonged to him. Chushim was deaf and could not understand why Yaacov's burial was being delayed. When he finally understood that Eisav was to blame, he became angry about the way his grandfather was put to shame, and he therefore struck Eisav with his staff and killed him.

In Bamidbar, at the census taken 212 years after the count in Bereishit, the tribes of Binyamin and Dan once again appear in close proximity. The population of Dan, which started out with the single deaf son, was 62,700 -- the second largest tribe in Israel. Surprisingly, the population of Binyamin was only 35,400. Not only was Binyamin not larger than Dan, as might have been expected, it was significantly smaller.

It is commonly thought that a handicapped child will not be able to function properly, and there are those who might wonder if his life has any value at all. When a prenatal test shows a high probability that a child will be born with a defect, the future parents often despair and sometimes even have thoughts of stopping

the pregnancy. Dan, who raised Chushim with dedication in spite of his impaired hearing, knew that he should be treated just like all the other "normal" children. In the end, Chushim, who demonstrated a high level of courage and initiative at the time of Yaacov's burial, showed with the large number of his offspring that his defect would not inhibit the existence of a tribe. In fact, his tribe was larger than most of the others, in spite of his slow start. As our sages point out, one soul can be the source for an entire new world.

It is important for us to learn the lesson. Every child is an incomparable gift, and we have no way to predict anything about his offspring, his fruits, and his actions. This is true even if the child has some sort of defect.

### **"I Will Harden Pharaoh's Heart"**

*by Rabbi Shlomo Schock*

An important question is asked with respect to the fact that G-d helped Pharaoh to be stubborn: How is it that G-d took from Pharaoh his ability to choose between good and evil? "Hardening" somebody's heart removes his ability to make a decision about how to act. We become hard, and in this way we lose our ability to choose, and to make a hole in the iron wall that surrounds us and silences us. Why did G-d block the way for Pharaoh to make his own choice?

In last week's Torah portion we already saw that Pharaoh was a difficult person. While he still had the power of choice, he brought on himself an ever-increasing measure of stiffness. One sin leads to another, and the trait of being stubborn increases with time. The opening for escape from being stubborn and stiff-necked gets smaller all the time, and it may even close altogether, G-d forbid. Pharaoh's heart did not close suddenly because of an arbitrary decision by G-d. Pharaoh, slowly but inevitably, brought his stubborn character on himself, swallowed up as it were in a hard-hearted whirlwind, without any possibility for survival.

This phenomenon can happen to each and every one of us. There is no Divine declaration, "I will now make so-and-so's heart stiff." The truth is just the opposite. Unfortunately, every one of us can slowly make his own heart stiff, eventually reaching the tragic situation of Pharaoh, without the ability to make any choice. We slowly close our hearts by not making any effort to choose good. The verses in this week's Torah portion that declare how Pharaoh's heart became hard are a warning for us to beware of the trap of hardening our own hearts, by our own actions.

When Pharaoh reaches the lowest possible level, from which it is impossible to rise again, the Torah tells us, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart" [Shemot 7:3]. G-d accepts responsibility for the process of descent, whereby in the end each and every one of us can as a result of his own free choice end up in the same situation as Pharaoh.

The ten plagues that Pharaoh and Egypt faced are ten object lessons meant for anybody who feels that the walls of hardening the heart are closing in on him, making it difficult for him to continue a normal life, without acting stubborn. A hardened heart stems from a loss of warmth. Warmth can remove coldness, which shrivels us and disconnects us from a warm feeling of caring for our surroundings. The first plague, blood, acts in a cold way. Blood is what warms our bodies, it gives us life. In order to free ourselves from the difficulties closing in on us, we must dare to perform warm and good acts, which will help us break out from the circle of hardness and cold in which we find ourselves. Even if we see ourselves as frogs, it is best for us to try to take some warm jumps in order to break free of the cold and stiff bonds that hold us.

**RABBI OSHER CHAIM LEVENE**

## Magic: Spell-Binding

**T**he Torah forbids all form of witchcraft, practical magic and engaging in the occult. Forbidden practices include divination through trances (koseim); divining auspicious times through astrology (me'onein); divining by omens (menacheish); sorcery using magic (mechashsheif); using incantation (chover); consulting mediums and oracles (shoel ov veyid'oni); and communicating with the dead (doreish hameisim). (See Exodus 22:17, Leviticus 20:27, Deuteronomy 18:9-13).

Egypt was the hotbed of witchcraft: "Ten measures of witchcraft descended to the world; nine were taken by Egypt" (Talmud Kiddushin 49b). Pharaoh's wizards sought to duplicate the divine miracles performed by Moshe in the Ten Plagues that afflicted the idolatrous Egyptians. For some plagues, the sorcerers were successful. But they ultimately confessed that the supernatural phenomena were the "finger of G-d".

Witches and wizards, magic spells and potions, demons and spirits. The occult and forces of magic are a source of fascination for many people. Folktales and legends regaling magical characters have enjoyed a strong resurgence in popularity of recent. Most authorities maintain witchcraft constitutes a serious force - one that must be reckoned with. So what is the allure of magical forces? And why is the occult so forcefully rejected by the Torah?

G-d fashioned two systems in creation: the natural system and the supernatural system. Obeying the laws of cause and effect, the natural world is clearly chartered. One can accurately predict that the sun will rise in the morning and set in the evening. A cause has a resulting effect and an effect can be traced back to a cause. But man has to penetrate the appearance of this system by seeing G-d as the Creator and Power behind the natural world that veils His Divine Presence.

The supernatural system is a quasi-spiritual realm where nature's rules can be bent or temporarily suspended. Subject to its own system of laws, this realm still remains very much under the aegis of G-d. And it is within this latter system that miracles and magic operate.

What magic does is to rightly tap into the supernatural domain. But it falls short insofar as the person does not, ultimately, come closer to G-d. The magician recognizes the invisible spiritual forces at work and is aware one cannot view the world exclusively within the realm of nature. Searching out the spiritual forces to circumvent the natural channels, however, the sorcerer sets his heart on forcing the spiritual forces to do his own bidding. Indeed, the word magic kisuf (plural keshafim) denotes the "coercion (Mekacheish) of the heavenly spiritual agents [of G-d]" (Talmud, Sanhedrin 67b).

Where magic tragically errs is by mistakenly thinking that the occult and the supernatural forces may be independent of G-d. The belief in many forces and powers contradicts the Creator's Oneness and constitutes a form of idolatry. This explains why the prohibitions against magic fall under the grouping of idol-worship (See Rambam, Moreh Nevochim III, 37).

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 66b) relates how a witch once wanted to cast an evil spell upon Rabbi Chanina. He mocked her by proclaiming the verse "there is none besides Him [G-d]". With this he disarmed the evil forces of the occult by reaffirming G-d's Absolute control of the cosmos. "If G-d desires that I live," said Rabbi Chanina, "then all your efforts are for naught. And if you are successful in harming me, you should know that this is due to His royal decree. Then you will merely be the medium for His will to be fulfilled." The existence of evil forces is only to the extent that man gives them existence. But they do not have a free hand; they do not have any autonomy! This sage dismissed the forces of magic as non-existent by lending them no credence.

Instead, a Jew lives according to the dictate "you shall be perfect with Hashem your G-d" (Deuteronomy 18:13). He demonstrates a complete trust in G-d precluding the need to consult any medium or oracle regarding his future. Magic does not impress him. Nor does the Jew imagine he has anything to fear other than the Creator. (See Nefesh HaChaim 3:12). Supernatural feats and miracles may be most impressive but they cannot be a foundation for faith or belief (See Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 8:1). Bilaam confirmed as much by declaring "There are no divination in Yaakov and no sorcery in Yisrael" (Numbers 23:23).

To be sure, the popular appeal of magic is that it offers the quick-fix way to solve one's life's problems with its complex difficulties by the introduction of powers that do, indeed, counter the natural order.

And yet, a wave of a wand is not the solution.

Life's challenges do not magically vanish in a puff of smoke with a muttered incantation. Fantasy may provide temporary relief and respite but this avoids working out a long-term solution. All escapism does is to avoid dealing with the issues.

Still, man must address his individual set of circumstances. He should apply his intellect over and above his imagination to come out with a sound, thought-out conclusion. This requires tackling the harsh reality of living and using it as a springboard for spiritual growth within our designated environment.

It is here in the natural world that we must work our 'magic' by relating directly to G-d, placing our trust in Him and by performing the Torah's laws upon leaving Egypt. © 2006 Rabbi O.C. Levene & torah.org

### RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

## Guts and Glory

**T**here is a narrative in this week's portion that includes two verses that seem superfluous. The

Torah, in reintroducing Ahron and Moshe to us as they emerge as leaders of Klall Yisrael, also defines their lineage. While tracing their heritage, the Torah also enumerates the descendants of all the tribes, starting from the oldest, Reuvain. It finally reaches Amram, the grandson of Levi and tells us that he married Yocheved who bore Moshe and Ahron. The Torah continues with Ahron's wife, descendants, and others from the tribe of Levi. Then the Torah stops the listings. The rest of the tribes are enumerated later. However, the Torah re-identifies Moshe and Ahron with two verses. "This was the Moshe and Ahron to whom Hashem commanded "take the Children of Israel out of Egypt. They were the ones that spoke to Pharaoh telling him to send the children of Israel out of Egypt; that was Moshe and Ahron" (Exodus 6:26-27). We are talking Moshe and Ahron! Doesn't everyone who reads the Torah know that they are the ones that led the Jews out of Egypt? The details of their encounters with Pharaoh are clearly appraised throughout the first three portions of the Book of Shmos. Why then does the Torah, in two succinct verses, tell us that these are the Moshe and Ahron that were sent on a Divine mission these are the same pair that told Pharaoh to let the Jews go?

Rabbi Chaim of Sanz was once walking in a small shtetl with his shammash (sexton). Suddenly he stopped in front of the home of a simple Jew. "There is a certain spirituality that I sense here. I'd like to stop by this man's home."

His shammash knocked on the door, and as it opened the holy Rebbe exclaimed, "There is a smell in this home that must be from the Garden of Eden. It is sweet and pure. Pray tell me, where does it come from?"

The simple Jew did not know what to answer, but allowed the Rebbe to roam freely through his humble abode and open any door he chose. Suddenly the Rebbe pointed to a closet. "What is in that closet? The holiness comes from within." The man was reluctant to open the door, but the Rebbe urged him. The man opened the door and in the closet hung the vestments of a priest! The Rebbe turned to the man once again and asked. "Please tell me. What is a holy Jew doing with those clothing?"

The poor Jew told his tale: "Years ago, I was asked to help raise money for a family thrown into jail by a poritz (landowner) to whom they owed rent. My Rebbe asked me to raise the funds, and I immediately agreed. After all, I thought, with the Rebbe's wishes it would be an easy task. Everyone would give to save a Jewish family! I was wrong. Everyone in town had an excuse not to give. There was a deadline approaching, and I had no choice but to approach the wealthiest Jew in town who was known for his malevolence toward Chassidim. "The man told me he would give me the entire sum that day on one condition. I must parade through the town, dressed as a priest singing psalms in Hebrew and asking for tzedaka (charity) in Yiddish. At the end of the day, he would pay the ransom.

"I did what I had to do, while a group of his friends followed me around, laughing and mocking me wherever I walked. I got the money and I never returned the vestments he gave me."

The Rebbe turned and said, "Yes. These clothing are truly holy. They are the source of the spirituality I sense." Legend has it that the Rebbe told the man to be buried in those clothes.

The Torah sums up the mission and job of Moshe and Ahron in two verses. They were the ones enthusiastically sent to redeem the Jews. Then it tells us that they were the ones that had to deal with Pharaoh. They were mocked with the words, "who is this Hashem that I shall listen to Him?" (Exodus 5:2). They were the ones who were threatened by Pharaoh that "the day you return to see me you will die! (Exodus 10:27). But they did not back down. They suffered the threats, the humiliation, the skepticism, and the failures with strength and fortitude. We may remember them as the ones who were told to take the Children out of Egypt but the Torah reminds us in the ensuing verse that we should never forget the difficult process that led to their great accomplishments. For in order to fulfill what one hears from G-d, he or she must also be ready to hear from a Pharaoh. In those two contrasting verses, the Torah teaches us that very often if there are no guts, then there is no glory. © 1999 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

