

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The process of the redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage is long and slow. The Jews suffer eighty years of bondage and persecution, humiliation and murder before the redemption takes place. Many Jews waver, understandably so, under the impact of the bad times. Some become informers (Datan and Aviram), others lack courage (the seventy elders of Israel who drifted away from accompanying Moshe to warn Pharaoh) and still others castigate Moshe for the apparent lack of progress in their redemption (the Jewish overseers employed by the Egyptians.)

Then there will be large sections of the Jewish people who simply give up on the entire enterprise of freedom and redemption. They will not merit to live to see and be part of the actual redemption and exodus from Egypt when it occurs. Even Moshe himself is ruefully criticized by G-d at the beginning of this week's parsha for his complaints to Heaven about the apparent lack of progress on the redemption and freedom front.

It is obvious that staying power and almost infinite patience are requirements for Jews hoping to see better times. The story of the plagues and the events of the parsha illustrate for us the necessity of a long range view in dealing with events in Jewish life. Great things take time to develop and unfold. Sudden and immediate proposed solutions to longstanding problems and challenges rarely are effective or beneficial. The Lord, so to speak, counts infinite patience as one of His attributes. Our task is to somehow emulate Him is this characteristic.

Pharaoh, the enemy of Israel, is the prototype of all later enemies of the Jewish people. No logic or facts can persuade him to abandon his irrational hatred and self-destructive behavior towards the Jews. Even when his closest advisers exclaim to him: "Are you not aware that Egypt is doomed because of your intransigence?" Pharaoh remains unmoved. He is willing to soldier on till the last Egyptian is destroyed in the series of plagues that are visited upon him and them.

The hatred of Jews is unreasoning and totally irrational. Yet it remains the constant in world history for millennia on end. Let Gaza be totally destroyed but no one will step back and ask why did we allow this to

happen? The spirit and unreasoning stubbornness of Pharaoh lives on in all later haters and murderers of Jews. Moshe engages in negotiations with Pharaoh but Pharaoh never honors the agreements achieved by these negotiations.

Pharaoh is already preparing for the next round as soon as the physical pressure of the plague is relaxed. And G-d tells Moshe in advance that this will be the scenario until the final blow is delivered. Pharaoh will remain Pharaoh until the end, even after the exodus from Egypt takes place.

Even though this is completely illogical, the Lord realizes, so to speak, that evil people behave this way and oftentimes cover their evil in the cloak of piety. In any event this week's parsha illustrates for us once more that the parshiyot of the Torah deal not only with the past but illuminate for us our present situation and our future hopes and triumphs. © 2009 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.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

At the end of last week's Torah portion, Moshe turned to G-d with a question asked by the foremen of Bnei Yisrael, whom the Egyptians had punished: "Why did you make things worse for this nation?" [Shemot 5:22]. In reply, at the beginning of this week's portion, Moshe hears the news of redemption, described in four different ways: "I will take you out... I will rescue you ... I will redeem you... And I will take you to Me" [6:6-7]. However, it is clear that this in fact answers Moshe's question. News of redemption is indeed a consoling thought, but it does not at all explain why it was necessary for the people to go through a period of harsher suffering!

The author of Chidushei Harim, the first rabbi of the Chassidic dynasty of Gur, asked this question, and gave a remarkable answer: The four different descriptions represent four stages of redemption. An overall look at the path of redemption and in particular at the role played by the foremen of Bnei Yisrael can

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

provide what appears to be a very reasonable reply to our question.

Only one of the four types of redemption is exclusively related to the relationship between Yisrael and the Almighty. This is the fourth element, describing a process: "And I will take you to Me for a nation, and I will be your G-d" [6:7]. This promise was fulfilled when the Torah was given and when the Shechina appeared in the Tabernacle.

The first three aspects of redemption involve tension between Yisrael and Egypt. The middle one of the three is the clearest: "And I will rescue you from their labor" [6:6]. When our ancestors were allowed to stop working, which according to the sages happened at the beginning of the Ten Plagues, we were freed from the harsh slavery. But we were still in the land of Egypt and under the control of the Egyptians, waiting for Pharaoh's decision about whether to let us leave the land and threatened by his horses and the riders who stood by ready to pursue us if we threw off their yoke.

Thus, the next stage, "And I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great miracles" [ibid] refers to the final shattering of the strength of Egypt, that is, to the splitting of the Red Sea, when we achieved the full redemption. "After you have seen Egypt today, do not ever continue to see them, any more" [14:13].

However, in view of these considerations, returning to the first stage, "And I will take you away from the suffering of Egypt" [6:6], the statement would seem to be not really necessary. What news does it contain which justifies its appearance before the rescue from slavery? The Chidushei Harim explains that this phrase provides the answer to the question asked by the foremen. The redemption begins when the Almighty begins to take them away from the control of the Egyptians, when the "routine" of the exile to which they are accustomed is broken-their daily ration of bricks-even though the situation becomes intolerable.

The grievance felt by the foremen is the essence of spiritual redemption from the lowly internal status of the exile. This is the main aspect of redemption that is remembered for all generations. What we celebrate is the act of leaving Egypt, not the redemption or the salvation. This refers to removing the spirit of Egypt from the people. As has been said more

than once, removing the spirit of exile from the people is more difficult than to take the people out of the exile.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The seventh plague, hail, was preceded by a warning (Shemos 9:19) that the Egyptians should bring everything they had out in the field inside.

This is followed by two verses of narrative, telling us that "those who feared the word of G-d from the servants of Pharaoh gathered his servants and his cattle into [their] houses," whereas "those who did not take G-d's word to heart left his servants and his cattle in the field." Earlier (9:9), when describing the plague of "boils" that affected both man and beast, Rashi had asked how there were any animals left, since all of the Egyptians' animals had died from "pestilence" (9:6). Based on the Mechilta, Rashi answered that since the warning before the pestilence included the fact that it would smite all the animals "in the field" (9:3), whomever feared G-d brought their animals inside. It was these animals, brought inside by those Egyptians that feared G-d, which were still around to be hit with "boils." (Obviously, even those Egyptians that feared G-d weren't so righteous, as it was their animals that were ridden to chase after the Jews after they were freed. They feared G-d, so knew enough to protect their animals when warned about a forthcoming plague, but were still wicked.)

Based on Rashi's approach to how there were any Egyptian animals left, the Bechor Shor (one of the Ba'alay Tosfos) asks how, by the "hail," there were any animals that were not brought inside. After all, if only the animals of those that feared G-d were still around, then who was it that didn't pay attention to G-d's warning to gather everything inside? If the implication of the pestilence affecting those "in the field" was enough to get them to bring their cattle inside, wouldn't an explicit warning cause them to do the same?

Although there are other approaches to explain how there still were Egyptian animals after the pestilence (see Rabbeinu Bachya on 9:19), the language of the verses backs Rashi's approach. Rather than contrasting "those that feared G-d" (9:20) with "those that did not fear G-d," the Torah contrasts them with "those that didn't take G-d's word to heart" (9:21). While we still need to understand what it means to fear G-d yet not take His word to heart, the change in wording does indicate that it was not because they didn't fear G-d.

The Sefornu (in his own commentary, not trying to explain Rashi) understands the two verses of narrative after the "hail" warning to be referring to what had happened by the pestilence. Moshe advised the Egyptians to gather in their cattle "in order to save the servants that were with the cattle, as our sages of blessed memory have said (Avos 3:18), 'man is

precious for he was created in [G-d's] image." Moshe was concerned about the possible loss of human life (the servants that were working outdoors with the animals), so told the owners/masters to bring the animals inside, which would mean that the people taking care of them would be out of harm's way as well. "And the reason I [Moshe] said to send [for your cattle] and gather them in was because I saw by the pestilence that those that feared G-d gathered in [their animals, which allowed them to be spared]." Rather than telling us that, after Moshe's warning about the hail, the G-d fearing Egyptians heeded his warning and took their servants and animals inside, the Sefornu says that because the G-d fearing Egyptians had done so before the pestilence, Moshe advised them to do it again before the hail.

If Rashi understood these verses the same way, then he (on 9:10) was not just applying verse 20 (about the hail) to the pestilence, but quoting a verse that was relating what had actually occurred by the pestilence to explain how there were still animals around to get "boils." There may not have been any Egyptians that brought their animals indoors before the fifth plague that left them outside by the seventh, as the verse that describes animals being left outside (9:21) was describing what had happened by the fifth, not the seventh. We would then need to explain why those who left them outside by pestilence are described as "not taking G-d's word to heart" rather than "not fearing G-d's word." However, being that they had already lived through the first four plagues, even those who didn't "fear G-d" should have considered the possibility that the fifth plague would come too. Why take a chance by leaving the animals outside? Perhaps this is why the Torah describes them as "not taking G-d's word to heart," as they didn't even consider the possibility that this plague would affect them, and instead of playing it safe "just in case," they left their animals exposed outside.

Nevertheless, the context of the conversation of the commentators on Rashi (including the Ba'alay Tosfos) shows that they did not understand Rashi this way, and the Chizkuni says explicitly (9:10) that Rashi is not explaining verse 20 to be referring to what had occurred by the pestilence. He also points out (9:21, as does the Bechor Shor on 9:6) that it wasn't necessarily only the animals that were purposely brought inside (out of fear of G-d) that were previously spared; those that just so happened to be inside anyway were also spared. Therefore, it was not only the animals of those that feared G-d that were around by the hail, and even if they still didn't fear G-d, they should have seen what had happened by the fifth plague and heeded the warning of the seventh. If they didn't, they did more than just "not fear G-d;" they didn't even "take his word to heart."

The Riva quotes Rabbeinu Elyakim, who suggests that there were different levels of "fear of G-d." Pestilence was rather common, so those with any fear of G-d took heed of that threat and brought their animals inside. The hail that was threatened, on the other hand, was quite out of the ordinary, and only those who really feared G-d brought their animals in. This would also explain why those that left their animals outside were described as "not taking G-d's word to heart" rather than "not fearing G-d;" they did fear G-d's word enough to take their animals in before the fifth plague, but did not take it to heart enough before the seventh.

The Meshech Chochmeh explains verse 20 slightly differently. Rather than it saying that "those of Pharaoh's servants that feared G-d," he reads it as, "those that feared G-d more than [they feared] Pharaoh's servants." In other words, even though all of those who still had animals may have only had them because they feared G-d and had brought them in before the fifth plague, they were under a lot of pressure from the royal servants to leave their animals outside and ignore G-d's warning about the seventh plague. Those that feared G-d more than they feared Pharaoh's servants gathered their animals in, and they were spared again. However, there were some who gave in to the pressure left their animals outside by the seventh. This latter group could not be described as "not fearing G-d," as they feared G-d enough to have taken their animals in previously, and would have done so again if not for the royal pressure. Instead, they could only be referred to as "those who didn't take G-d's word to heart," listening to Pharaoh's servants instead. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

As a child, I used to be fascinated by the cup of Elijah at the seder table. Would the prophet come when we opened the door after the meal? Would he be visible or invisible? Did the level of the wine go down, however imperceptibly? The idea of the prophet who did not die, but went to heaven in a chariot of fire (II Kings 2: 11), and who would one day return to bring the good news of redemption was intensely dramatic. Only later did I discover the real significance of Elijah's cup, and found, as so often, that the truth is no less moving than the stories we learned as children.

The Mishneh in Pesachim speaks of four cups of wine. These are the basic requirements of the seder, and the community must ensure that even the poorest person has sufficient wine to drink these cups. According to the Talmud Yerushalmi, they represent the four stages of redemption at the beginning of our sedra. G-d assures Moses that despite the fact that his intervention with Pharaoh has initially made things worse, liberation will indeed come: "Therefore, say to

the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your G-d.'

In the Babylonian Talmud, however, there is a strange statement: "The fifth cup: over this one completes Hallel and says Hallel Hagadol (Psalm 136, 'Gives thanks to the Lord, His love endures for ever'). These are the words of Rabbi Tarfon."

Rashi is puzzled by these words. Thus far, the discussion has been about four cups, not five. He is therefore driven to the conclusion that the text is a scribal error. It should say, 'the fourth cup.'

Rambam, however, accepts the text as it stands. After drinking the four cups and completing Hallel, he writes: "One may pour a fifth cup and say over it Hallel Hagadol... This cup is not obligatory, unlike the four cups."

Ravad (R. Avraham ibn Daud), contemporary of Rambam, takes a slightly different view. For him it is a mitzvah to drink a fifth cup. There is a difference between mitzvah and chovah. The latter is an obligation, the former an act which, though not obligatory, constitutes a positive religious deed.

Two questions arise on the views of Rambam and Ravad. The first is: why does the Mishnah speak about four cups if there are in fact five? To this the answer is straightforward: The four cups are obligatory, unlike the fifth. That is why the community must provide the poor with the means of fulfilling their obligation, but they do not have to make provision for the fifth cup, which according to Rambam is optional, and according to Ravad is desirable but not absolutely necessary.

The second question seems stronger. When G-d speaks to Moses, He uses four expressions of deliverance, not five. Hence, the four cups. Asking this question, however, takes us back to the text at the beginning of our sedra. It is then that we discover, to our surprise, that there is in fact a fifth expression of deliverance: "And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord."

The drama of the fifth cup now becomes apparent. Pesach represents the start of the great journey of Jewish history, from slavery to freedom, Egypt to the promised land. What then became of it after the destruction of the Second Temple, the failure of the Bar Kochba rebellion, the Hadrianic persecutions and the long, tragic series of events that led to the greatest exile of Jewish history? Could Jews celebrate freedom under such circumstances?

The pathos of this question is evident in the opening words of the seder: 'This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.' The very festival that spoke of liberty gained became-for

almost 2,000 years-a poignant reminder of what the Jewish people had lost: freedom, a land, a home. A new phrase was born: next year. 'This year we are slaves; next year we will be free. This year we are here; next year in Israel.' The past became the future. Memory was transfigured into hope. It is not too much to call the Jewish people 'the people of hope'. What had happened once would happen again. As the prophets of exile-Jeremiah and Ezekiel- said: there would be a second exodus. The loss was only temporary. The Divine promise was for ever.

It was in this context that the debate over the fifth cup arose. Jews could speak about the four preliminary stages of redemption-but could they celebrate the fifth: 'I will bring you to the land'? That is the debate between Rashi, Rambam and Ravad. Rashi says one should not drink a fifth cup; Rambam says one may; Ravad says one should.

Hence the extra cup at the seder table. Out of respect for Rambam and Ravad, we pour it. Out of respect for Rashi, we do not drink it. According to the sages, unresolved halakhic disputes will one day be resolved by Elijah (the word Teyku, 'Let it stand [undecided], refers to Elijah: 'The Tishbite [Elijah] will come and answer questions and problems'). Hence the fifth cup became known as 'the cup of Elijah'.

In our times, the Jewish people has returned to the land. According to one sage (the late Rabbi Menahem Kasher), we should now drink the fifth cup. Be that as it may, it is no less moving to think back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries-the age of Rashi, Rambam and Ravad-and know that in the darkest night of exile, the only question was: how far, in the present, do we celebrate hope for the future? Four fifths? Or all five? The promise G-d gave Moses at the beginning of our sedra spoke not just to that time, but to all time. Pesach kept hope alive. Hope kept the Jewish people alive. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**T**he Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Go and tell Pharaoh King of Egypt to let the Israelites depart from his land'" (Exodus 6:11).

The first three Biblical portions of the Book of Exodus describe the bitter servitude of the Israelites in Egypt, their abortive, repeated requests to leave the country of their travail, the ten plagues wrought by G-d in His attempt to force the hand of the cruel despot Pharaoh, and their eventual 'exodus' from foreign domination and oppression. From this perspective, Pharaoh is evil incarnate and the Israelites are pure and innocent victims.

However, the Bible itself records that from the very beginning of the dialogue between Pharaoh and Moses there was a degree of deception on the part of the Israelites - a deception which seems to have been

orchestrated by the G-d of freedom and justice Himself! Last week we read how G-d commands Moses "...Go with the elders of Israel to the King of Egypt and you shall say to him, 'the Lord G-d of the Hebrews manifested Himself to us. Now therefore let us go a distance of three days into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our G-d'" (Exodus 3:18). The Hebrews only request a three-day "UJA mission" - and then, when they finally are sent away by Pharaoh after the tenth plague to offer their sacrifices, they never return to Egypt. If indeed their plan from the very beginning was to leave for good (Ex 3:10), why the request for three days?

Could it be that the reason for this duplicity was to enable the Israelites to borrow vessels of gold and silver from the Egyptians for their "desert sacrifice service"? Although the command came at the behest of G-d Himself, were they "setting up" the Egyptians to believe they would return after the three-day journey, something they never intended to do? If so, the Hebrews were not such lily-white victims after all!

Don Yitzhak Abarbanel, the late fifteenth century Biblical commentary, maintains that there was a misunderstanding between the Israelites and the Egyptians. Moses had initially made it clear to Pharaoh that they would be leaving Egypt for good, and that their departure point would be in the desert, a three-day journey from the country which enslaved them. However, the people who actually lent the Israelites gold and silver vessels certainly didn't understand it that way; they were convinced that the Hebrews would return to Egypt and honor their debts. Since it seems apparent from the Biblical text that the Hebrews didn't disabuse them of their expectation - and probably even fostered it - the moral problem still remains.

Most of the commentaries suggest that the Hebrews came up with the three-day ruse in order to fulfill the initial Divine prophecy and promise to Abraham, "...your seed shall be strangers in a land which is not theirs and they shall enslave and afflict them; but I shall then judge the nation whom they served, and they [your seed] shall go out [of that country] with great wealth" (Gen. 15:13,14). The question remains whether the apparent mandate to fulfill a Divine prophecy should usurp the fundamental principle requiring honesty and the necessity to shun duplicity.

I once suggested in a previous article that the gold and silver the Hebrews received when they left Egypt should not be relegated as deception or thievery, but rather a small portion of what they deserved as payment for their enforced labor, comparable to the reparations Holocaust survivors received from Germany after the second world war. Just as all the gold and silver in the world couldn't make amends for the millions of enslaved Jews gassed and burned in the crematoria of Auschwitz and Treblinka, so too the gold

and silver of the Egyptians couldn't possibly compensate for all the male babies drowned in the Nile River.

The RaN in Sermon Eleven (Drashot) of his essays on government and political rule provides a more profound meaning behind the request for a three day leave and the borrowing of the gold and silver, more significant-from a historical and moral perspective-than the actual acquisition of gold and silver payments ('reparations'). In effect, the Hebrews and the Egyptians were involved in a clash between two civilizations: the G-d who created the human being in His image was pitted against the idol Ra, the sun-G-d who represented domination and enslavement; Moses, the man of justice and freedom for all, was locked in a struggle against Pharaoh, the totalitarian despot who controlled and enslaved an entire society. If the concept of freedom was to take root in the world, not only was it necessary for the G-d of the Hebrews to win a decisive victory but it was absolutely crucial that the nations of the world had to witness that victory as well.

Had the Israelites merely left Egypt after the plagues, the Egyptians would have said "goodbye and good riddance" and the world would have assumed that Egypt had been struck by a string of natural disasters like the Tsunami; any identification between the plagues and the departure of the Israelites would have been considered coincidental at best and irrelevant at worst.

But given that the Israelites now were in possession of all that borrowed gold and silver, once the Egyptians realized that the Israelites had no intention of returning, their pursuit of the borrowers became their first order of business -anything to retrieve their wealth.

The three-day journey placed the Israelites on the shores of the Reed Sea, a waterway which paralleled the Nile River within Egypt. When the Egyptians tore after the Hebrews into the sea and drowned, the world couldn't help but recognize the parallel between the drowned Egyptians and the murder of the Hebrew babies who had been drowned in the Nile, measure for measure. This is precisely what Yitro understands when he praises Moses and his G-d: "Now I know that the Lord is greater than any other power since that which they [the Egyptians] did with malice of forethought [in the Nile River], came upon them [in the Reed Sea] - Exodus 18:11).

And this what the Jews sang in their song at the sea: "The nations heard and trembled, a shuddering grasped the inhabitants of Philistia; ...all the inhabitants of Canaan melted. Fear and terror fell upon them, and with the greatness of Your Divine arm they became silent as stone...." (Exodus 15: 14-16). The three-day journey and the gold and silver reparations was what ultimately made the world understand that the victory in Egypt was a victory of the G-d of justice and

freedom, who abhors - and will eventually destroy - the tyrants of totalitarian enslavement. © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Moshe warned Pharaoh and the Egyptians that there was going to be a devastating hail that would destroy living creatures remaining out in the open. The Torah states:

"Those who feared the word of the Almighty from the servants of Pharaoh brought his servants and his cattle into the houses. And those who did not pay attention to the word of the Almighty left their servants and cattle in the field" (Exodus 9:20-21).

What can we learn from these two responses?

The Torah does not state that there were people who did not believe that Moshe's warning was true. Rather, the Torah states that they did not pay attention. From here we see that the opposite of fearing the Almighty is not paying attention.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz asked regarding these verses: Why didn't the servants themselves flee to safety? They should have feared for their own lives and run to find safe places. The answer, said Rav Chaim, is that they did not pay attention. When one does not pay attention to danger, it is as if it doesn't exist.

All the knowledge in the world will not help a person keep away from danger unless he takes that knowledge to heart. For this reason there are plenty of people who do things that could greatly endanger their spiritual and physical well-being. They do not take the dangers seriously. Lack of paying attention to dangers will lead to all kinds of impulsive behavior that will have painful and damaging consequences.

The Talmud (Tamid 32a) teaches that the wise man is one who sees the future consequences of his behavior. The Chofetz Chaim (Introduction to Chovas HaShmirah) writes that the Sages used the term "seeing" to tell us a means of making future events real. One should use one's power of imagination to see the future as if it is actually occurring in the present. When you see something before your eyes, it has a much stronger effect than just hearing about it. *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

On most occasions when the Torah states that G-d issues a command, the details of the directive are spelled out. Our portion offers an exception to the rule. The text reads, "and the Lord spoke to Moshe (Moses) and Aaron and gave them a charge unto the children of Israel." (Exodus 6:13). But the specific command is not spelled out.

The reality is that the power of certain situations go beyond words. When the emotion is so high, words simply do not suffice. For example, in the Hagaddah we proclaim that had G-d taken us to Sinai, but not given us the Torah-dayenu, it would have been enough. Is this true? What value is there in coming to Sinai if the Torah is not given? But perhaps it can be suggested that the experience of coming to Sinai, the revelation moment, even without words, has intense power. The rendezvous with G-d would have been enough. Following this idea, it can be suggested that the mere experience of being commanded was enough - nothing more had to be said.

One wonders, however, why here specifically were no words required? After all G-d commands Moshe and Aaron many times-and the specific mandate follows? But perhaps the command was indeed fully spelled out. Note that after the Torah says, "and He commanded them (va-yetzavem)," the Torah adds the two letter word, "el" which literally means, "to." Here, Moshe and Aaron were commanded "to" the Jewish people; in other words they were to become involved with the Jewish people in a way that they would connect with them no matter what.

Sifrei makes this very point by declaring "G-d said to Moshe and Aaron, I want you to know that the Israelites are a stubborn and troublesome lot; but you must accept this mission on the understanding that they will curse you and stone you." Ibn Ezra follows this idea by stating that Moshe and Aaron were commanded to be patient with Israel and not be angry with them, even if the nation refused to believe in their leadership.

This idea also makes contextual sense. It follows immediately after the Jewish people had bitterly complained to Moshe and Aaron that their efforts to free the people had only made things worse. (Exodus 5:21)

This approach rings true today. Debate has emerged on how to deal with Jews who have strayed. In Israel for example, there are those who throw stones at Jews who do not keep the Sabbath. Our analysis points us in a different direction-rock throwing is counter productive. Patience and love are the way.

A chassid once approached his rebbe. "My child is desecrating the Sabbath. What shall I do?" "Love him" replied the rebbe. "But he is desecrating the Sabbath publicly," retorted the chassid. The rebbe looked up with a smile and responded, "Then, love him even more."

Hence, G-d's command to Moshe and Aaron "to the children of Israel." "El" teaches that the gateway to the soul is not through stones or harsh words, but rather through love. © 2009 *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 MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Hitting Pay Dirt

There is a certain sensitivity displayed in this week's portion that serves as a lesson to mankind.

The first two of the 10 plagues that befell Egypt evolved around water. In the first plague, the waters of Egypt turned into blood. The second plague had frogs emerge from the water. In order to generate those miraculous events Moshe's staff struck the waters. Moshe, however, did not strike the water. He was told that his brother Ahron should do the smiting. After all, as a three-month-old child the waters of the Nile were Moshe's refuge as he was hidden in a reed basket from Pharaoh's soldiers who were drowning all Jewish males. It would not be fitting for one who was saved by the water to strike it.

The next plague, lice, emerged from the earth. After striking the earth with his staff, lice emerged, afflicting all of Egypt. Again Moshe was told not to be the agent of transmutation. After all, he must be grateful to the earth that hid the Egyptian whom he had killed.

Of course, the great ethicists derive from Moshe's behavior the importance of gratitude. "Imagine," they point out, "Moshe had to refrain from striking inanimate objects because he was saved by them years back! How much more must we show gratitude to living beings who have been our vehicles of good fortune."

Such morals deserve a homily to themselves, and there are countless stories of gratitude to accompany such essays. However, I am bothered by the simplicity of that message and the derivations that lead to it. Why is striking water or earth a display of ingratitude? Was it not the will of Hashem to have the dust and waters converted? Would it not be a great elevation to those waters or the dust to be transformed to higher components of G-d's glory? That being the case, wouldn't it be most fitting that Moshe be chosen to elevate simple waters or lowly dirt into objects that declare the open presence of an Almighty Creator who shouts together with his humble servant, "Let My people serve Me"?

Rabbi Nosson Schapira of Krakow (1585-1633) once told of his most difficult case.

A wealthy businessman from Warsaw would do business each month in the Krakow market. On each visit he noticed an extremely pious widow huddled near her basket of bagels reciting Psalms. She only lifted her eyes from her worn prayer book to sell a bagel or roll. After the sale she'd shower her customer with a myriad of blessings and immediately she'd return to the frayed pages of her prayer book that were varnished with teardrops and devotion.

Upon observing her each month, the Krakow businessman came to a conclusion. "This pious

woman should not have to struggle to earn a living. She should be able to pursue her prayers and piety with no worries."

He offered to double her monthly earnings on one condition: she would leave the bagel business and spend her time in the service of the L-rd. The woman, tears of joy streaming down her face, accepted the generous offer and thanked the kind man with praise, gratitude and blessing.

A month later, when the man returned to Krakow, he was shocked to find the woman at her usual place, mixing the sweet smell of bagels with the sweet words of Tehillim. As soon as he approached, the woman handed him an envelope. "Here is your money. I thought it over I can't accept your offer."

"A deal is a deal," he exclaimed. "We must see Rabbi Schapira!"

After the businessman presented his case, the woman spoke. "The reason this generous man offered to support me was to help me grow in my spirituality and devotion. From the day I left my bagel business I've only fallen. Let me explain.

"Every day that it would rain, I would think of the farmers who planted the wheat for my bagels. I would sing praises for the glory of rain as I felt the personal guidance of Hashem with each raindrop. When the sun would shine I would once again thank Hashem from letting the farmers harvest in good weather. When I would grind the flour and then sift it again I'd find countless reasons to thank the Almighty. When the bread would bake golden brown I'd thank Hashem for the beauty of the product and its sweet sell. And when a customer would come I'd thank both Hashem for sending him and then bless my patron, too! Now this is all gone, I want no part of a simple, all-expense-paid life."

Moshe had a very personal relationship with the water and the dust. Each time he saw the Nile or tread upon the ground, he remembered the vehicles of his good fortune and used them to praise Hashem. Blood, frogs, and lice are surely miraculous, but they were not Moshe's personal salvation. Striking the water or earth may have produced great national miracles, but Moshe would be left without the simple dirt that yielded piles of personal praise. When one forgoes marveling at a lowly speck of dust and chooses to focus instead upon huge mountains, he may never hit pay dirt. He may only bite the dust.

© 1997 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

The Hebrew language has so many hidden lessons, and one such lesson lies within this week's Parsha (portion), Vaeira, where G-d promises to take the Jews from under the 'burdens' of Egypt (6:6). But as the Rebbi of Gur explains, the Hebrew word that means

'burden' also means 'tolerant', which would make the Passuk (verse) read..."I will deliver you from being tolerant of Egypt". We find proof for this tolerance when even after the Jews were released from Egypt, when the situation looked bleak, they wanted to go back to slavery. Had their slavery been such a burden, why would they ever consider going back?

The answer is that the problem was not that they were overworked, but that they were too tolerant of their surroundings! Hashem therefore told them, and is telling us, that the first step Jews have to take is to realize when we are 'slaves' to our society. If we tolerate our surroundings, not only will we not appreciate how LUCKY we are to be different, but also we'll forget that we even ARE different! In a society where some people hide their religious identity, the Torah is telling us to always keep in mind our ultimate differences as Jews, to never settle for being just like everyone else, and to love it, show it, and prove it in constructive ways every chance we get! In response to this Parsha, we should all pick one way to show the world, and OURSELVES what it means to be a Jew, whether it's by volunteering to visit the sick, to give charity, or to say one Perek (paragraph) of Tehillim (Psalm) every day? Find a way to find your way! © 2009 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

As our parashah opens, G-d tells Moshe, "I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov as 'Kel Shakkai,' and My Name 'Hashem' I did not reveal to them." R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of Einayim La'mishpat) explains G-d's message as follows:

"Kel Shakkai," referring, as it does, to G-d's precise measurement of creation, alludes to the Attribute of Strict Justice, which demands strict measure-for-measure accounting. This is the highest form of Divine Providence; indeed, in the beginning, G-d's "design" called for the entire world to be subject to Strict Justice. He knew, however, that the world could not exist under that Attribute, so He paired it with the Attribute of Mercy [see Rashi to Bereishit 1:1]. Nevertheless, G-d did act pursuant to Strict Justice with the patriarchs, for they were on a sufficiently lofty level.

(R' Arieli explains in passing that the difference between G-d's "design" and His implementation is alluded to by the verse (Tehillim 145:17): "Hashem is righteous in all His ways, and magnanimous in all His deeds." G-d's true "ways" are based on righteousness, i.e., differentiating between right and wrong— Strict Justice. However, His deeds are magnanimous, i.e., tempered with Mercy.)

R' Arieli continues: The level of Providence that was applied to the patriarchs is reached by serving G-d with love, as it is written (Yeshayah 48:8), "The seed of

Avraham, My beloved." No person ever reached this level except they. For their sons, in contrast, Providence is tempered with Mercy, manifested by the fact that the Exodus occurred before its time, i.e., before the 400 years passed.

In fact, Yaakov asked that his descendants merit to deserve Hashem's favor even when subjected to Strict Justice—"May 'Kel Shakkai' show you mercy" [Bereishit 43:14]. Then, the redemption from Egypt would have been the complete and final redemption. Instead, however, the difficulty of the subjugation required that Hashem apply Mercy that was undeserved and end the exile early. (Midrash Ariel)

"When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Provide a wonder for yourselves,' you shall say to Aharon, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh—it will become a snake!' (7:9)

What is meant by "Provide a wonder for yourselves"? Wasn't the wonder provided for Pharaoh? R' Shalom Rokeach z"l (the first Belzer Rebbe) explains:

For himself, Pharaoh did not care to see a sign from Hashem, as Mishlei (18:2) states, "The fool does not desire understanding." We read similarly in Yishayah (17:11-12) that Hashem invited the wicked king Achaz to challenge and test Him, and Achaz responded, "I will not ask [for a sign] and I will not test Hashem."

Rather, Pharaoh's intention was to impugn the emunah / faith of Moshe and Aharon. "Surely you have doubts and would like to see a sign," he implied.

R' Rokeach continues: [Obviously Moshe and Aharon had no doubt as to the truth of their mission.] However, the typical Jew does sometimes experience doubts in matters of faith. Why did Hashem create us this way?

The answer is that such experiences are meant to be growth opportunities, for a person who has doubts will either research the answers to his questions in our holy literature or he will go to a tzaddik to find answers.

Deep down, every Jew wants to know the truth. In contrast, the wicked (such as Pharaoh) are terrified of the truth. This is why Pharaoh was not content to deny the veracity of Moshe and Aharon's message. Instead, he had to goad them as if they did not believe either. (Midbar Kodesh) © 2005 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org



www.chabadnj.org