

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd G-d did not lead them via the land of the Pelishtim, for it was shorter, because G-d said the people may change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt” (Shemos 13:17). Rashi explains what G-d tried to avoid by taking a circuitous route from Egypt to the Promised Land: “When they see a war such as [the one described in Bamidbar 14:45, when] the Amaleki and the Canaani descended (and attacked), had they traveled in a straight (i.e. short) path they would have returned. For if when He led them in a non-straight (i.e. longer) way they said, “let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt” (ibid, 14:4), how much more so (would they have attempted to return) had He had taken them via the simplest way.”

Rashi's explanation seems very straightforward; in order to make it inconvenient to turn around and head back to Egypt, G-d led them the long way, so it would be too difficult to follow through with their desire to. But Rashi says more than that, describing which kind of war would cause such a reaction and then proving that it would cause them to want to return. However, these additional details raise several questions, which lead to even more questions on Rashi's explanation.

First of all, why did Rashi need to give an example of the kind of war that would cause this reaction? We can understand that the prospect of facing a fierce battle would be very scary to a newly freed nation; do we need to know which specific battle would scare them? Besides, had G-d led them via the southwestern corner of Canaan (“the way of the land of the Pelishtim”), they would have avoided Amalek completely, as they lived in the southeast. In fact, the Amaleki attacked even sooner than Rashi's referenced war (see Shemos 17:8-16), an attack that might not have occurred had the Children of Israel not been heading their way! And, despite still being close to Egypt when this war happened, there was no thought of returning to Egypt. How can Rashi say that a war would have caused them to return if they were still near Egypt, if a war *did* occur near Egypt and they never attempted to return?

Additionally, if we look at the war that Rashi does cite, there is no mention of any desire to return because of it, so it would seem to be a pretty poor

example of the kind of war that would make them want to return. A much better example would have been the one Rashi brought as proof (but not as an example) that war would bring about a desire to return to Egypt, the necessary war with Canaan about which the meraglim (spies) scared them. Rashi could have simply stated that we see that even after taking the long way the nation considered returning, so this same war would certainly have caused such a reaction had it occurred close to Egypt. Why did Rashi use a different war as the example, one that didn't actually cause a desire to return, rather than the one that did?

There was another war that led to an attempt at returning as well. After Aharon died, and the Ananei Hakavod (clouds of glory) left, there was an attack by the Amaleki trying to impersonate the Canaanim (see Rashi on Bamidbar 21:1), which led to an attempted return to Egypt (see Rashi on Devarim 10:6). Rashi may have avoided this as a “proof” since it's not explicit in the Torah, but since they actually went back eight steps of their journey (ibid), it seems like a much more likely candidate to be the example of a war that would cause a return to Egypt. Why didn't Rashi use this one?

Rashi's source is attributed as the Mechilta, and it's likely that Rashi therefore chose the Mechilta's example. However, the Mechilta actually brings 3 possibilities of which war would cause the nation to want to return to Egypt: (1) The war Rashi cites (when the Amaleki and Canaani attacked), (2) the war that wiped out the members of the Tribe of Efrayim who left Egypt 30 years too early (as seeing their bones would scare the newly freed nation), and (3) the prospective war with Canaan, which actually did cause them to try to return. Rashi seems to be combining the first and third answers, using the third to prove the first. Why did Rashi combine the two, rather than using one or the other?

If we look closely at the wording of Rashi's previous comment, we may notice something that can unlock these issues. “For it (the way of the land of the Pelishtim) was close, and easy to return *via that same route* to Egypt.” The words “via that same route” seem superfluous, for if Rashi's trying to tell us that entering from the southwest was the shortest route, making it easier to return, he could have said so in fewer words (“for it was close, making it easier to return to Egypt”). What do the additional words “via that same route” add?

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I would like to suggest that Rashi is telling us that the problem G-d was trying to avoid was not warfare as a whole, as that was inevitable if they were to conquer the land (and the nation realized as much when they left Egypt). Even after entering Canaan the short way, if a situation would ever arise that caused despair, the nation could easily retrace its steps back to Egypt. What kind of a situation? Well, the Torah tells us it was a war, and Rashi is telling us what *kind* of war. Not which war specifically, but which category of war would cause them to consider returning to Egypt, and could easily be acted upon because they knew how to return. Which is why Rashi doesn't just say the war the Torah refers to was when the Amaleki and Canaanite descended, but adds "for example" that war. What kind of war was it? One that they suffered losses from because G-d was not with them. The spies had talked the nation out of trying to conquer Canaan, and G-d killed the spies and told the rest of the nation that they could not enter the land. Some responded by admitting they had sinned, but insisted on trying to enter the land anyway, resulting in their being wiped out by the Amaleki and the Canaanite.

The first war with Amalek wasn't the same, because Yehoshua had soundly defeated them. The war after Aharon died wasn't either, as they were victorious then as well (but retraced their steps because they thought they were vulnerable to future defeat). And there was no war yet when the nation wanted to return to Egypt after hearing from the spies. Nonetheless, their fear of defeat brought about this reaction, so while it couldn't be an example of a category of war, it did prove that even fear of losing made them want to return. The war Rashi cites, however, was an actual war with serious losses, so was chosen as the example of the kind of war that G-d knew would have caused the nation to return to Egypt, even though they didn't actually repeat their desire to return to Egypt (most likely because they saw G-d's harsh reaction to the sin of the spies and to the attempt to defy Him).

After Achan took from the spoils of Yericho, the nation sustained serious losses after attacking Ha-ai, a city they thought they should have easily defeated (Yehoshua 7). Had such a loss occurred in Canaan itself, even after having won previous battles, knowing

how they got there from Egypt (which route) would make it easy for them to return there. However, after going around Edom, Ammon and Moav, how would they get back? They didn't know the route, so couldn't even consider returning. G-d didn't lead the nation the short way, for if He had, they would know how to return to Egypt if they ever experienced a war that didn't go so well. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Our Sages teach us, "It is more difficult for the Almighty to bring two individuals together in marriage than it was for Him to split the Reed Sea." (Sota 2a) Superficially speaking, the analogy seems to make no sense whatsoever. In what way is there any logical comparison between the splitting of the Reed Sea and the making of a shidduch?

The usual interpretation which is given is that both events - the splitting of the Reed Sea and the bringing together of two individuals in marriage - are totally unexpected and illogical. The Israelites find themselves being chased by Egyptian charioteers from behind and facing the formidable Reed Sea right in front of them. They could see no clear exit; in no way whatsoever could they ever have predicted a miracle like the splitting of the sea. Similarly, two single individuals - especially if they are getting on in age - begin to lose faith that they will find the complementary mate for whom they are dreaming. It seems as if they will never succeed in discovering a suitable life's partner with whom to create a family. More often than not, the one with whom they eventually stand under the nuptial canopy was a most unlikely prospect who would never have been an initial logical choice. From this perspective, the analogy between the two makes much more sense. However, the axiom which serves as the very bedrock of the analogy is not only that the splitting of the Reed Sea was totally dependent upon G-d's miraculous action but also that marriage is much more a result of Divine direction than it is a product of human efforts in relationship.

Bashert! This is the Yiddish word which describes what we have just said about marriage. G-d is the only real matchmaker "Forty days before a child is born, a message is proclaimed from Heaven: this individual will marry that individual" (Sota 2a). Parents and younger adults need not be concerned. Marriages are made in heaven, every pot has its lid, and just as G-d split the Reed Sea He will find the mate for you. And if it is taking a bit longer, not to worry. After all, our Sages also understood that arranging marriages is even more difficult than the splitting of the Reed Sea. Nevertheless it is all pre-ordained, bashert.

At the risk of sounding like a total heretic, I am very skeptical of the concept of bashert. Indeed, I would suggest a second look at the story of the Reed Sea as

well as of the Jewish concept of marriage. I believe that at the end of our analysis we will arrive at a very different understanding of the logic of the analogy. Our Biblical portion opens its description of the splitting of the Reed Sea with a distinct description of the exact place of the Israeli-Egyptian encounter, and this place is non other than a central worshipping sanctuary of the Egyptian Idol Horus (Hebrew- Hirot) in front of the Idol of the North (Exodus 14: 2). Both of these idols were poised just in front of the Reed Sea. Why describe a place by emphasizing the idols which were placed there? After all, with the splitting of the Reed Sea and the drowning of the Egyptians, the G-ds of the Egyptians will be of no account whatsoever.

Moreover, the pursuing Egyptians consisted of 600 choice chariots and three times that amount of regular chariots.(Exodus 14:7) Our Biblical portion also informs us that the Israelites (consisting of at least 600,000 men) exited from Egypt well armed (Exodus 13: 18). As the Ibn Ezra so logically queries, why did the Israelites not wage war against the Egyptians? Why do they seem to fall into such a paralyzed panic which causes them to rail against G-d for having brought them into the desert to die. It apparently never even dawns upon them to use the armaments which they took out of Egypt.

The answer to both of these questions lies in the very difference between the idolatry of Egypt and the new religion of Israel. The Bible emphasizes that the Israelites were stationed near the idol Huras, which reads in Hebrew "lifne pi hahiroi" which can literally be taken to mean "before the mouth of freedom". Egyptian idolatry was the very antithesis of freedom. Humans under the idols were not free to act; only the G-ds acted while the only possible interference by humans was their propitiation or bribery of the G-ds. The Israelites are not yet wholly freed; hence they are paralyzed and never dream of actually waging war against their enemy. At best they can cry out to their G-d hoping that He will be stronger than Horus and the Idol of the North (Remember that Pharaoh himself was a G-d in Egypt and so he could enslave others).

The Almighty responds to the panic-stricken beseeching of Moses and of Israel with a decisive message: "Why are you praying to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and have them move (into the Reed Sea)" (Exodus 11:15). G-d is explaining to the Israelites that in this new religion they must be active partners : unless they are ready to make the first movement and plunge into the waters of the Reed Sea, they will be destroyed by the Egyptians. But if they will take their destiny in their own hands and begin to act, G-d will complete their redemption and they will become free.

This is precisely the case with marriage as well. Yes, in the Divine scheme of things every individual has a destined mate with whom he/she will be able to make a meaningful life together. G-d may even set up the

circumstances by which these two individuals will actually come into contact with each other. However, each of the two must take advantage of that contact; and if one or the other never leaves his/her home, even the planned initial contact may never take place. Each of us, must take advantage of all meeting possibilities, and must then work hard at continuing and even enhancing the quality of the relationship. This is the way in which I believe our analogy works. It is not necessarily easy; it is like the splitting of the Reed Sea. And it is even harder, because once the sea was split, the Israelites were freed. In marriage, even after the blessings are intoned at the Huppah, both partners must continue to work hard to make the marriage last in a meaningful way. But at the end of the day, marriage may be more difficult but it is more satisfying: after the Reed Sea was split, it was divided into many different parts. In a successful marriage, two separate individuals truly become united as one. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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This coming Shabat we will commemorate Tu B'Shvat-the new year day for trees and fruit here in the Holy Land. The day carries with it halachic significance with regard to some of the agricultural mitzvoth of the Torah are. But as in all matters of halacha and mitzvoth, there is a great moral lesson to be taught from this day as well.

Tu B'Shvat marks the turning point of the winter season. Even though there are many weeks of winter still ahead of us, there is no doubt that the season is turning. The days are becoming longer, the sun higher and brighter in the sky and the advertisements for Pesach accommodations more urgent and frenzied in tone. Tu B'Shvat is thus not only a new beginning for the fruits and trees of the Land of Israel, it is meant to signal a new beginning for us as individuals and as a people and a Jewish society.

One of the many amazing patterns of Jewish history, among others, has been the ability of Jewish society to renew itself as the circumstances of time demanded. Every generation and certainly every century of history poses age-old problems coupled with new twists and wrinkles. How to meet those challenges is the responsibility of Jewish leadership of every generation and time. Tu B'Shvat comes to remind us of this omnipresent responsibility of facing the present and the future with realistic and yet inspirational tactics and solutions that deal with our current angst and problems.

The past three centuries, especially in the world of Ashkenazic Jewry, has produced a dazzling variety of movements, ideals and solutions to the age-old "Jewish problem." The Haskala came to "civilize" us; the Marxists arose to create a utopia for us; the Zionists came to make us secure and cure anti-

Semitism once and for all; Reform came to make us acceptable to non-Jewish society and to integrate us with humanistic goals; secularism came to free us from the burdens of tradition and mitzvot. None of these movements achieved their stated goals.

The Holocaust made mockery of integration in the general humanistic world; Zionism created the State of Israel but has provided it with no sense of security and certainly has only exacerbated the problem of anti-Semitism; Stalin cured us of Marxism; the Haskala apparently did not sufficiently civilize us; and secularism has to constantly attempt to prove that it is not an empty wagon. Thus there is a great feeling of apathy and emptiness in the Jewish world today. In the realm of traditional Jewry, much of Religious Zionism has lost its steam; Chasidut has pretty much frozen and atrophied and become insular; the yeshiva world has become a place of narrow focus and elitism; the Mussar movement no longer exists; and modern Orthodoxy has not found its voice and parameters.

Therefore we are witness to the end of an era. The old is going and the new has not yet arrived. Hence the apathy and ennui, and the seeming lack of leadership that grips the Jewish world today. It is at such moments in Jewish history that a renewal of faith and idealism has always occurred.

Tu B'Shvat should make us aware that such a renewal is necessary. The season is turning not only weather-wise but in our history and society. The old tactics are no longer efficient for the solution of today's problems. The answers are available within the framework of tradition and halacha as they were when Chasidut revolutionized Ashkenazic Jewry in the eighteenth century and Mussar created the yeshiva world of the late nineteenth century. We will not be able to live forever based on Holocaust memorials or Zionist slogans that belie the reality of our situation here in the Land of Israel. We need a new way to govern here, to reform our politics and make it more representative.

The Torah should be freed from the chains of party politics that currently smother it. The Torah belongs to all Jews and should be made available to all Jews. Reforming, editing, changing and improving the Torah is now, as it always was, a surefire recipe for disaster and assimilation in the Jewish world. But we have to take a fresh look at our schools and our societal norms to be able to state clearly what our goals are. There may be different ways to reach them but there has to be a consensus as to what the actual goals are. It is a time for renewal and new and different thinking. The winter is turning on us. Let us think hard about reaching the warmth of spring that will surely come.

One of the major miracles that the Jewish people have experienced over our long and miracle-

laden history is the manna that fell from the skies during our sojourn in the desert of Sinai after leaving Egyptian bondage. That miracle is described for us in detail in this week's parsha. What makes this miracle so extraordinary is that it is not a one-shot miracle such as the splitting of the Red Sea or Elijah's confrontation with the false prophets of Baal. This miracle of the manna is a forty year long continuing and ongoing miracle. Because of the nature of this miracle and its repeated frequency- six times a week for forty years-the miracle became a natural event to the Jews, something expected and it lost its aspect of being exceptional, which after all is what makes a miracle a miracle.

When the Jewish people entered the Land of Israel the miracle of the manna ceased. But the salient message and moral teaching of the manna has remained for all time. It is implicit in Moshe's statement to the Jewish people in his valedictory address "For it is not by bread alone that humans live, but rather do they live by the utterances of G-d's mouth, so to speak." Thus bread baked by humans from flour threshed and processed by humans from grain grown by humans is no less miraculous than is the manna that fell directly from the skies for forty years on behalf of the Jews in the desert of Sinai. In short, Judaism views nature itself as being inherently miraculous, a product of the Divine Will. Manna is therefore not really any more special than is rye bread.

The manna had another number of lessons of life for us. It could not be stored for the next day. Humans are dependent daily on G-d's grace. Though we all crave security and a sense of an assured tomorrow there really is no sure way to achieve that. When I was a rabbi in Miami Beach, we once had a freezer full of meat that was destined to see us through much of the winter. A hurricane struck, the electric power failed, the freezer defrosted and the meat turned rancid. The only thing certain in life is uncertainty.

The manna did not fall on Shabat. Preparations for Shabat must be made before Shabat. The Talmud taught us that "the one who labored before Shabat will have sustenance on Shabat." This world is before Shabat. The World-to-Come- of the soul and the spirit, the eternal world, is Shabat. This world and our lives are for work and accomplishment. G-d's sustenance of us is omnipresent but it will not achieve its purpose without human effort and diligence.

And finally the manna taught us that G-d's grace does not fall evenly on all humans. The Talmud again teaches us that the manna fell at the doorstep of the righteous while others had to travel into the desert to find and gather it. Some have it easier than others in life. We are not privy to G-d's Will in these matters and the question of reward and punishment in this world remains forever a vexing problem. But just as the manna was from the hand of G-d, so to speak, so too are all of the experiences, good or better, in life. Thus

the manna lives on in its moral teachings even if we are no longer witness to its actual physical presence in our lives. © 2007 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 LEVI COOPER

Dust in the Wind

At the conclusion of prayer, the talmudic scholar Rava would add a personal supplication (B. Berachot 17a): "My G-d, before I was formed I was unworthy, and now that I am formed it is as if I had not been formed," highlighting the almost impossible pursuit of the Divine Will in this world.

One commentator connects Rava's prayer to another talmudic passage which reports a vote on the question of whether it is good for humans to be created or not (B. Eiruvim 13b). The show of hands revealed a somber view of life as it was decided that it would be better for humans not to have been born. Without coming into this world, there would be no possibility of transgressing the numerous negative commandments. This is the theme of Rava's prayer: I may not have been worthy before I was created for I had no merits, but now that I have been brought into the world I most certainly am not worthy for I must have sinned (Maharsha, 16th-17th centuries, Poland).

Rava continued his personal supplication: "I am dust in my life, and surely I am dust in my death. Behold, before You I am like a vessel filled with shame and humiliation." Having painted a picture of an existence of no value - unworthiness, dust, shame and humiliation - Rava turned to G-d with a request: "May it be Your will, G-d, my Lord that I not sin again and what I have sinned before you - obliterate with Your abundant mercy, though not through suffering or serious illness." Another talmudic sage, Rav Hamnuna Zuti, adopted this short prayer as his confessional supplication on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur. We follow this example and at the end of the Amida at each service on Yom Kippur we recite Rava's prayer as part of the confessional.

Focusing on one aspect of Rava's prayer - "I am dust in my life, and surely I am dust in my death" - we can ask: What is the thrust of being like dust?

The image is of biblical origin. Dust first appears as the raw material for the creation of humans (Genesis 2:7), but quickly becomes part of the curse of physicality decreed against humankind: ...for you are dust and you will return to dust (Genesis 3:19).

Acknowledging our dusty origins and end is recognition of our nature as physical human beings in this finite world. Further in our talmudic passage, however, we are told that another scholar - Mar the son of Ravina - actually beseeched G-d to be like dust: "...

and may my soul be like dust to all..." This prayer is not reserved for Yom Kippur, but is appended to the thrice daily Amida suggesting that it reflects a central theme in our tradition. Indeed in the Bible, being like dust is considered a national blessing. Amongst the first blessings G-d bestowed on our ancestors was that their progeny would be like the dust of the land (Genesis 13:16).

In a similar vein, as Jacob flees from Beersheba after appropriating his brother's blessings, he stops to rest at the end of the day. At this bivouac Jacob has a fantastic dream where angels are ascending and descending a ladder that is firmly planted in the ground, but reaches up to the heavens. The Almighty appears to him with a promise: ...and your progeny will be like the dust of the land... (Genesis 28:14). How are we to understand the imagery of being like the dust of the earth? Is this a positive icon, a desirable or wanted likeness? Or are we asking to be downtrodden and inconsequential?

The first dust-blessing bestowed on Abraham is elucidated: And I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth - if a person could count the specks of dust of the land, then your offspring will also be countable (Genesis 13:16). Our small nation will be so numerous that we will not be able to be counted. Being like dust is a quantitative blessing.

AN ALTERNATIVE approach looks at the first references to dust. As we have seen, dust evokes the physical condition of human existence and the finite and fleeting nature of life on earth. In this sense, references to our dusty character are sobering reminders that we are not G-ds. Perhaps the promise to our forefathers that we will be like dust is a blessing that we can attain the elusive quality of humility (Rabbi Hanoch Zundel, 19th century, Bialystok).

One commentator - following the line of the insignificance of dust - suggests that we pine for a reality when our enemies pay no attention to us and do not bother to curse us (Maharsha). Perhaps we can relate to this blessing in light of our reality: Our tiny country draws so much global attention; our every move is scrutinized on the front pages of newspapers around the world in an unprecedented fashion. Can we not relate to the wish that we were not the focus of so much interest?

A further explanation offered by the commentators highlights a different aspect of dust - its eternal nature. Dust is never destroyed, and we pray that we too will be everlasting (Tosafot, 12th- 14th centuries, France-Germany). Indeed, in biblical ritual law, in cases where a house must be torn down because it is afflicted with the spiritual disease of tzara'at [roughly translated as leprosy], the dust remains. Though the constituent parts must be moved to outside the city limits, its dusty raw material remains (see Leviticus 14). Even when there are those who

would have us utterly wiped out, we continue. Despite being moved from one place to another, chased out of city and state, we survive just like the everlasting dust of the earth.

Our people strive to be like the dust of the earth. This ideal does not spring from masochistic desires to be trampled. Rather, we seek the blessings in being like dust: The uncountable quantity of dust, the humility of this trampled substance, the overlooked insignificance of what we step on and perhaps most importantly its eternal nature. © 2007 Rabbi L Cooper. *Rabbi Levi Cooper teaches at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post and Up Front Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.*

RABBI YEHUDAH PRERO

Project Genesis

In this week's Torah portion of B'shalach, we read about one of the first difficulties complained of by the nation of Israel during their sojourn in the desert.

"And the whole assembly of the children of Israel complained against Moshe and Aharon in the wilderness; and the children of Israel said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of Hashem in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pot of meat, and when we ate bread to satisfaction; for you have taken us out into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.' And Hashem said to Moshe 'Behold, I will rain down for you bread from heaven; and the people will go out and gather a portion every day, so that I can test them, whether they follow my Torah, or not.' (Shmos 16:2- 4).

The nation of Israel needed sustenance. They complained to their leaders. Hashem told Moshe that the people would be provided with sustenance- and they were provided with the miraculous "man" (manna).

This episode is recounted in Devorim (8:3). We find that Moshe, shortly before he passed away, told the nation of Israel "And He afflicted you, and let you hunger, and fed you the manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; so that he will make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Hashem does man live."

Rav Aharon Kotler (Mishnas R' Aharon, P' Ekev) explained how man lives by the words that come forth from the mouth of Hashem. He quotes the Vilna Gaon's explanation (in Aderes Eliyahu) on the portion of the recounting of the creation of the world where the verses state (Bereshis 1: 29-30) "And Hashem said, 'Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, that has fruit that yields seed; it shall be to you for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that moves on the earth, which within

there is life, I have given every green herb for food;' and it was so." The Vilna Gaon notes that this utterance, whereby G-d says He has provided vegetation for food, is itself an expression of creation. Although G-d had already created the vegetation, it did not yet possess the ability to sustain man. G-d, in this pronouncement, endowed fruits and vegetables with the power to provide man with the nutrients needed for him to survive. He enabled them to sustain and satisfy the hunger of man. The provision of this special power to the fruits and vegetables warranted its own pronouncement.

It was this pronouncement, Rav Kotler says, to which Moshe referred when he stated that man lives by G-d's words. Hashem gave the power to sustain life to bread. Hashem gave the power to sustain life to manna as well. Just as the power of manna, a substance that existed only during one period in the history of mankind, stemmed clearly from an act of G-d, the power of bread, of fruits and vegetables, is the same.

What is curious, Rav Kotler notes, is that Moshe said that G-d had to "afflict the nation and let them hunger" so that they would know that "man does not live by bread alone." The provision of manna was miraculous. It came portion controlled, lasted only a day except for that provided on Friday for Shabbos, could change taste, came encased in dew, and produced no bodily waste. One would think that the mere provision of such an amazing, miraculous substance would be enough to alert a person that his sustenance was provided by G-d. Yet, Moshe said the nation had to hunger before the manna came so that they would acknowledge G-d. Rav Kotler uses a parable provided by Rabi Shimon bar Yochai to explain. The Talmud says (Yoma 76a) "Rabi Shimon bar Yochai was asked by his students: Why didn't the manna come down to Israel once annually? He replied: I will give a parable: This can be compared to a king of flesh and blood who had one son, whom he provided with his nourishment once a year, and he would visit his father only once a year. Thereupon, he provided for his nourishment every day, so that he visited him every day. The same with Israel..."

Rav Shimon bar Yochai explained that, notwithstanding the miraculous nature of manna, if it had been provided only once annually, people would not appreciate that their sustenance came from G-d. G-d had to provide it daily so people would need to rely on Him, and recognize that they were dependant on Him for their survival. So too, Rav Kotler writes, the people needed to physically experience hunger, and therefore a need for salvation, before the miraculous intervention could occur. If the people had received manna before they absolutely needed it, they would not have fully appreciated the fact that "man does not live on bread alone." Man, a physical creature, needs physical and mental stimuli to bring it to certain

realizations. Man needs the assistance of tangible motivational tools to recognize the full extent of certain truths. The people needed to first experience the feelings of hunger before they were able to appreciate the totality of the gift of manna. They needed to experience the anxiety of not knowing where the next day's food was coming from to fully appreciate G-d's role in providing sustenance.

On Tu B'Shvat, we acknowledge the start of the new year for trees. It is an appropriate time in the midst of the dry "holiday-free" spell between Sukkos and Pesach to acknowledge the good that G-d gives us. It is an occasion to specifically appreciate the gift of fruit. It is an occasion to more generally appreciate G-d's gift of sustenance. We need to recognize that the fact that fruits provide sustenance is itself miraculous-as miraculous as manna. We need to recognize that it is G-d who gave us this gift that keeps on giving. Keeping these facts in perspective is not easy, as illustrated. The Magen Avraham (on Orech Chayim 131) writes that there is a custom "to increase consumption of different types of fruits on this day." By eating fruits in recognition of this special day, one can provide himself with the tools needed to acknowledge G-d's vital place in our everyday lives. © 2007 Rabbi Y. Prero & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

“Where is G-d?” asked Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, one of the great Hasidic masters. “Everywhere,” replied his students. “No, my children,” he responded, “G-d is not everywhere, but only where you let Him enter.”

The Kotzker's answer reinforces a distinction that Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik makes between two terms of redemption-both relate to being saved-hatzalah and yeshuah. Hatzalah requires no action on the part of the person being saved. Yeshuah, on the other hand, is the process whereby the recipient of salvation participates in helping him or herself.

In the portions read during the last few weeks, the Torah describes how the Jewish people, emerging from Egypt, experienced the process of hatzalah. Note G-d's words-ve-hitzalti etchem. (Exodus 6:6) G-d and G-d alone, says the Hagadah, took us out of Egypt. Just as a newborn is protected by her or his parents, so were the newly born Jewish people protected by G-d.

Much like a child who grows up, the Jewish people, having left Egypt, were expected to assume responsibilities. While Moshe thought that the process of hatzalah would be extended into the future, G-d does not concur-the sea will split, but you will be saved only if you do your share and try to cross on your own. (Rashi on Exodus 14:15) As the Jews stand by the sea, the Torah suddenly shifts from the language of hatzalah

to that of yeshuah as it states va-yosha Hashem. (Exodus 14:30)

I remember my son Dov, as a small child at the Seder table, asking: "Why do we have to open the door for Eliyahu (Elijah) the prophet? He has so much power! He gets around so quickly and drinks a lot. Couldn't he squeeze through the cracks?"

At the Seder table, in addition to re-enacting the redemption from Egypt we also stress the hope for future redemption. This part of the Seder experience begins with the welcoming of Eliyahu, who the prophet says, will be the harbinger of the Messianic period. But for the Messiah to come, says Rav Kook, we must do our share and so we open the door and welcome him in. Sitting on our hands and waiting is not enough.

I often asked my parents where their generation was sixty years ago when our people were being murdered and destroyed. Although many stood up, not enough people made their voices heard. Let us bless each other today that when our children and our grandchildren ask us similar questions such as, "Where were you when Jews were mercilessly murdered in Israel" we will be able to answer that we did stand up and did our best to make a difference.

Let us pray that we will have done our share and opened the door to let G-d in. We must recognize that we can't only ask for hatzalah, where G-d alone intervenes, but we must also do our share to bring about a new era, one of genuine partnership between heaven and earth-a true yeshuah. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

After Pharaoh's ignominious capitulation to G-d's demand to free Israel, G-d again hardened his heart. Pharaoh reversed his decision to allow his slaves their freedom and he gathered his army in hot pursuit of the escaping Israel. We then find the following verse: "And he (Pharaoh) harnessed his chariot and his people he took with him." (Exodus 14:6)

"And he (Pharaoh) harnessed his chariot"-RASHI: "He himself." An obvious question: What has Rashi told us? Isn't it obvious that if the Torah says Pharaoh harnessed his chariot, this means that Pharaoh harnessed his chariot? Why do think he made this comment? Rashi's approach, in general, to understanding the Torah's words, is that when the Torah tells us something seemingly obvious and trivial, we must understand why it does so. This fact that Pharaoh harnessed his chariot is so trivial a piece of information that it would be unnecessary to record. He couldn't go to war without a chariot and a chariot cannot run without being harnessed up to its horses.

He also probably put on his shoes (or sandals) in the morning, but that is not important to tell us, so why is the trite bit of information (that he harnessed his chariot) mentioned? This is what spurred Rashi (and the Midrash, his source) to comment here. We can better appreciate Rashi's comment when we compare it with Ibn Ezra's comment on these words. "And he harnessed-With his command (instruction). Just as it says 'And Solomon built the house (i.e. the Temple).'" (I Kings 6) The Ibn Ezra is saying that just as Solomon didn't actually build the Temple with his own hands, he rather gave the command to do so, nevertheless the verse credits him with building it. So too here, Pharaoh didn't actually harness his own chariot (a king wouldn't do such manual labor), rather he instructed his servants to do this. The verse credits him with doing so because it was done at his command. Rashi clearly disagrees with Ibn Ezra (or more correctly, Ibn Ezra disagrees with Rashi. He lived after Rashi and saw Rashi's commentary.) Why does Rashi take our verse literally? And why does G-d deem it necessary to point out that Pharaoh himself was the harnesser?

An Answer: Because Rashi's view, as we said, is that relating such trivial narrative information is not the way of the Torah. By telling us that Pharaoh harnessed his own chariot, we learn of his burning, obsessive, hatred for the Jews and of his unquenchable desire to bring them back to slavery as soon as possible. He couldn't leave even this mundane and trivial task to his trusty servants. Rashi makes a similar comment regarding Bilaam (Numbers 22:21) when he rushed to curse the people of Israel. There Rashi adds the words "hatred causes one to disregard normal behavior."

Here too, Pharaoh's deep hatred caused him to act impulsively and improperly for a king. We find poetic justice in verse 15:19. "When Pharaoh's horse and his chariot.came into the sea then Hashem turned the waters on them..." That chariot and those horses that he so diligently prepared for the pursuit, got their just desserts. Indeed, hatred disrupts normal procedure and normal thinking. May G-d deal with all mad haters in a similar way. © 2007 Dr. A. Bonchek and aish.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

When Amalek fought Yisrael at Refidim, Moshe told Yehoshua to go to war, adding, "Tomorrow, I will stand at the top of the hill, with G-d's staff in my hand" [Shemot 17:9]. However, the staff is not mentioned any more in the events that followed. This is conspicuous in the next verse, where we are told that Moshe's instructions were carried out, but the staff does not appear: "And Yehoshua did what Moshe told him to do... And Moshe, Aharon, and Chur climbed to the top of the hill" [17:10]. As is well known, later,

"when Moshe raised his hand, Yisrael prevailed, but when he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed" [17:11]. Why isn't the staff mentioned?

It might be assumed that when Moshe raised his hand he held the staff in it. However, in every verse where he held the staff, it is explicitly noted, using the verb "natoh," to stretch. For example, in the plague of hail, it is written, "Stretch out your hand towards the sky, and there will be hail... And Moshe stretched out his staff towards the sky." [9:22-23]. The same is true about the plague of darkness, and also at the splitting of the Red Sea: "And you, lift up your staff and stretch your hand over the sea, and split it... And Moshe stretched his hand over the sea" [14:16,27]. Thus, the fact that Moshe lifted his hand up in the war with Amalek does not seem to be connected to the staff at all. And this brings us back to our previous question: Why is there a difference between what Moshe planned in advance, before the battle, and the way the operation was finally carried out?

Evidently, this is related to a central message in this passage? the need to stop the dependence on the staff. Before this point, while the main objective was to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, what was needed was leadership based on the miracles. From the very beginning, the staff was used as a tool to perform miracles: it was transformed into a serpent, it initiated the plagues, it was used to split the Red Sea, and near the end of this week's Torah portion it was used for the last miracle, extracting water from a rock (17:5-6). Now, when Amalek came to fight against Bnei Yisrael, Moshe continued as he had before and assumed that he would need the staff in order to defeat Amalek.

But it seems that the staff had ended its active role. The stage of leaving Egypt was over, and now it was time for Bnei Yisrael to wage war against the nations of Eretz Yisrael, with Amalek being their first representative. From this point on, Bnei Yisrael could no longer depend on miracles, as had been expressed by the help of the staff, rather the people were required to be more directly involved in the natural processes that would take place in Eretz Yisrael. The staff therefore had nothing more to contribute. Moshe understood that in order to win this war what was needed was a higher level of personal involvement.

And this explains the way Moshe raised his hands. This was no longer a one-time action of stretching out the staff, it was a longer process, one that was difficult and tedious, requiring that the man? in this case Moshe ? put forth a greater effort in order to succeed. While the event was still based largely on Divine help, a process had begun to move the responsibility for events over to man.

Moshe would use the staff one more time, when Bnei Yisrael were about to enter the land. But this tragic mistake of his would be one of the reasons that he was not permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael.