

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

When we last left Moshe, at the end of Parashas Shemos (5:22-6:1), he had confronted G-d regarding the plight of the Children of Israel. Despite Moshe following G-d's commandment and speaking to Paro, not only was the nation not set free, but they were forced to work even harder than before. G-d then reassured Moshe that He will witness Paro sending them out of his land. Our Parasha seems to continue that conversation, with G-d sending a message through Moshe to His people that He will take them out of Egypt and bring them to their land (6:6-8) and to Paro to let His people go (6:10-11). However, our sages tell us (Bamidbar Rabbah 11:2, see Rabbeinu Bachye on 10:5) that there was actually a three-month delay between the first time Moshe and Aharon approached Paro and when they went back to him again. In between, Moshe had gone back to Midyan until G-d told him to return to Egypt (see Shemos Rabbah 5:20). The question is, why was there such a long delay between the two missions? Or, as Moshe seemed to ask (5:22), why did G-d send him so early, if the time had not yet come to take the Jews out of Egypt?

One possible answer is based on the amount of years that the nation was in Egypt. They were supposed to be in exile for 400 years (Beraishis 15:13), but were only approaching their 210th year in Egypt. It has been suggested that because of how harshly the Jews were treated by the Egyptians, over the 210 years (especially the last 87 of them) they had already suffered what normally would have taken 400 years. If so, the suffering over those final months might have had to be even more severe in order to complete the 400-year equivalent. By sending Moshe early, G-d knew that Paro would react by making things more difficult, allowing the redemption to start earlier as well. This might be what G-d meant when he answered Moshe by saying "now you will see" (6:1), i.e. since they are suffering more, you will see Paro sending them out "now," earlier than they otherwise would have been. There are other possible explanations for the lengthy delay as well.

Rabbeinu Bachye (5:22) quotes Rabbeinu Chananel, who explains Moshe's question to really be why the righteous suffer and the wicked thrive. Here,

the wicked Egyptians are still enjoying the benefits of their slave labor, while the Jews must continue to endure their suffering. G-d's answer was that His purpose for allowing Egypt to stay on top was to increase their punishment when the time comes, as well as to increase the reward for the Children of Israel. Without getting into the theological implications of this approach, it can explain why G-d wanted this three-month time period, which consisted of additional suffering for the Jews as well as the Egyptians no longer even providing straw to their slave laborers. Rabbeinu Bachye himself suggests that the purpose of the redeemer (both Moshe in Egypt and Moshiach, may he come soon) first appearing and then disappearing is to trick the oppressors into a false sense of confidence so that their "hearts can be hardened." Whereas Rabbeinu Chananel saw the Egyptians' additional success as a means of bringing additional punishment, Rabbeinu Bachye understands the appearance of a savior without immediate results as a means of being able to punish a non-repentant oppressor. Therefore, Moshe had to first demand, in G-d's name, that the Jews be set free, without there being any consequences of Paro's refusal (for a few months), so that a more severe punishment can follow subsequent refusals.

Shemos Rabbah (15:14), explaining Moshe's initial reluctance to be G-d's messenger to redeem the Jews in Egypt, says that Moshe was telling G-d that He had promised to redeem them Himself (not through a human intermediary). G-d responded by saying that He will indeed redeem them, but He wants Moshe to first inform them that He is going to. Evidently, Moshe's first appearance was not supposed to be the beginning of the redemption, but an announcement that the redemption is coming. There's no reason why that announcement can't come months before the actual event; it might even make those final months more bearable, knowing that the end is in sight. A bit later (15:18), the Midrash says that Paro was justified in saying no to Moshe when he first came, as G-d had promised to redeem them Himself, not through an emissary. It can therefore be suggested that there had to be a delay between Moshe's first appearance and the actual redemption in order to show that it was G-d doing it, not a charismatic human leader. Moshe's initial "failure" made it clear that it was not Moshe coming to the rescue but G-d Himself.

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The Midrash Tanchuma (Vayikra 3) says that after Paro said no the first time, Moshe felt that he had fulfilled G-d's commandment and returned to Midyan. Apparently, Moshe's reluctance to become the leader led him to believe that his mission was to be a messenger, not a redeemer, and he had therefore fulfilled his mission no matter what the response was. The Talmud (Gittin 56a) tells us that the Temple was destroyed and we were exiled because of "the humbleness of Rebbe Zecharya the son of Avkulus;" is it possible that Moshe's humbleness caused a delay of a few months until G-d went back to him several months later and commanded him to "take the Children of Israel out of Egypt" (6:13) i.e. that his mission was not accomplished until they are free?

After Paro said that straw would no longer be provided, "the nation spread out over the entire land of Egypt to gather stalks for straw" (5:12). The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 19) says that the real purpose of having the Jews go all over Egypt was so that, after they were beaten by the locals, no Egyptian could complain about being punished. It was no longer just Paro or the ruling elite that mistreated the Jews, but each and every Egyptian, when given the chance to help the poor slaves trying to find straw near their home, chose to physically harm them instead (see Eitz Yosef). The period of time between Moshe's first appearance and his return to Egypt months later was therefore necessary so that when all Egyptians suffered during the plagues, they would know that it was justified. After all, they had all participated in mistreating the Jews.

None of these approaches are really mutually exclusive, and there may be additional possibilities as well. Nevertheless, when trying to understand the sequence of events that led to the exodus, there was certainly significance to Moshe announcing that the redemption was coming and then disappearing for a long stretch before he returned for the actual redemption. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Stubbornness can be a virtue or a terrible character defect. When it is a virtue we call it tenacity. When it is a defect it is just plain foolish and counter

productive. Pharaoh's stubbornness, as exhibited in this week's parsha, is an example. His advisers inform him that Egypt is headed for disaster because of his stubbornness but he refuses to give in to the reality of the series of plagues that threaten to decimate Egyptian society.

Of course the Torah tells us that his tenacity was reinforced by the fact that G-d hardened his heart. The commentators, especially Maimonides, judge that to mean that the Lord gave him the courage of his convictions not to be influenced by the events transpiring in his country but to continue on his evil path to enslave the Jewish people.

Hardening his heart did not influence Pharaoh's choices in the matter. It merely allowed him to transform what previously appeared to be tenacity into ultimate foolishness and disaster. Hitler, Stalin, Mao and other such leaders displayed this same reckless stubbornness over the past century, resulting in the destruction of societies and the deaths of tens of millions of people.

Because of his behavior, Pharaoh becomes the paradigm for the self-destructive trait of foolish stubbornness. The Jewish people are also characterized as being a stubborn people. This trait has served us as well when we were and are tenacious in preserving our values and traditions. It is a foolish trait when we continue the policies and misbegotten certainties that have always led to our tragedies and misfortunes.

Rashi and Midrash teach us the source of Pharaoh's suicidal stubbornness. It lay in his belief in himself as a G-d - arrogant and convinced of his own infallibility. People who are never wrong never have to change their policies, beliefs or behavior.

I am reminded of a sign that I once saw on the desk of a prominent public figure that said: "Don't confuse me with the facts; my mind is already made up!" He was joking about it (I think) but that danger lurks in all of us. Once we are convinced of the absolute rectitude of our position, we not only are tenacious in maintaining it, we become downright blindly stubborn.

Moshe meets Pharaoh at the river's edge where he went to perform his bodily functions. Pharaoh is exposed there - not as a G-d but only as a mortal man. Moshe means to teach Pharaoh that the justification for his stubbornness - his sham sense of infallibility - is itself false. A little humility on the part of Pharaoh would have saved himself and Egypt a great deal of grief. That is why the Torah stresses that the desired quality for true leadership is humility.

Moshe becomes the paradigm for humility just as Pharaoh - his arch-nemesis - is the paradigm for arrogant stubbornness. This lesson of wise tenacity versus foolish stubbornness exists in all areas of human life and society - family, community, national

policy and personal development. May we be tenacious enough in life to avoid foolish moments of harmful stubbornness. © 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

If the Egyptian magicians did not have G-dly powers, how were they able to perform miraculous feats and match Moshe (Moses) act for act by duplicating the first two plagues? A closer look at the text reveals that these people did not actually duplicate the acts, for they were charlatans.

In the plague of blood, the Torah states: "And Moshe and Aharon (Aaron) lifted up their rod...and all of the waters turned to blood." (Exodus 7:20) Soon after, the Torah states: "And the Egyptians did in like manner with their secret arts (lateihem)." (Exodus 7:22) Here, the magicians apparently proved that Moshe and Aharon's powers were limited as they easily performed the same feat.

But the fraud surfaces from the precise language of this verse. First, the expression in "like manner" may mean that the Egyptian magicians were not able to bring forth blood at all, they merely copied the way Moshe and Aharon moved their hands.

Second, the Hebrew for "secret arts"-lateihem, literally means, "with a flash of fire." The magicians, using the cover of fire, moved their hands quickly to make it appear as if they brought forth blood, when indeed they did not.

This same language ("like manner" and "secret arts") is found prior to the plague of blood (when the rod is turned into a serpent) (Exodus 7:11) and in the second plague of frogs (Exodus 8:3) as well.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch points out that if the magicians were truly powerful and were looking after Egypt's best interests, they would have used their powers to remove the plague altogether. Instead, they seem to bring more of it to Egypt. In fact, Rabbi Hirsch suggests that they produced nothing new. They merely took a bit of the blood that Moshe and Aharon brought forth and deceptively placed it before Pharaoh.

By the third plague, Pharaoh finally catches on to the reality. After Egypt is full of lice, he turns to his magicians demanding that they use their powers to help remove the swarm. The magicians were obviously unable to follow the order. Hence, the Torah states that the Egyptians attempted to remove (lehozi) the lice but could not. (Exodus 8:14) This finally led to an admission by the magicians that their abilities never did and never could match those of G-d for the plagues revealed the true power of the true G-d. (Exodus 8:15) The gig was truly up.

Charlatans in any realm, whether they be in the world of magic, in the world of business or the world of politics, cannot fool people forever. In the end, their sham will be revealed, and the truth will become apparent not only to everyone around them, but even to themselves. © 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.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

When G-d sends Moshe to warn Pharaoh about the second plague, He tells Moshe that if Pharaoh refuses to release the people G-d will strike them with frogs. And then, "The frogs will swarm from the Nile, and they will rise up and come into your homes, and your bedrooms and on your bed, and in the homes of your slaves and your people, and in your ovens and your baking bowls" [Shemot 7:28]. However, when G-d commands Moshe to tell Aharon to wave the staff in his hand, he does not mention the Nile specifically but speaks in much more general terms. "Wave your hand with your staff over the streams, the rivers, and the lakes, and raise the frogs over the Land of Egypt" [8:1]. What is the reason for this difference?

Evidently the difference between the two commands is related to different approaches to the plague of the frogs. The first time G-d sends Moshe to Pharaoh, there is another threat in addition to the threat that the frogs will swarm into the homes and the rooms of the Egyptians: "And in you, and in your nation, and in all your slaves, the frogs will rise up" [7:29]. From this point of view, the plague consists not only of the swarms of frogs but also causes direct harm to the people of Egypt. Thus, with respect to the Nile, it is written, "they will swarm from the Nile," emphasizing the role of the Nile as the source of the huge numbers of frogs. (This is similar to what is written at the beginning of Shemot about Bnei Yisrael: "And Bnei Yisrael multiplied and swarmed, and they became very strong, and the land was filled with them" [1:7]. Perhaps from this point of view the plague of frogs was a way of punishing Egypt for refusing to tolerate the culture of Yisrael and plotting to destroy them.)

However, the other point of view, that the frogs will "rise up," is the phrase that is used with respect to Aharon. This is true in the command? "raise the frogs over the Land of Egypt"? and in the fulfillment of the command? "And the frogs rose and covered the Land of Egypt" [8:2].

In view of the above, it seems that the frogs from the Nile swarmed over the land, while frogs from other water sources harmed the Egyptians themselves. This dual approach to the plague can also be seen in the words of Moshe when Pharaoh begs for the frogs to

be removed. "And Moshe said to Pharaoh, you can look at me in wonder. When shall I pray for you and your slaves and your nation, to remove the frogs from you and from your homes? They will only remain in the Nile... And the frogs will leave you and your homes, and your slaves and your nation" [8:5-7].

The same two viewpoints of the plague of frogs can be seen in Tehillim. In one place, the emphasis is on the irritation of the swarm of frogs in the homes of the Egyptians: "Their land swarmed frogs, in the rooms of their kings" [105:30]. However, in a different psalm the plagues of the frogs and the wild animals are grouped together, with a similar significance:

"He sent wild animals among them to devour them and frogs to destroy them" [78:45]. This emphasizes the direct harm to the Egyptian people.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

From earliest childhood, we are taught to express our gratitude for anything we receive. Think back.

What were the first things your parents taught you, "Say please" and "Say thank you." Appreciation and gratitude seem to be fundamental universal values. Why is this so? Is it only to give our benefactors a good feeling? Or is there some deeper purpose? What exactly do these words mean?

In this week's Torah portion, we find a rather strange form of gratitude. As the story unfolds, Pharaoh defiantly refuses to release the Jewish people from bondage. The Ten Plagues begin. First, the Nile River turns to blood. Pharaoh persists in his stubborn refusal, and the river spawns and disgorges myriad frogs that swarm over all of Egyptian. Pharaoh still resists, and the very dust of the earth is transformed into lice. But this, too, does not convince Pharaoh to release the Jewish people, and as the plagues continue, Egypt is overrun with beasts of prey. And so it continues until Pharaoh finally lets the Jewish people go.

If we look carefully, however, we notice an interesting distinction between the first three plagues and all the rest. Moses was the divine messenger to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and he personally administered the plagues. Nonetheless, Hashem chose his brother Aaron to administer the first three plagues. Why was this so?

The Sages tell us that for Moses to strike the river and turn it into blood or to generate a plague of frogs from its bowels would have been an act of ingratitude. During the decree of infanticide, Moses had been concealed among the bulrushes of the Nile, and in effect, the river had saved his life. How could he now afflict it with plagues? Furthermore, Moses had struck down an Egyptian taskmaster who had been tormenting a Jewish laborer and buried the body in the soil. Therefore, it would have been an act of ingratitude for him to transform the soil into lice.

But wait! What sort of gratitude was Hashem demanding from Moses? What is the point of being grateful to inanimate entities such as the river and the soil?

Clearly, the primary purpose of gratitude is for our own benefit. People sometimes have a tendency to avoid expressing their gratitude, because somehow doing so makes them feel diminished. Their egos do not allow them to acknowledge that they are beholden to others. In order to counteract this tendency, the Torah repeatedly emphasizes the importance of expressing thanks. Indeed, the Hebrew word for gratitude is hakaras hatov, acknowledgment of the favor. Acknowledgment is the key, regardless of whether the benefactor is another person or an inanimate river.

The tendency to ingratitude, the commentators explain, is one of the major obstacles to a close relationship with the Creator. A person whose ego does not allow him to acknowledge his own limitations and needs will not recognize the limitless presence of the Creator in the world. Only by becoming conditioned to express gratitude at every appropriate occasion, to acknowledge dependency on others, can a person break out of the ego-driven illusions of self-sufficiency and gain a clear vision of the world. This knowledge and humble acceptance is the first step towards connecting with the Master of the Universe.

A great sage was having dinner with one of his young disciples in a hotel dining room.

"The owner of this hotel is a fine person," remarked the sage. "Look at this dinner he prepared for us. And the service!"

"Well, what do you expect?" said the young disciple. "He is getting paid very well for it."

"Naturally, he has to get paid," said the sage. "He has expenses, you know. That's the only reason he takes our money. But he is such a considerate, wonderful host."

"He takes more than to cover expenses," the young man persisted. "He make quite a tidy profit here."

"Of course, he makes a profit," said the sage. "Otherwise, how is he to support his family" Nonetheless, he is such a warm host. But you, my young friend, have thought of every which way to avoid being grateful to him. Do you why? Because you are afraid that acknowledging the good in others may make you indebted to them and thereby diminished. But the opposite is true. Recognizing the good in others makes you a better person."

In our own lives, we must never underestimate the importance of expressing gratitude and appreciation to others. We must recognize every good turn that is done for us, and we must declare our acknowledgement in no uncertain terms. We owe it not only to our benefactors but to ourselves even more. A

person wise enough to thank the doorman for opening the door is exalted enough to be in touch with eternity.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

What makes Moses Moses? He is certainly the consummate prophet, the man of G-d whose vision of ethical monotheism was expressed in a moral code of law which commands to this very day, more than 4,000 years later. He is certainly the consummate leader who took a bedraggled slave-people into freedom and nationhood. But I believe that the central characteristic of Moses is his love of the Jewish people, his "brotherly" love. When he witnesses the slaying of a Hebrew by an Egyptian, he takes action and kills the Egyptian, but he suffers a tremendous loss. All of Egypt sees him as a Prince and, like a Prince of Egypt, he might have concluded his career with his own pyramid one day.

Yet Moses risks all because one of his "brothers" has been slain. Ordinarily, revolutionary careers begin with selfless acts and it would be logical to assume that a fugitive from the law who has put his life on the line for the Hebrews should become a hero at home, among his own people. Moses experiences the exact opposite. On the following day, when he chances upon two Israelites fighting, he wants to stop their wickedness, to defend his brother the underdog, but their response is cynical and arrogant. "Who made you our judge? Do you want to kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" (Ex. 2:14). In an instant Moses realizes the difficulty in attempting to work with his "brothers" as well as the fact that his prior deed is public knowledge and so Pharaoh's palace is no longer open to him. Moses becomes a refugee, escaping into the desert with only a shirt on his back. There, with his new wife and child, earning a living from his flock of sheep, he can live out his years as one more person who tried to make a difference, failed, and left the stage of human history. Let others tackle the problem. But G-d still has His eye on Moses.

The text then tells us that G-d appears to Moses from within the flame of a burning bush, urging him to become the Redeemer of his people. Moses demurs, fearing that as a stutterer, a man whose words trip over his tongue, he will never manage to convince Pharaoh. It is precisely because he loves the Jewish people so much that he wants the best candidate to present their case. Only when G-d informs Moses that his brother Aaron will become his mouthpiece does his resistance cease....for the moment.

The next stage of the redemptive process begins when Moses presents his credentials and G-d's instructions to Pharaoh. But the result is utter failure. Instead of relenting, Pharaoh tightens the screws, and

now the Israelite slaves must gather their own straw for the bricks they bake in the hot sun.

Our portion for the week, Va'era, opens with the verse, "G-d spoke to Moses, and said to him, I am the Lord..." (Exodus 6:2). The Chatam Sofer writes in his work *Torat Moshe* that we should note an interesting use of language in this verse. It relates directly to three verses earlier when Moses' response to Pharaoh's increased tyranny was a pointed rebuttal to G-d. "Lord, why do you do evil to this people?" (5:22) Instead of being angered by such strong language, G-d is pleased with Moses' willingness to confront Him. Better to speak tough with G-d than to speak out against the Jewish people. The English translation of the opening verse of Va'era does not completely capture the significance the Chatam Sofer alerts us to. The first use of G-d is rendered *Elokim*, signifying the powerful or judging aspect of G-d, while the next use of G-d's name, translated *LORD*, is in fact the four letter name of G-d. This name signifies the merciful, compassionate nature of G-d. Similarly, the first "speak" uses the word "vayedaber," which is a harsher form of speaking, while the second "speak" uses the word "vayomer," a softer, gentler form of speaking.

According to the Chatam Sofer, G-d greatly values the extent to which Moses defends the Jewish people, and once Moses calls G-d to task, so to speak, G-d replaces his initial, judgmental name "E-lohim" for the compassionate "Y-HVH," and his original harsher form of "Va'yedaber" for the gentler "Va'Yomer." Even after Moses was rejected by his own "brothers" and forced to live in Midian, Moses nevertheless forgives the Jewish people. Moses is the leader G-d wants for this new nation because he is ready for anything the Jewish people may throw at him. He has no illusions about the people he will lead. He has experienced their ingratitude and sensed their independence. He can sympathize with Ben-Gurion's comment to Truman: "You may be President of 140 million citizens, but I am the Prime Minister of 600,000 Prime Ministers."

Rabbi Yitzchak Levi of Berditchev, the great chassidic master, was banished from two rabbinic posts because of his chassidic sympathies. His students wondered what he would do next and he answered that he would seek a third position. But why? they asked. For the honor, he answered. They waited for the wink of his eye, but Rabbi Yitzchak Levi was not being ironic - he was very serious. He explained that leading a Jewish town was always an honor for the rabbi, even if the people didn't honor you in return. Apparently he learned this from Moses. Moses' outreach towards his hapless and enslaved brothers and his willingness to assume a leadership role only if it is together with his brother as his "front" man, makes him the archetypal brother, the towering figure of the Book of Exodus who is cured of the "brotherly hatred" of the Book of Genesis. It is not easy to love one's

brothers, but a true leader is someone who can feel connected to every other Jew, whether from a far away tribe or a DNA related brother. Often parents work out their own problems and short-comings through their children, but siblings have the potential to love each other unconditionally, even when the love is repaid with a curse. This was Moses' greatest gift and his most impressive legacy. © 2007 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BORUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

We have a major problem with this week's Torah portion. In fact, it's a problem with the entire Exodus from Egypt. The problem is: Is G-d being truthful with Pharaoh?

Beginning back in Parshat Shmot (Exodus 5:3) and continuing this week in Va'eira (Exodus 8:23), G-d instructs Moshe to ask Pharaoh to release the Jewish People for three days only.

"We will go on a three-day journey in the Wilderness and bring offerings to Hashem, Our Lord, as He will instruct us."

Lest we think that Pharaoh knew and understood that the three days would extend to more days, it is clear that he did not (Exodus 8:24): "Pharaoh said, 'I will send you and you shall bring offerings to Hashem, your Lord, in the Wilderness, only do not go far off!'" (Subsequently, Pharaoh went back on his word.)

So was G-d playing straight with Pharaoh? Beyond the moral and philosophical problem of G-d telling lies, the Talmud (Shabbat 55a) states unequivocally, "The signature of G-d is Truth." Yet, it is difficult to fathom G-d asking Pharaoh for three days of freedom when we know that He intended all along to set the Jewish people free from Egypt forever. What can we suggest to resolve this troublesome issue?

There is no way out of saying that when G-d said three days, He meant three days-and three days only. Since Pharaoh rejected this 'Freedom-for-three-days-only Plan,' it never took hold and G-d was not bound by it. Therefore when the Jewish People do eventually leave Egypt, they leave forever.

So, we have resolved the problem-G-d is not a liar. But now we have another question. Why would G-d deal in such terms with Pharaoh? True, had Pharaoh agreed, the Jews would have left for three days and then returned to Egypt. But we know that G-d did have in mind for the Jewish nation to exit Egypt, never to return. Why, then, would G-d initially want a temporary reprieve from Egyptian persecution before the ultimate Exodus? The answer teaches us something extremely vital for spiritual living.

If I asked you today to change your entire lifestyle overnight so that by tomorrow you'll be as learned and as pious as the greatest Torah leader

alive, you would probably be unable to accomplish it. This is not because you are not a good person and don't have a great spiritual yearning. Rather, there are some challenges that are so overwhelming that they are virtually impossible. Perhaps, given a few years of profound growth, it would be possible, but it is not presently. People usually change and grow gradually.

If someone takes on too much, too fast, the growth very often does not have any lasting effects.

G-d knew that Pharaoh was very attached to all of his possessions. The Jewish slaves were a major portion of his possessions. Asking Pharaoh to part from the Jewish nation-his slaves-forever would be a demand that Pharaoh would find impossible to agree to. G-d wanted Pharaoh to gradually realize that he would not perpetually own the Jews as slaves. Hence, He plans to take the Jews out for three days, have the Jews worship Him, and in this way Pharaoh will begin to get the idea that in the future, the Jews will serve G-d and not Pharaoh.

This 'three-days-only' request is one that Pharaoh would be able to answer affirmatively. Although, Pharaoh in the end refuses, he was at least capable of passing the test.

This temporary Exodus was also beneficial for the Jewish nation as well. They had spent many years in Egypt and had become adversely affected by the immoral Egyptian society. Had they been asked by G-d to suddenly leave Egypt, they would find it hard to abandon their cultural idolatrous leanings and serve only G-d. They, like Pharaoh, needed time to get used to the idea of the Jewish people leaving Egypt. They could only gradually begin to serve and worship G-d through His Torah. They were too attached to Egyptian idolatry to change without a 'three-days-only' interim reprieve from Egyptian culture.

We are all good people. We all want to reach our maximum spiritual potential. Yet, we sometimes move too fast for growth to last. How many of us leave Yom Kippur thinking we will never gossip again? And then that first violation happens when we aren't thinking, and we give up.

We have to learn to move more slowly. We have to utilize patience in our spiritual growth. And we have to remember that it doesn't matter how high up you are on the spiritual ladder-as long as you are moving up. © 2007 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This 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. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

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What's Bothering Rashi

This week's parsha begins the story of the ten plagues. Pharaoh refused to acknowledge Hashem's existence and would therefore not consent to free his Hebrew slaves, as Moses had requested. The plagues had symbolic meaning and their ultimate message is all material for the Torah commentators to delve into. We will look at the plague of frogs and Moses' prayer to Hashem to remove them, as Pharaoh requested. Let us see what we can learn from it.

"And Moses said to Pharaoh 'Glorify yourself with me-for when shall I pray for you, for your servants and for your people, to destroy the frogs from you and from your house? Only in the river will they remain.'" (Exodus 8:5)

"For when shall I pray for you?"-RASHI: "With reference to the prayer which I shall pray for you today to destroy the frogs, when do you want them to be destroyed, and you will see whether I can carry out my promise by the time that you set for me. If it had said (in Hebrew) 'mati a'ateir' without the letter 'lamed,' it would mean 'when shall I pray?' but now that it says (in Hebrew) 'l'mati' it means, 'I will pray today that the frogs be destroyed for the time you set for me. Tell me, then, by what day do you wish that they be destroyed?'"

Rashi is quite clear here as to the point of his comment. He wants to clarify the meaning of the word "when" (Hebrew "l'mati"). Since the addition of the letter "lamed" at the beginning of the word is unusual, Rashi shows us its special meaning here. Moses will pray now to have the frogs destroyed at whatever time in the future Pharaoh designates. So the word means "for when" and not just "when."

The Ramban (Nachmanides) differs with Rashi on the meaning of this word. He says it means simply "when."

Can you find support for Rashi's interpretation of the meaning of this word elsewhere in the text? Hint: Look further regarding other plagues.

Rabbeinu Bachaya, in his commentary on the Torah, finds support for Rashi in Exodus 8:25. There, referring to the plague of mixed wild beasts, it says "And Moses said: Behold I leave you and I shall entreat Hashem and the mixture of wild beasts will depart from Pharaoh, from his servants and from his people tomorrow etc."

Here it does not say "I shall entreat Hashem tomorrow" even though the wild beasts were to be removed only on the morrow. This, says Rabbeinu Bachaya, indicates that Moses would pray immediately for the cessation of a plague to take effect on the morrow.

Rabbeinu Bachaya points out an interesting pattern, not usually noticed in the plagues. Why would Pharaoh ask for the plagues' cessation on the next day, when immediate relief would seem to be the desired objective? Commentaries suggest that Pharaoh was skeptical of Moses and the miraculous nature of the plagues. He assumed that Moses had some insight into natural events and thus predicted these "miracles" which he knew would happen naturally in any event. Thus, Pharaoh thought that since Moses asked him when he wanted the plague stopped, Moses expected Pharaoh to say "right now" and Moses was ready for that, because he knew it would stop soon due to natural causes. So Pharaoh thought to outsmart Moses and made the unusual request to stop the frogs only on the morrow, even though this would cause him and his people additional discomfort.

Now notice the pattern that Rabbeinu Bachaya points out. See Exodus 8:19 regarding the plague of mixed animals: "And I will put a separation between my people and your people, tomorrow will be this sign."

See Exodus 9:5 regarding the plague of pestilence: "And Hashem set an appointed time, saying: Tomorrow Hashem will do this thing in the land."

See Exodus 9:18 regarding the plague of hail: "Behold I will rain at this time tomorrow very heavy hail, etc."

See Exodus 10:4 regarding the plagues of locusts: "For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring the locusts in all your boundaries."

It is as if Moses is mocking Pharaoh, "You asked me to remove the frogs 'tomorrow' to test me and my G-d; well, then, you will have your tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrows! You'll wait anxiously and expectantly for each plague, until... tomorrow." © 2007 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.ocm

