

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SIR JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It is one of the classic philosophical conundrums. In this week's sedra, before even the first plague has struck Egypt, G-d tells Moses: "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt. He will not listen to you. Then I will lay My hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out My troops, My people the Israelites. And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out My hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it." (Ex.7:3-5)

The problem is obvious. If it was G-d who hardened Pharaoh's heart, where then was his freedom? Either the Egyptian ruler had a genuine choice, or he did not. If he did, it was Pharaoh, not G-d, who was responsible for the hardness of heart. If he did not-if it was G-d acting on him, controlling his responses, determining his reactions-then how could Pharaoh be guilty and worthy of punishment? As Moses Maimonides puts it: If there were no freewill-

What room what would there be for the whole of the Torah? By what right or justice could G-d punish the wicked or reward the righteous? "Shall not the judge of all the earth act justly?" (Genesis 18:25; Laws of Repentance 5:6) Punishing Pharaoh for something he could not help doing is, simply, unjust.

The general outline of an answer-however we construe its details- is already implicit in the precise wording of the biblical narrative. After each of the first five plagues, the Torah tells us that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. It is only from the sixth plague onward that his hard-heartedness is attributed to G-d:

Plague 6, Boils: "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said to Moses." (Ex. 9:12)

Plague 7 Hail: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform My miraculous signs among them.'" (10:1)

Plague 8 Locusts: "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go." (10:20)

Plague 9 Darkness "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go." (10:26)

Plague 10: "Firstborn Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country." (11:20)

Rashi understands the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the last five plagues as a form of punishment for first five, when it was Pharaoh's own obstinacy that led him to refuse to let the people go.

Maimonides (Laws of Repentance 6:3) interprets G-d's hardening of Pharaoh's heart as meaning that "repentance was withheld from him, and the liberty to turn from his wickedness was not accorded to him."

Albo and Sforno offer the opposite interpretation. G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart precisely to restore his free will. After the succession of plagues that had devastated the land, Pharaoh was under overwhelming pressure to let the people go. Had he done so, it would not have been out of free choice, but rather under force majeure. G-d therefore toughened, strengthened, Pharaoh's heart so that even after the first five plagues he was genuinely free to say Yes or No.

Simplest and most profound are the words of the Talmudic sages about yetser ha-ra, the evil impulse: "Rav Assi said: At first the evil impulse is as thin as a spider's gossamer, but in the end it is as thick as a cart-ropes." (Sukkah 52a)

"Rava said: At first the evil impulse is call a 'wayfarer', then a 'guest', then finally a 'master'". (Sukkah 52b)

Evil has two faces. The first-turned to the outside world-is what it does to its victim. The second-turned within-is what it does to its perpetrator. Evil traps the evildoer in its mesh. Slowly but surely he or she loses freedom and becomes not evil's master but its slave.

Pharaoh is in fact (and this is rare in Tanakh) a tragic figure like Lady Macbeth, or like Captain Ahab in Melville's Moby Dick, trapped in an obsession which may have had rational beginnings, right or wrong, but which has taken hold of him, bringing not only him but those around him to their ruin. This is signaled, simply but deftly, early in next week's sedra when Pharaoh's own advisors say to him: "Let the people go so that they may worship the Lord their G-d. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?" (10:7). But Pharaoh has left rationality behind. He can no longer hear them.

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It is a compelling narrative, and helps us understand not only Pharaoh but Hitler, Stalin and other tyrants in modern times. It also contains a hint- and this really is fundamental to understanding what makes the Torah unique in religious literature-of why the Torah teaches its moral truths through narrative, rather than through philosophical or quasi-scientific discourse on the one hand, myth or parable on the other.

Compare the Torah's treatment of freewill with that of the great philosophical or scientific theories. For these other systems, freedom is almost invariably an either/or: either we are always free or we never are. Some systems assert the first. Many-those who believe in social, economic or genetic determinism, or historical inevitability-claim the second. Both are too crude to portray the inner life as it really is.

The belief that freedom is an all or nothing phenomenon-that we have it either all the time or none of the time-blinds us to the fact that there are degrees of freedom. It can be won and lost, and its loss is gradual. Unless the will is constantly exercised, it atrophies and dies. We then become objects not subjects, swept along by tides of fashion, or the caprice of desire, or the passion that becomes an obsession. Only narrative can portray the subtlety of Pharaoh's slow descent into a self-destructive madness. That, I believe, is what makes Torah truer to the human condition than its philosophical or scientific counterparts.

Pharaoh is everyman writ large. The ruler of the ancient world's greatest empire, he ruled everyone except himself. It was not the Hebrews but he who was the real slave: to his obstinate insistence that he, not G-d, ruled history. Hence the profound insight of Ben Zoma (Avot 4:1): "Who is mighty?" Not one who can conquer his enemies but "One who can conquer himself."

Many things influence us-our genes, our parents, our early childhood, our race, creed, culture, class, and the persuasions and pressures of our environment. But influence is not control. Causes do not compel. It was a survivor of Auschwitz, the late Viktor Frankl, who discovered in that nightmare kingdom the truth to which he subsequently devoted his life. He said: The Nazis tried to rob us of every vestige of our humanity, but there was one freedom they could not take away from us: the freedom to decide how to

respond. At the heart of Judaism is faith in freedom: our faith in G-d's freedom, and G-d's faith in ours.

Judaism is, among other things, a sustained tutorial in freedom: in the ability to say No; to conquer instinct by conscience; to resist the madness of crowds and their idols. That needs discipline, and the ability to stand a little apart from society, even while contributing to it. To be a Jew is to know that though we are here, we are also elsewhere. We live in time, but we are addressed by the voice of One who is beyond time.

Pharaoh was born free but became his own slave. Moses was born into a nation of slaves but led them to freedom. Easily lost, hard to sustain, freedom is our most precious gift. But it must be exercised if it is to be retained. Its greatest discipline is to let G-d's will challenge ours. That is the path to freedom and the cure for hardness of heart. © 2010 Rabbi Sir J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“I shall bring you to the land about which I raised my hand [in oath] to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; And I shall give it to you as a heritage - I am Hashem" (Genesis 6:8)

The most famous source for the four cups of wine which we drink at the Passover Seder is found in our Biblical portion of Va'era, which cites four expressions of redemption: "I will free you from under the burdens of the Egyptians [the killing of the male babies], and I will rescue you from their work [the actual enslavement], I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments [the ten plagues and the splitting of the Reed Sea]; I shall take you to Me for a nation and I shall be for you as a G-d [in your ability to survive the Egyptian rigors and experience the Revelation at Sinai]; and I shall bring you to the land..."(Exodus 6:6-8). Even someone with a minimal background in mathematics will readily count five - and not four - expressions of redemption. What happened to the fifth cup?

The simplest explanation is that because of the sin of the spies, the slave-desert generation did not make it to the Land of Israel. Moreover, the very compilation of the Passover Haggadah took place in Babylon after the destruction of the Second Temple. The mystical, magical night of the Seder opens with the declaration, "Here is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the Land of Egypt... Now we are here, next year may we be in the Land of Israel. Now we are slaves, next year may we be free." Since we were living in exile, it hardly made sense to drink a fifth cup of wine marking our return to our ancestral homeland; we weren't there!

Nevertheless, there are still five expressions of redemption in the bible! Therefore the custom developed to have a special fifth cup for Elijah the

prophet who will eventually return to earth as the herald of redemption.

From this perspective, we can readily understand why - once we have, with G-d's help, been privileged to attain sovereignty over our Jewish homeland - Rav Menachem Kasher (Torah Shleimah, Divrei Menahem) has endorsed reinstating the fifth cup to be poured right before Hallel HaGadol, in accordance with the view of many of the Gaonim and Rishonim (see Otzar HaGaonim and Rishonim to B.T. Pesachim 118a, variant readings to Mishnah Pesachim 10:5, Maimonides, Laws of Hametz and Matzah 8,10, as well as my own interpretation in "A Haggadah Happening").

At this stage in history, when we have returned to our land but not yet rebuilt the Holy Temple, it is particularly appropriate to pour the fifth cup for universal redemption of world peace, for which we all yearn.

One question remains, however, especially for those of us who do pour and drink a fifth cup. Why do we also continue to pour the cup for Elijah right before Grace after Meals? We've returned to our homeland, we anxiously await the universal redemption; these ideals are imbedded in the fifth cup. Why the cup for Elijah? What does it add?

Natan Sharansky is a genuine hero of our time, a prisoner of Zion held captive in the gulag behind the Iron Curtain of Soviet Russia, rescued by the indefatigable efforts of his beloved and courageous wife Avital and the grassroots Soviet Jewry movement which developed in the 60's and 70's. He became a minister in the Israeli government and is a celebrated author and international spokesman on behalf of freedom, democracy and morality.

A couple of years ago, I had the privilege of attending his daughter's wedding at Kibbutz Ramat Rachel in Jerusalem. At the conclusion of the marriage ceremony, just before the breaking of the glass, Sharansky reminisced about his own wedding ceremony, which occurred 34 years earlier. "It took place in a one-room apartment in Moscow, behind closed doors and shuttered windows, with only a quorum of ten men, including myself and the rabbi. A sheet served as a marriage canopy and, with the exception of the rabbi, no one really understood the meaning behind the ritual. But then, when the glass was shattered underfoot, everyone understood. We all understood destruction and mourning, we all understood Jewish victimization and sacrifice." Then, when that very night Natan Sharansky was taken from his bride by the KGB (Soviet Secret Police), everyone understood even better...

"But now," asked Sharansky, "as we are miraculously standing under this nuptial canopy with our daughter and son-in-law here in Jerusalem, in sight of the Temple Mount, why should we still break the glass?" Addressing the young couple, Sharansky magnificently answered his own question: "Your task, Micha and Rachel, is more difficult than ours was. We had to get to

Jerusalem, but you have to protect and preserve Jerusalem. You have to protect and preserve the indelible connection between Jerusalem below and Jerusalem above. You have to protect and preserve the prophetic dream of Jerusalem, the City of World Peace..."

I would submit that this charge goes one step further. The Bible opens with the words, "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth", and the Book of Exodus opens with G-d's five promises of redemption. Our Bible ends with the words, "Thus said Cyrus, King of Persia. Hashem, G-d of Heaven, has commanded me to build Him a Temple in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of His entire people, may go to fulfill this task. May Hashem his G-d be with him." (Second Book of Chronicles 36:23)

G-d created an incomplete, imperfect world and promised redemption. We, who are created in His image, must complete and perfect His world, build His Temple, and realize redemption. Elijah the Prophet must pave the way for King Messiah, and during the Seder we must open the door and let Elijah in. In Grace after Meals, we thank G-d for the bread, but we understand that before we can eat, we must first develop the agricultural processes and work hard in order to produce the food. "They [the people] must build for Me a Temple so that I may dwell in their midst" (Exodus 25: 8). The cup of Elijah reminds us of our crucial role in the path to redemption. © 2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, reveals to us a secret dimension of this significant date. In fact, as we will discover, Rosh Chodesh possesses the potential of assuming a greater personality than ever seen before. Its heightened effect will be so powerful that it will be likened to the impact of one of our three Yomim Tovim.

The prophet opens the haftorah with a fiery message regarding the privilege of sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash. Yeshaya declares in the name of Hashem, "The heavens are My throne and the earth is My foot stool. What home can you build for Me and what is an appropriate site for My Divine Presence?" The Radak explains that Hashem was rejecting the notion of His requiring an earthly abode wherein to reside. Even the span of the universe barely serves as a throne where upon Hashem rests, how much more so our small Bais Hamikdash. But the purpose of His earthly abode is in order for us to experience His Divine presence. And it is in this uplifting environment that we offer sacrifices to Hashem and commit ourselves to fulfilling His will.

Yeshaya continues and expresses Hashem's view of the Jewish people's sacrifices at that time.

Hashem says, "One who slaughters the ox is likened to smiting a man; he who sacrifices the sheep is akin to slashing a dog's neck; a meal offering is like swine's blood....(66:3) The Radak explains Hashem's disturbance and informs us of the attitude of those times. The people would heavily engage in sin and then appear in the Bais Hamikdash to offer their sacrificial atonement. However, this uplifting experience was short-lived and they would return home and revert to their sinful ways. Hashem responded and rejected their sacrifices because the main facet of the sacrifice was missing, the resolve to elevate oneself. From Hashem's perspective, a sacrifice without an accompanying commitment was nothing more than an act of slashing a useful animal.

The prophet continues and notes the stark contrast between the above mentioned and the humble and low spirited people. Hashem says, "But to this I gaze, to the humble and low spirited and to the one who trembles over My word." (66:2) These humble people do not need the experience of the Bais Hamikdash. They sense the Divine Presence wherever they are and respond with proper reverence and humility. Unlike the first group who limits Hashem's presence to the walls of the Bais Hamikdash, the second views the earth as Hashem's footstool and reacts accordingly. In fact we are told earlier by Yeshaya that they are actually an abode for His presence as is stated, "So says Hashem, "I rest in the exalted and sanctified spheres and amongst the downtrodden and low spirited ones." (57:15)

In a certain sense we resemble the first group when relating to our Rosh Chodesh experience. Rosh Chodesh is a unique holiday because its entire festivity consists of a special Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. There are nospecific acts of Mitzva related to Rosh Chodesh and there is no halachic restriction from productive activity. However, the first day of the month provides the opportunity for introspect. After our serious contemplation over the previous month's achievements we welcome the opportunity of a fresh start. We offer a sacrifice in atonement for the past and prepare ourselves for the challenges of the new month. Unfortunately this new opportunity is met with trepidation and is always accompanied by mixed feelings of joy and remorse. Because each Rosh Chodesh we realize how far we have strayed during the previous month and we look towards the next month to be an improvement over the past.

This is the limited status of our present Rosh Chodesh. However, as we will soon learn, a greater dimension of Rosh Chodesh was intended to be and will eventually become a reality. The Tur in Orach Chaim (417) quotes the Pirkei D'R'Eliezer which reveals that Rosh Chodesh was actually intended to be a full scale Yom Tov. The Tur quotes his brother R' Yehuda who explains that the three Yomim Tovim correspond to our three patriarchs and that the twelve days of Rosh

Chodesh were intended to correspond to the twelve tribes. This link reveals that each Rosh Chodesh truly has a unique aspect to itself and that one of the Biblical tribes' remarkable qualities is available to us each month. However, as the Tur explains, due to an unfortunate error of the Jewish people this opportunity has been, to a large degree, withheld from us.

But in the era of Mashiach this error will be rectified and the experience of Rosh Chodesh will actually reach its intended capacity. Yeshaya reflects upon this and says at the close of our haftorah, "And it will be that from month to month.... all will come and prostrate themselves before Hashem." (66:23) The Psikta Rabbasi (1:3) explains that in the days of Mashiach we will have the privilege of uniting with Hashem every Rosh Chodesh. All Jewish people will come to the Bais Hamikdash each month and experience His Divine Presence. During the illustrious era of Mashiach sin will no longer exist and Rosh Chodesh will be viewed exclusively as an opportunity for elevation. Each month will provide us its respective quality and opportunity which we will celebrate through the Rosh Chodesh festivities. The sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh will reflect our great joy over being with Hashem and will no longer contain any aspect of remorse or sin. In those days, the experience of His Divine Presence in the Bais Hamikdash will be perpetuated throughout the month and the entire period will become one uplifting experience.

This, according to the Maharit Algazi is the meaning of our Mussaf section wherein we state, "When they would offer sacrifices of favor and goats as sin offerings.... May you establish a new altar in Zion.... and we will offer goats with favor." With these words we are acknowledging the fact that the goats which had previously served as sin offerings will now become expressions of elevation. Without the need to reflect upon our shortcomings of the previous month, Rosh Chodesh will be greeted with total happiness, and we will welcome with great joy the uplifting spiritual opportunity of each respective month. © 2010 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Lord appears to Moshe at the beginning of this week's parsha with a recounting of His relationship with the fathers of Israel, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. The Talmud comments that the Lord, so to speak, complained that it is a sadness and loss that those who were once here and alive are no longer so. This is in connection with Moshe's complaint to G-d that since the beginning of his mission to Pharaoh and to the enslaved Jews things had gotten far worse instead of improving.

The fathers of Israel never complained in such a fashion when faced with their own many tests and

challenges. They fully believed in G-d's promise that all would somehow turn out well for them and their descendants. Avraham and Yitzchak saw the place from afar and even though they would first have to undergo the supreme test of the akeidah, the proposed sacrifice of Yitzchak, they also saw from afar the Temple and the redemption of Israel that would take place on that very spot of Mount Moriah.

G-d always preaches patience and a long term outlook on events. The rabbis preached that the wise person was one who took the long term view of one's actions and is cognizant of how the future will view present behavior and ideals.

Moshe's task in Egypt is not to be fazed by the current rather bleak scene. Rather he himself must be able to see the future which will be better and even more importantly to have the Jewish people share his faith and belief in that better future. Moshe is to be held to the standard of faith of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

It is interesting to note that G-d appears to Moshe and to the Jewish people always as the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov and not as the Creator of the universe or other attributes that can be used to identify Him. We Jews imitate that type of description in the Amidah prayers that we recite thrice daily by blessing You, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov.

Our connection to G-d is through our parents, our ancestors, through the founders of our faith and people. Midrash tells us that the voice that spoke to Moshe at the burning bush sounded in Moshe's ears and heart as the voice of his father Amram. As long as Jews feel that the voice of their past is speaking to them even now they will yet have a valid connection to G-dliness and holiness.

For so many Jews this ancient and vital chord of memory has been weakened if not even severed. G-d is therefore no longer a personal presence or factor in their lives. Truly they and we should mourn over what has been lost and can no longer be found?

The Lord, so to speak, is the storekeeper who has serviced generations of our family granting them credit and sustenance and we are His latest customers applying for further credit from Him on the basis of our long term family relationship with Him. Truly the past lives within us. © 2010 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

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Egypt will know that I am Hashem (i.e. G-d)” (Shemos 7:5). Although Moshe had already been told that one of the purposes of the exodus from Egypt and the way it was

accomplished was for the Chosen People to "know that I am Hashem your G-d" (6:7), Paro's refusal to let them go and the subsequent plagues brought this knowledge to the Egyptians as well. As the Rashbam points out, previously Paro had denied knowing G-d (5:2), so now G-d will make sure that he and the rest of the Egyptians know exactly who He is and what He is about.

Why was it so important for the Egyptians to know who G-d is? According to the Seforno (14:18), so that they could "return to G-d" rather than continuing to worship idols and/or mistreating others. What happens to the Egyptians will be a lesson for all of humanity (see Ibn Ezra on 7:5), and the existence, might, and sense of justice of the One True G-d will be known by all. Nevertheless, the Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 7:4) tells us another reason why G-d sent Moshe to speak to Paro rather than just smiting them right away and taking the Nation of Israel out of Egypt.

"Rabbi Levi said, 'this is comparable to a king that had an orchard, within which he planted trees that didn't bear fruit and trees that did. His servants said to him, 'what benefit is there to you from these trees that cannot bear fruit?' He (the king) said to them, 'just as I need the trees that provide food, so too do I need the barren trees, for if not for the barren trees, from where would I [get wood] for bathhouses and furnaces?' Therefore it was said to the Children of Israel and to Paro. Just as the praise of the Holy One, blessed is He rises up to him from the Garden of Eden from the mouths of the righteous, so too does it rise from Gehenom from the mouths of the wicked, [where] tears flow like springs, until they cool Gehenom down with their tears.' And what do they (the wicked) say (in their praise)? Rabbi Yochanan said [they say], 'You (G-d) said appropriate (things), You judged appropriately, You made things [ritually] pure appropriately, You made things [ritually] impure appropriately, You found [us] guilty appropriately, You taught us appropriately, You decided the law appropriately.'"

Several issues are raised by this Midrash. First of all, it is obvious that the "wicked" referred to are wicked Jews, not gentiles, as the concepts of "purity" and "impurity" do not apply to those only required to keep the seven Noachide laws. This "praise" (as stated explicitly in Midrash Tehilim 84) is their acknowledgment that they got what they deserved, since they didn't listen to G-d's commandments. The Talmud (Eruvin 19a) states explicitly that this Agada only refers to Jews being punished in Gehenom. If so, how could it apply to Paro and the Egyptians? Additionally, how is the praise of the wicked "needed" by G-d the way the king "needs" wood for fuel (for his furnace and to heat the water of his bathhouse)? As the Ramchal writes in Derech Hashem (and elsewhere), G-d created the world in order to be good to the righteous, and the possibility to do bad only stems from the need for it to be our choice to do good. Even if firewood is a secondary need (compared to food), how

can the praise of the wicked be even "secondary?" Since the wicked haven't fulfilled their purpose, their praise shouldn't be needed at all!

This second issue isn't really that difficult, as the commentators explain it to mean that the wicked "cool down Gehenom with their tears" because they recognize their mistakes and regret them. After this process, they merit the world to come, so their praise has much value. However, this wouldn't apply to Paro and the Egyptians, so we still need to understand why their "knowing G-d," and thereby recognizing the error of their ways, has any value.

Which is better, blind faith, or faith reached through reason? Actually, I'm not going to touch that issue, except to point out that any thinking believer realizes that as strongly as they "believe" that their "belief system" is correct, there are others who believe just as strongly in a mutually exclusive "belief system," who are just as convinced that they are right as we are that we are right. Still, each person who follows their belief system sincerely, does so because they trust their own assessment of what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is not true, despite knowing that others disagree. We must do our utmost to get to the truth, but ultimately, we have to go full steam ahead with our religious commitments even though we know that there are others that question the basis for our commitment.

As Rav Yochanan says in Midrash Tehilim, the greater the reward one receives, the less valuable the praise is. If the praise is coming from those being punished, on the other hand, it must be true praise, indicating true recognition of G-d's greatness and sense of justice. Saying "G-d is great" when life is good is fine (and praiseworthy), but saying it when things aren't so good says a lot more about how great G-d really is. Similarly, there is value when believers, members of a faith, proclaim that a tenet of that faith is true, but nowhere near as much value as when an outsider acknowledges its truth. It is for this reason that Yisro's proclamation (18:11) that "G-d is greater than any deity" carried so much weight.

When G-d tells Moshe to go back to the Children of Israel to tell them that they are about to be redeemed (6:6), He tells Moshe that in (or through) the process, "you (plural) will know that I am Hashem" (6:7). How will they "know?" Here's how the Ramban (ibid) explains it: "For as I redeem you with an outstretched arm that will be seen by all the nations, you will know that I am Hashem who does original (i.e. unnatural) signs and wonders in the world." Not just that G-d performed these miracles, but that He did it before everybody ("all the nations"), so that there's no counterargument against Him.

The same way the praise of the wicked has value because it shows G-d's true greatness, when even the idol-worshipping Egyptians, who had said they "didn't know" G-d, come to recognize G-d, it has

extreme value, saying much about the truth of His existence and power. As it says (Zecharya 14:9), "and Hashem will be king over all of the land; on that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One." May it be soon. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

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

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

This idea of process is especially important as it is very common for people, in times of desperation, to believe that the only hope is sudden change -the immediate coming of the Messiah. Note that after the destruction of the Second Temple the great Rabbi Akiva thought that Bar Kochba was such a leader. The belief that Shabtai Tzvi was the messiah came about in the 17th century as the decrees of the notorious Jew killer Bogdan Chmilniki took hold.

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

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

Messianic era to the rising of the sun, it happens slowly, step by step—in rabbinic terms, *kima, kima*.

An important message especially during these difficult times in Israel. We believe that we are in the process of reaching towards that redemptive moment but that process has its pitfalls. Sometimes it moves forward but sometimes it stands still and even moves backward. The four languages of redemption teach us that no matter the obstacles, never to give up hope, for slowly the sun will rise and redemption will be upon us. © 2010 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 DANIEL TRAVIS

Integrity

Yosef's brothers began to realize [the implications] of their father's death. "What if Yosef is still holding a grudge against us?" they said. "He is likely to pay us back for all the evil we did him." They instructed messengers to tell Yosef: "Before he died, your father gave us final instructions. He said, 'This is what you must say to Yosef: Forgive the spiteful deed and the sin your brothers committed when they did evil to you.' Now forgive the spiteful deed that [we,] the servants of your father's G-d, have done." (Bereshith 50:15-17)

From these verses the Gemara derives that one may for the sake of peace deviate from factual integrity, for Yaakov never suspected Yosef and had given them no such command. (Rashi on Bereshith 50:17) The above verses teach us that one may initiate such a remark even if nothing has yet directly happened to threaten the peace. (Aruch L'Ner Yevamoth 65b) Although the brothers had sold Yosef into slavery, that had happened many years before, and during the many years that had passed since they had been reunited, Yosef had not shown any sign that he would harm them. Nevertheless, since the brothers feared that Yosef might have been restraining himself for Yaakov's sake, they were permitted now that their father had died to say whatever they thought necessary to preserve the peace.

A common application of this principle is that a woman may make flattering remarks about the beauty of a bride even if no one has asked for his opinion. One might think that it is better simply to keep silent if one does not see the bride's beauty, however the Sages felt that silence in such a case would detract from the couple's joy at their wedding. However our Sages established that in such a case one should only say "the bride is charming and beautiful", because there is an element of truth to it. (Masecheth Kallah Rabbathi Ch. 10) Every bride is beautiful in the eyes of her husband, for if this were not the case, he would not be marrying her. (Maharsha Ketuvoth 17a; Taz, Shulchan Aruch Even HaEzer 65:1)

Seen from a different angle, there can be no harmful consequences to saying that she is beautiful, and furthermore, this is an accepted figure of speech. (Responsa Zacher Yosef 1:70) For these reasons, a bride is to be praised for her beauty and charm even if one personally does not consider her beautiful. (Tosfoth Ketuvoth 17a, Shulchan Aruch Even HaEzer 65:1) © 2010 Rabbi D. Travis and torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week's parsha of Va'aira continues with the transition from galus to geulah, exile to redemption. The only purpose of the galus was to lead toward geulah; the purpose of a seed being planted is to ultimately reap the harvest. This entire process had already been foretold to Avrohom as part of the covenant generations earlier. Furthermore, the very purpose of creation was the emergence of a people who would connect to Hashem by adhering to His will and word that would be transmitted to them. This would only take place as the redemption stage would move from Mitzrayim {Egypt} to the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

"And I have heard the cries of Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} whom the Egyptians are enslaving and I have remembered My covenant. [6:5]"

The Sforno explains: A cause of the redemption was Hashem hearing their cries and prayers in their times of trouble. This might appear a bit strange. What role did prayer play in a process that not only had been foretold but upon which the existence of the world depended on?

"And every shrub of the field was not yet on the earth and grass of the field had yet not sprouted for Hashem had not yet caused it to rain on the earth and there was no man to work the soil. [Breishis 2:5]"

Why was there no rain? Because there was no man to work the soil and there was no one to recognize the benefit of rains. When Adom came and understood that they were necessary he prayed for them, they descended and the trees and grass sprouted. [Rashi]

The world needed rain in order to exist. Hashem wanted to give this rain, as He wanted his creation to continue to exist. But that wasn't enough to bring the rains. Man needed to ask for it.

Why was this established as a principle upon which the world was created? It might mistakenly appear to some as a major ego issue...

We've mentioned many times that the root of the Hebrew word 'olam' {world} means hidden. The definition of the word 'olam' is thereby the place wherein Hashem hides Himself. It is the difficulties that one overcomes and the world-mask through which one's perception pierces, which brings a person from their personal galus to geulah.

Without feeling that something is lacking we don't reach out to connect. When that which is

recognizably lacking seems to appear on its own without having been requested, a person assumes a smug self-complacency. He feels no need to connect to a Force that is beyond him. He can live out his entire earthly existence without ever even touching upon the reason for which he was granted this earthly existence.

One of the greatest gifts that Hashem gives is the need and subsequent ability to call out and to connect to Him. The fulfillment of the purpose of creation is based on that.

This was made clear at crucial junctures. The vivid, vibrant, dazzlingly colorful canvas that we call the world was dull, drab and lifeless before prayer transformed it. It was one of the first lessons that Adom needed to be taught.

And at the time when the galus was about to begin its transformation into geulah; when that group of individuals was about to be transformed into a nation; when the world was about to take a major step forward toward realizing its purpose; at that point the lesson needed to be taught again. Everything would stop dead in its tracks. The spiritual creation of this new, Torah-revealed world would remain spiritually dull, drab and Torah-less unless and until man would call out to Hashem, realizing his dependence on Him and thus realizing the purpose of existence.

"And I have heard the cries of Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} whom the Egyptians are enslaving and I have remembered My covenant. [6:5]"

Without that, it wouldn't have happened. And it is our calling out to Hashem for our personal and national, spiritual and material needs, which brings about the deliverance of the treasures that He is so eagerly awaiting to give us. © 2010 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

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 © 2010 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In 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! © 2010 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.