

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Egypt reels under a barrage of plagues. Pharaoh's stubborn resistance is finally crumbling. The Jewish people sense the long-awaited end of their enslavement. Hashem is about to take them out of bondage and forge them into His chosen people, the recipients of His holy Torah. Indeed, even before the final plague is administered to the Egyptians, Hashem already gives them their very first mitzvah as a nation.

So what is this first mitzvah that will cement the nascent relationship between Hashem and our emancipated ancestors whom He has chosen as His own special people? One might have expected an exalted ideal, such as the mitzvah of emunah, faith in Hashem. Or perhaps a mitzvah of personal refinement, such as loving other Jews as oneself. But no. It was the very practical mitzvah of establishing a lunar calendar to regulate the annual cycle of festivals and observances. This is really quite baffling. Why this particular mitzvah? Would it not have been more appropriate perhaps to initiate the Jewish people with a mitzvah that represents transcendent spiritual concepts?

Let us reflect for a moment on one of the more notorious features of our society—the mad rush that characterizes our daily existence. The rhythm of our lives is driven by the ticktocking of the clock. Our jobs, our schedules, our appointments, rush hour traffic, all the aspects of our contemporary lifestyles are measured and regulated by the inexorable clock. But this is not really a new phenomenon. The accelerated pace of society has simply highlighted one of the fundamental truths of the world—that the most precious commodity by far is time.

"Time is money!" we are told, but a wise man once turned this adage on its ear and said, "Money is time!" Time, not money, is the fundamental currency by which the value of all things is measured.

Coming out of bondage, the Jewish people were presented with a sudden wealth of time. As slaves, their time had been stripped away from them, but now they got it back. What would they do with this great treasure that was about to fall into their laps?

This crucial question was answered by the mitzvah of establishing the calendar. When designating the new month, the Beth Din declares, "Mekudash,

mekudash! Sanctified, sanctified!" Hashem gave the Jewish people the power to sanctify time by what they say and do, not only to give it worth but to imbue it with holiness. Rosh Chodesh, the first day of the new month, has the status of a minor festival, reminding us that we can consecrate all the moments of our lives. By living in a way consistent with Torah values and ideals, we consecrate our time and preserve it for all eternity. This mitzvah, therefore, does indeed represent some of the most transcendent spiritual concepts in the Torah. This mitzvah, delivered with the gift of time, was indeed a most fitting beginning for the special relationship between Hashem and the people He had chosen as His own.

The mitzvah of establishing the calendar also highlights another aspect of time—its cyclical nature. Life, as we know all too well, is an endless procession of ups and downs, with no guarantees as to the outcome. But the eternal existence of the Jewish nation is unconditionally guaranteed by our Creator. The symbol of this guarantee is the lunar cycle which our calendar follows. The Jewish people are compared to the moon. Just as the moon wanes to the point of oblivion but always returns to its fullness, so will the Jewish people always return to their greatness, no matter how far they are driven down by the pressures of exile.

Therefore, the mitzvah of the calendar was doubly appropriate for the time it was given. The Jews were slaves deprived of spirituality and even basic human dignity, a people on the verge of extinction, yet they would once again glow with the brightness of the full moon. They had been mired for centuries at the nadir of human existence, but now Hashem had lifted them up and placed them on the pinnacle of Creation.

A man once visited a great sage. "How is your life going?" asked the sage, "Spiritually? Materially?"

"Splendid!" said the man. "Everything is excellent. It's been great for years and years. Couldn't be better."

"Life without ups and downs? You are living in a dream world. If you do not know you are down, how do you expect to get up?"

In our own lives, we can also take comfort in the metaphor of the lunar cycle. The flow of time is a harbinger of hope, both for ourselves as individuals and for all of us as a people. But even as we wait for the future, it is within our power to sanctify the present, to

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The commandment given to the Jewish people by G-d must not be seen as a commandment which "just happens" to be first. Rather, it must have special significance, and have been chosen as the cardinal commandment. It must also reveal basic philosophic truths about who we are as a nation.

We read in Bo, this week's portion: "This month shall be head month to you. It shall be the first month of the year." (Exodus 12:2) The Midrash tells us it is necessary for G-d to actually guide Moses' gaze toward the sky so that when the new moon looks like "this ...," he should sanctify it.

There are many traces in our halachic ritual of an ancient practice where witnesses who first saw the new moon would rush to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, even desecrating the Sabbath if necessary, in order for the Religious Court to declare: "The month is sanctified, the month is sanctified."

The first day of the month, Rosh Chodesh, is a minor festival. On the Sabbath before a new month, the moon's re-appearance, to a fraction of a second, is announced after the public Torah reading, echoing the Sanhedrin's public declaration. On Rosh Chodesh itself, during the Amida and the grace after Meals, we add a special prayer, Ya'ale Veyavo, and chant the Half-Hallel during the morning service. There is a special scriptural reading, just like any festival, and we add the additional Musaf prayer, a reminder of the extra sacrifice in the Temple. Women are freed from certain domestic tasks, and fasting and eulogizing are forbidden. During the first days of the new month, generally when the Sabbath lets out, Saturday evening, special prayers are recited and Jews even dance in a circle while gazing at the new moon in a ceremony called "sanctifying the moon." Thus, we still need to understand why, out of so many possible commandments, the Torah chose this one to introduce the Jewish people to their future destiny, and why there is so much fascination with the moon.

There are many possible answers, but this week ours begins in Egypt, a land where the calendar followed the sun. The Maharal of Prague points out that when the Jews were given this first commandment, they were actually given more than just a law telling them to start counting months according to lunar cycles-it emphasized a new way of life that would stand in sharp contrast to Egypt.

The sun is symbolic of constancy and power-the very image of Egypt. Except for gray clouds (not too many in Egypt), every day the sun's warmth and light reaches someone in the world -- 365 days a year, we trust the sun to rise and set. There's nothing new under the sun because the sun sees and oversees everything in an unchanging fashion. But under the moon, there is something new at least 12 times a year. It is forever changing, going through its phases, getting smaller and smaller, and then bigger and bigger. When it seems to have disappeared completely, there's a sudden turnaround and rebirth. To the ancient imagination, the permutation of the moon in its 28 day journeys were a constant source of heavenly wonder and speculation.

The Holy Zohar compares the Jewish people to the moon because both the moon and the people of Israel go through phases, disappearing little by little until it seems that it's the end; centuries-long exile climaxing in Europe's death factories. Suddenly, a new moon is sighted and the messengers run to Jerusalem.

The repetition of a monthly cycle, this law of change, firmly established within the Jewish psyche the inevitability of renewal. Our sanctity as a nation is tied to this potential of renewal, and our history attests to the termination of a Jewish culture in one land and the almost simultaneous appearance of a new Jewish culture in a different land. Like the moon, our disappearance is never forever.

The first Torah commandment is given when it's clear that Pharaoh himself cannot change. After nine terrifying plagues, one might expect him to have a change of heart, but the leader of Egypt cannot relent. Despite all that he has witnessed, he refuses to let the Jews go. The message of this first commandment is that in contrast to the blind Egyptians (darkness is the ninth plague) the Jews can, and do, change, emerging again and again out of the fangs of evil to enter the gates of redemption.

Rabbi Kook, Israel's first chief Rabbi, often wrote of the old being made new, and the new becoming holy. I have a good friend, Yehuda, from Kibbutz Ein Tzurim. Years back, a parent of one of the kibbutznikim, a resident of Kfar Chassidim near Haifa, died and several of us from Ein Tzurim headed north. Before the funeral actually started, the head of the town's yeshiva, a man dressed in the typical black hat and coat of a Rosh Yeshiva from the old world, stepped outside with several students, the clothes in sharp contrast to the light shirts and summer shorts of the

kibbutznikim. I sensed that the Rosh Yeshiva looked disdainfully upon these men, though they wore kippot and were from a religious kibbutz. All of sudden his eyes fell on my friend Yehuda, and he cried out to him in Yiddish: "Yudke? Is that you?" It turned out that the two had been students together in a yeshiva in Petach Tikva. The Rosh Yeshiva then asked the kibbutznik why someone as brilliant as he had been, interrupted his talmudic studies and left yeshiva world. "I wouldn't think that our Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Shach, would have you go." "You're right. Rav Shach wrote many letters to dissuade me." Thundered the head of the yeshiva: "And those letters will be the prosecuting attorney when you stand before the heavenly throne."

Ordinarily a reserved man, Yehuda stood his ground: "And the kibbutz I helped start, Ein-Tzurim, will be my defense attorney. And I think this attorney will win the case." His old school-mate was taken aback by the answer and said, almost admiringly, "You've stayed the same." Yehuda wouldn't let the issue drop. "It's not true, Reb Elya. I didn't remain the same, but you remained the same Elya. You are what you were 30 years ago, a hundred years ago. But I saw G-d's hand in history. I saw changes in store for the Jewish people, the creation the State of Israel, and in accordance with those changes, I changed." © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BORUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

We all believe in G-d, but we constantly struggle with the same issue: how do we increase our faith in Him? Is there anything active that we can do to deepen our belief in G-d? This week's Torah portion provides the answer.

The second verse in Parshat Bo states G-d's goals in bringing forth more plagues in Egypt: "And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that which I have played with (punished) Egypt, and My wonders that I placed among them. And then you will know that I am G-d."

It seems to be black and white. G-d desires to ravage Egypt with plagues so that we will have material to use in order to tell our children. Beyond the basic purpose of punishment for Egypt, the wonders and signs of the Exodus would establish a basis of belief in G-d. This belief would be transferred to the next generation. But that's not all the verse says. In addition, the very teaching and relating of the Exodus story, with all of its miracles, would lead to: "And then you will know that I am G-d." When one teaches about belief in G-d, the belief becomes internalized. It ceases to be only belief; it becomes knowledge. What's the difference between belief and knowledge?

I have never visited Australia. Yet, I have a strong belief that it exists. I don't believe there is a worldwide hoax about its existence. I have been in

Israel, though, so I KNOW that Israel exists. Through teaching about G-d's existence and His involvement in the world, my belief in G-d becomes stronger and stronger until I can come close to actual knowledge.

William Glasser, Ph.D., once conducted a study in which he concluded that people learn 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, 80% of what they experience, but 95% of what they teach to others.

The Talmud (Ta'anit 7a) said it first: "Rabbi Chanina said: 'I have learned much from my teachers, from my colleagues even more, but from my students I have learned the most.'" The Torah instructor is really instructing him/herself through his/her teaching. We can derive this idea from the way in which Maimonides describes the commandment to study Torah. Maimonides, in *The Book of Mitzvot*, his enumeration of all the Biblical commandments (Mitzvah 6), describes the Mitzvah of learning Torah as "G-d commanded us to study Torah and to teach it."

Learning Torah and teaching Torah are not two separate commandments. Rather, you have not fulfilled your obligation within the realm of Torah study if you do not teach. (This does not mean that every Jew must work in the teaching profession. But it does mean that every Jew must look for opportunities to share wisdom with others, especially within one's own family and to one's own children.) In fact, the Torah uses the language of teaching when commanding Torah study. "You shall teach them to your children and you shall speak of them while you sit in your home and while you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deut. 6:7)

In every place in the Torah where the Torah discusses study, it is always put in the language of teaching. It would also seem quite significant that in Hebrew, as opposed to English, where "to teach" has a different root than "to learn", the root of both words for studying and teaching is "lamed." Gesenius Hebrew Grammar explains that the act of teaching, *melamed*, means an eager, intensified learning. Teaching must be a process of heavy learning as well.

It would seem that in order to truly study Torah properly, and in order to genuinely make one's studies a meaningful part of one's life, one must teach Torah to others. The Mitzvah is "lilmod u'lelamed"-to study and to teach. And the Mishna tells us that one should "lilmod al menat lelamed"- to learn in order to teach. The two go hand in hand. Every generation is a link in the chain from the Revelation at Sinai to modern times. We must receive knowledge from the previous generation and impart that knowledge to the next generation. This is the obligation of Talmud Torah-Torah study. And in teaching the next generation, we internalize the information, knowledge, and faith that brings us closer to G-d.

So, learn a lot. Study a lot. But don't forget to teach it to others. © 2008 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah reflects the painful reality that people do not learn from the past and history will undoubtedly be repeated. The setting is the Babylonian destruction of the Egyptian Empire. The prophet Yirmiyahu states in the name of Hashem, "I will direct my attention to the multitudes of Alexandria and to Pharaoh and all of Egypt...I will deliver them into the hands of their killer, Nebuchadnezzar, 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. © 2008 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Salvation and redemption do not come easily. In this week's parsha the cost of Israel's redemption is graphically detailed in the Torah. Though the major cost and punishment is meted out to the Egyptian Pharaoh and his nation, the oppressors and enslavers of the Jewish people, Midrash teaches us that the Jews also suffered great loss in this process of redemption and of gaining their freedom.

According to certain midrashic opinion most of the Jews never were able to leave Egypt at all. Only a minority successfully followed Moshe out of the house of slavery. And ironically, even most of those who did leave Egypt would eventually be unable to live to see the promised land of Israel.

Why must the process of redemption and independence be such a long and painful one? After all, the Lord could certainly have made it much easier on all concerned. The obvious lesson is that freedom and redemption, both physical and spiritual, has little value if it is not hard won.

That is the symbol of the blood on the doorposts that signaled the immediate moment of redemption. "And I [the Lord] said unto you: With your blood [and sacrifice] shall you live!" The rabbis interpreted the repetition of this phrase twice as referring to the paschal sacrifice and the blood of circumcision.

Redemption is apparently meant to be hard won. It is not a gift that entails no cost. Becoming a Jew entails blood at the beginning of life. Becoming the truly free Jew that the Torah commands us to become entails lifelong sacrifice and the blood that this entails.

Our generation is also involved and absorbed in a struggle for redemption and salvation, both personal and national. This struggle has taken a great toll on our enemies, but in a psychological and spiritual

measure, perhaps even a greater toll upon us. Much blood has been spilled in this struggle and, truth be said, no imminent success is yet visible to us.

A great portion of world Jewry in the twentieth century did not survive to see the beginnings of our redemption and restoration to sovereignty in our ancient homeland. Many others have now faltered in their resolution to see it through until reaching the Promised Land. Whereas the Jews leaving Egypt had dominant figures such as Moshe and Aharon to lead and inspire them our times and situation lack such towering personalities.

But that may be precisely what the rabbis meant when they stated; "We have no one that we can truly rely upon except for our Father in Heaven." Every generation experiences crises of faith and belief. Our generation which is witness to the death of all of the false ideals that permeated Jewish society over the past two centuries is truly left with no one to rely upon "except for our Father in Heaven."

But the prophet has assured us that "as the time when you left Egypt, so too now will you witness wonders and greatness." The bitter and costly process of redemption is upon us. May we be privileged to see its successful completion with great speed and minimum pain. © 2008 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

The Biblical term for midnight, the time Moshe (Moses) says G-d will slay the first born-*ka-hazot ha-lailah*. (Exodus 11:4) Different interpretations are given for the prefix *ka*, which gives us the key as to the true meaning of this term.

On its simplest level, *ka*, says Rashi, means "when." From this perspective, *ka-hazot* is a delineation of time, i.e. that actual moment when the night was divided - midnight.

The Talmud sees it differently - *ka* means "approximately." Although the plague actually occurred *ba-hazi ha-lailah* (Exodus 12:29) - precisely at midnight, Moshe says *ka-hazot*. This was because Moshe feared the Egyptians would make a mistake in calculation and believe midnight had arrived when it had not. The Egyptians would then accuse Moshe of being a false prophet. (Berakhot 4a)

Or *Ha-hayyim* (Hayyim ibn Attar, 18c. Morocco) understands *ka* as referring to a moment in the past. The term refers to that midnight in the book of Genesis when Avraham (Abraham), the first patriarch, rescued his nephew Lot. (Genesis 14) As Avraham was victorious at midnight, so would the Jews overcome the Egyptians at midnight.

Another approach can be suggested. Perhaps ka does not refer to the past, but to the future.

Consider the following: night in the Torah symbolizes suffering and exile. Hazi takes it a step further. It is not only night, but it is the night of the night-midnight, the time of the deepest suffering and exile, when the voice of G-d seems silent.

Hence, the Torah here states ka-hazot. As we were saved from Egypt, so will we in the future, survive other midnights - other times of pain and despair.

In the will of Yossele Rakover, a fictitious last testament left in the ruins of Eastern Europe, this idea of ka-hazot is expressed powerfully. There it states: "I believe in the sun, even when it does not shine. I believe in love, even when I am alone. I believe in G-d, even when He is silent."

What is true about the nation of Israel is similarly true about individual lives. Often G-d intervenes precisely when one thinks there is no hope.

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, of blessed memory, reinforced this message in his comment on the sentence, "As for me, I trust in Your kindness, my heart will rejoice in Your salvation." (Psalms 13:6) He suggested that the Psalmist is telling us that our faith in G-d should be so great that we rejoice in His salvation even before we are saved - even when it is still dark.

May each of us achieve such faith in our personal and national experiences of ka-hazot. © 2008 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.

RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

After G-d set seven plagues upon Egypt, Pharaoh's servants finally said to him:

"How long will this be a snare for us? Send out the men that they may serve... G-d! Do you not know that Egypt is lost?" (Exodus 10:7)

The Egyptians had just experienced seven severe plagues that G-d set upon them. Even though Pharaoh had also witnessed all of it, he still remained stubborn in refusing to let all of the Jews go free. However, Pharaoh's servants-the ones who waited on their master hand and foot-had complete clarity: if the Jews were not freed, then Egypt and its inhabitants would be completely destroyed.

How is it that a king was unable to see what was so abundantly clear to everyone else?

The reason is that often we're much too close to a situation to be able to see it objectively. Since it was Pharaoh who was speaking directly to Moses, he was too emotionally charged with what was happening to "his" country. Too close to the forest to be able to see the trees. Pharaoh-like many of us who are too close to something in our own lives-has the misguided

belief that since we feel we know the situation the best, then we're also in the best position to know what should be done. Therefore, we won't entertain any other ideas or opinions.

It all comes down to objectivity. Whenever someone is emotionally immersed in something, then by definition he will have little or no objectivity. How often have you known someone who was involved in an unhealthy personal relationship but failed to see just how detrimental it was? And he justified being closed-minded to any other opinions because he embraced the notion that "no one knows the person like he does." And that's exactly why he can never be objective or act rationally. Anyone so close to a situation loses the larger picture and cannot see it clearly.

This is why it's imperative always to seek others out and sincerely ask for and hear their advice. Our human nature will oftentimes discount what other people are telling us. This is because if we embrace their viewpoints, then we have to admit to ourselves that we made poor choices and will continue to do so. This "saving face" mentality of not hearing good advice is why people continue to just rationalize their poor behavior instead of changing.

One can never grow or become great with this philosophy. The greatest men have always been able to admit their wrongs of the past and then, based upon a new perspective, choose to make healthy and productive choices.

So listen to those around you who know you well and whose opinions you value. But the ball will ultimately still be in your court, so fight the urge to justify your past actions and start taking good advice. While it might not be easy on your ego to do this, it will, however, make you great. © 2008 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.ocm

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

There are three passages in this week's Torah portion on the subject of how to relate to the children in performing mitzvot related to redemption. According to the well known Midrash quoted in the Pesach Haggada, the different responses are meant for children with different characteristics. However, it is simpler to explain that only one son is involved, each time in different circumstances. Two answers to the sons are about specific commandments. The first refers to the Pesach sacrifice: "And if your sons say to you, what does this service mean to you? You shall reply, it is a Pesach sacrifice to G-d." [Shemot 12:26-27]. The second answer refers to the firstborns:

"And if your son asks you tomorrow, what is this? Answer him... This is why I dedicate every male firstborn to G-d and I will redeem every firstborn among

my sons." [13:14-15]. As opposed to this, the third time, with respect to the mitzva of eating matza, there is no mention of the question that the sons ask. The Torah only notes the obligation to speak to them: "And you shall tell your son on that day, it is because of this that G-d acted for me when I left Egypt." [13:8]. What is the significance of this difference?

To answer this question, we must first understand the Torah's explanation about eating matza. "It is because of this that G-d acted for me." The early commentators did not agree about the meaning of this difficult phrase. The Ramban feels that the term "because of this G-d acted..." means, "because of what He did." Thus, this verse explains the reason for the mitzva-we eat matza because of what G-d did for us when we left Egypt. According to this approach, this reply is similar to the other two, and the redemption from Egypt is the reason for performing the mitzva. Rashi and Ibn Ezra, on the other hand, understand the key phrase "it is because of this" to mean that the purpose of the redemption was to give us an opportunity to observe the mitzva. This second interpretation by Rashi and Ibn Ezra seems to follow the simple way to understand the verse, since in other verses in the Tanach the Hebrew word "ba'avur" usually refers to an objective and not a cause. (For example: "Eat from my hunting, so that your soul will bless me" [Bereishit 27:19]; "For this reason I tested you, to show you my power" [Shemot 9:16].)

This implies that the different sons appearing in this week's portion are treated differently. With respect to two of the commandments (the Pesach sacrifice and redemption of the firstborns), we have been commanded to explain the reasons for the mitzva to the sons. This evidently stems from the desire to bring the sons closer to the internal significance of the mitzvot and to help them to "bind" together with them. For the third mitzva (eating matza), the Torah wanted to emphasize that the need to observe the commandment stems from a basic feeling of obligation towards the Almighty, who took us out of Egypt in order that we would be able to fulfill the mitzvot, even if we do not know the reason for them. Thus, the specific mitzvot in this week's portion illustrate the two important goals of the mitzvot. On one hand, it is sometimes necessary to understand the reasons for a mitzva in order to observe it fully. On the other hand, there is also another important value, observing the mitzva out of an obligation to listen to G-d's commandments, with full understanding that "the only reason He took us out of Egypt was in order to serve Him" [Ibn Ezra].

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

The final plague, the killing of the first-born Egyptians, strikes every home in Egypt. Pharaoh awakes in panic and finally is brought to his knees

as he agrees to free the Jews. We read the following cryptic Rashi-comment. It is a subtle one-word comment that highlights the drama of the text.

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

"And Pharaoh arose"-RASHI: "From his bed."

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

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

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

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

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

From where did he arise? From his bed, naturally. What about our second question: What difference does all this make? Why must Rashi, and the Torah, tell us this trivial fact?

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

While literary style is not the Torah's purpose, it certainly makes use of style in a most sophisticated way to convey its messages. © 2008 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.com