

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**A**fter the plague of darkness, Pharaoh was willing to let everyone go serve G-d in the desert, even the children, who he had forbidden from going before the plague of grasshoppers (Shemos 10:11). This time, the obstacle was the livestock (10:24), and because Pharaoh refused to let the Children of Israel bring their livestock with them, the Egyptian firstborn were smitten.

The standard approach of the commentators is that Pharaoh was using the livestock as collateral, to ensure that the nation would return after their religious festival (see Chizkuni). Ibn Ezra understands this condition as a way of testing whether or not they planned on returning; they should have no problem with leaving their biggest economic asset (their livestock) in Egypt while they worshipped G-d if they were going to return. If, however, they were using this "religious holiday" as an excuse to escape from Egypt, they wouldn't leave without it. Ramban adds that included in Pharaoh's thought process was that even if they didn't return, all of their livestock would now belong to him.

One of the issues with this approach (raised by Rabbi Dovid Soloveitchik, shlita, quoted by Rabbi Yitzchok Sorotzkin in the second volume of Rinas Yitzchok) is why Pharaoh would think that leaving their possessions would prevent the nation from running away from their torturous conditions of servitude. (Ramban sort of addresses this issue by implying that Pharaoh was willing to lose his cheap labor if he could keep their livestock, see also Kesav Sofer.) There is some discussion among the Midrashim and the commentators regarding whether or not the Egyptians knew that the Children of Israel could see during the plague of darkness. If they knew, then Pharaoh also knew that they hadn't escaped despite having the chance to (while Egypt was blinded and helpless), and were waiting to be freed rather than trying to find a way

to escape. [Chasam Sofer (in 5596, d"h Mi v'Mi) suggests that they didn't leave because of a loyalty oath all servants make to their masters, or a similar oath made by Yosef and his brothers when they first moved down to Egypt; see also d"h Vayikra from 5562.]

B'er Yosef raises a different, almost opposite, issue. From the very beginning, Moshe and Aharon had insisted that they be allowed to leave Egypt in order to offer sacrifices to G-d ((5:3). Pharaoh himself acknowledged that they would bring sacrifices during their holiday (5:17, 8:4, 8:24). How did he expect them agree to leave without their livestock if they needed their animals to offer as sacrifices?

Chasam Sofer (in 5563, d"h Gam Atuh) is among the commentators who say that Pharaoh didn't mean that they couldn't take any livestock at all with them, only that they couldn't take all of it. B'er Yosef himself has an interesting approach to answer his question, based on redefining the previous conversation between Moshe and Pharaoh. Whereas the standard approach to Pharaoh's reluctance (before the plague of grasshoppers) to allow the children to go is that the "evil" (10:10) he accused them of plotting was to escape, or that he was warning Moshe that astrological signs indicated that bloodshed awaits them in the desert (see Rashi), B'er Yosef suggests that the "evil" Pharaoh suspected them of planning was to sacrifice their children to G-d, a mode of sacrifice not uncommon at the time. His astrologers didn't just "see" bloodshed in the desert, but the blood of infants, spilled on purpose by the hands of their parents. Although this was actually the blood of the circumcisions done by Yehoshua, Pharaoh and his advisors thought it indicated that they planned on sacrificing their children, and therefore forbade them from taking them. After the plague of darkness, Pharaoh agreed to let the children go too, even though he still thought they would be sacrificed. Because he was convinced they were going to sacrifice their children, he figured there would be no need to take any livestock, so forbade them from taking any animals with them.

Based on the Sh'lah, another suggestion can be made. Pharaoh realized that there were two possible ways of serving G-d during this religious retreat, either by doing things personally (such as davening to G-d and praising Him, and learning about Him) or by bringing offerings to Him. Before the plague

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of grasshoppers, Pharaoh offered the latter, in which case there would be no reason for anyone but the adult males to go, while after the plague of darkness he switched to personal growth, making bringing the livestock unnecessary.

There are other issues about the conversation between Moshe and Pharaoh regarding the livestock that are discussed by the commentators as well. When Moshe refused Pharaoh's offer to let the nation go as long as they leave their livestock in Egypt, he said that not only will you (Pharaoh) give us animals to offer to G-d, but we will also bring our own (10:25-26). It would seem, though, that the more appropriate way to put it would have been to tell Pharaoh that not only will we bring our own livestock, but you will ask us to bring some of yours as well. Why did Moshe first mention Pharaoh giving them his own animals if the conversation had been only about the animals of the Children of Israel?

Midrash HaGadol (10:25) says that Pharaoh told Moshe he would provide "1,000 sheep [and] 1,000 cattle, and anything else you need" to bring as offerings to G-d, to which Moshe responded "we won't know what we'll need until we get there." Even though Pharaoh offered to supply as many animals as would be needed, Moshe thought they may need to compensate for the 210 years of offerings that weren't brought while the nation was in Egypt (see Shemos Rabbah 18:1), wasn't sure which animals (goats, sheep, etc.) and at what stage of their development (one year old, two years old, etc.) G-d would want (Netziv), or what percentage of their animals should be offered, needing all the animals with them in order to figure out the percentage (Maharil Diskin). Therefore, despite Pharaoh's offer, Moshe told him that all of their animals must also go.

Pharaoh knew all along that many animals would be needed to offer to G-d, and was willing to provide it from his own personal stock. Because Moshe wasn't the first one to mention bringing offerings from Pharaoh's animals, he acknowledged that Pharaoh would indeed provide animals, before adding that the nation would nevertheless bring their own. Why did Pharaoh prefer that his animals be used instead of theirs? He knew that he would have to explain his concessions to his own people, and they would never

accept allowing their deities (see 8:22) to be sacrificed to the Hebrew G-d. The Egyptians knew how much livestock the Children of Israel had, and would rebel against Pharaoh for letting them take it with them despite knowing what they would do. Pharaoh's personal livestock, on the other hand, was kept on royal property and wasn't accessible to anyone that didn't directly care for it. Allowing the Children of Israel to use his livestock instead of their own would protect Pharaoh's standing among his own people; letting the Children of Israel to take their own livestock to sacrifice would likely ruin him. Therefore, he forbade them from taking their own, offering his livestock instead. ©2010  
*Rabbi D. Kramer*

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**H**ow could it be that as the Jews left Egypt they despoiled the Egyptians (va-yenatzlu) and took their goods (Exodus 12:36)?

Based on this sentence, many anti-Semites have claimed that Jews are thieves, stealing from others. The mainstream response to this accusation is that the taking of Egyptian possessions was in fact a small repayment for all the years of Jewish enslavement.

There is yet another approach to the text that has far reaching consequences in contemporary times. Perhaps the Jews did not take from the Egyptians after all. Possibly the Egyptians, upon request of the Jews, willingly gave their property as a way of atoning for their misdeeds.

This approach would read the word va-yenatzlu not as meaning "despoil" but rather "to save" (from the word le-hatzeel). In giving money to the Jews, the Egyptians' soul repented, and in some small way was saved.

To paraphrase Dr. J.H. Hertz and Benno Ya'akov, 20th century commentaries: an amicable parting from Egypt would banish the bitter memories the Jews had of the Egyptians. Jews would come to understand that the oppressors were Pharaoh and other Egyptian leaders as opposed to the entire Egyptian people. The gifts ensure "a parting of friendship with its consequent clearing of the name, and vindication of the honor of the Egyptian people."

All this has much in common with a burning issue which surfaced in the early 1950's. Should Jews accept reparation money from Germany? David Ben Gurion argued for accepting such money feeling that Germany should at least pay for their horror, for otherwise they would go completely unpunished. Menachem Begin argued the reverse. He held that the payment would be viewed as blood money, an atonement to wash away German sins. In his mind, this was unacceptable as nothing could ever obviate the evil of the Third Reich.

The Book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes 1:9) proclaims that there is nothing new under the sun. The contemporary debate concerning recouping monies and plundered assets from the Germans and Swiss and others for their misdeeds during the Holocaust has its roots in the exodus from Egypt. Was va-yenatzlu, mandated as it was by G-d, a unique event not to be repeated, or, did it set a precedent to be emulated in order to give those connected with evildoers the chance to repent?

While I applaud the courage of those who have dedicated themselves to winning financial restitution for Holocaust survivors, I am deeply concerned. The fact that many people are not even familiar with this episode of the Exodus narrative clearly shows that our ability to remember the essence of the slavery in Egypt has not, in any way, been dampened by our successful recovery of Egyptian property. As we justly pursue the return of funds we must be careful that it does not become any type of obstruction to our ability to preserve the legacy of the Shoah - an event that was not primarily about stolen money, but was about something much more important, stolen souls. ©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 SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Bo continues with the plagues inflicted on the Egyptians, and the exodus that followed. We find one interesting event that happened when Paroh called in Moshe and Aaron to bargain with them, right after being warned of the upcoming locust plague. After offering to allow only the men to go, and being rejected, Paroh kicked Moshe and Aaron out of the palace. The "Riva" wonders why they waited until they were kicked out of the palace, when they could have left before it got to that point. The Riva answers that had Moshe and Aaron left before being told to leave, they would have shown a lack of respect for Paroh, thereby embarrassing him. Since it was Paroh that had originally invited them, and since he was the ruler of the land they were in, they showed him respect by not leaving until he told them to, despite their embarrassment.

This amazing lesson in humility is even backed up by the events surrounding it. Locust, the plague directly following the story, was started by Moshe stretching his hands on the ground, symbolizing humility. Each and every single one of us has a common, ongoing struggle throughout our lives-our ego. If we simply stopped, thought, and realized about EVERY time we felt cheated or angry, we'd realize that it's our own ego that's letting us get angry or feel cheated, and if we learned to set that ego aside, we

would accomplish SO much more, comparable to the accomplishments of Moshe and Aaron!

Our ego will control our action and reactions, unless we learn to control it! ©2010 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

**T**here is a fascinating moment in the unfolding story of the plagues that should make us stop and take notice. Seven plagues have now struck Egypt. The people are suffering. Several times pharaoh seems to soften, only to harden his heart again. During the seventh plague, hail, he even seems to admit his mistake. "Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. "This time I have sinned," he said to them. "The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong." (9: 27). But as soon as the plague is over he changes his mind. "He and his officials" says the Torah, "hardened their hearts" (9: 34).

And now Moses and Aaron have come to warn of a further plague, potentially devastating, a plague of locusts that, they say, will devour all the grain left after the hail as well as the fruit of the trees. And for the first time we hear something we have not heard before.

Pharaoh's own advisors tell him he is making a mistake: Pharaoh's officials said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their G-d. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?"

These words immediately transform the situation. How so?

Back in 1984 the historian Barbara Tuchman published a famous book called The March of Folly. In it she asked the great question: How is it that throughout history intelligent people have made foolish decisions that were damaging both to their own position and to that of the people they led?

By this she did not mean, decisions that in retrospect proved to be the wrong ones. Anyone can make that kind of mistake. That is the nature of leadership and of life itself. We are called on to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty. With the wisdom of hindsight we can see where we went wrong, because of factors we did not know about at the time.

What she was talking about were decisions that people could see at the time were the wrong ones. There were warnings and they were ignored. One example she gives is of the wooden horse of troy. The Greeks had laid siege to troy unsuccessfully for ten years. Eventually they appeared to give up and sail away leaving behind them a giant wooden horse. The Trojans enthusiastically hauled it inside the city as a symbol of their victory. As we know, inside the horse were thirty Greek soldiers who that night came out of

hiding, and opened the city gates for the Greek army that had sailed back under cover of night.

It was a brilliant ploy, but Laocoön, the Trojan priest, had guessed that it was a plot and warned his people, in the famous words, I fear the Greeks even when they come bearing gifts. His warning was ignored, and Troy fell.

Another of Tuchman's examples is the papacy in the sixteenth century which had become corrupt, financially and in other ways. There were many calls for reform but they were ignored. The Vatican regarded itself, like some financial institutions today, as too big to fail. The result was the reformation and more than a century of religious war throughout Europe.

That is the context in which we should read the story of Pharaoh and his advisers. This is one of the first recorded instances of the march of folly. How does it happen?

Some years ago Dreamworks studio made a cartoon film about Moses and the exodus, called Prince of Egypt. The producer Jeffrey Katzenburg invited me to see the film when it was about half complete, to see whether I felt that it was a responsible and sensitive way of telling the story, which I thought it was.

What fascinated me, and perhaps I should have understood this earlier, was that it portrayed Pharaoh not as an evil man but as a deeply conservative one, charged with maintaining what was already the longest lived empire of the ancient world, and not allowing it, as it were, to be undermined by change.

Let slaves go free, and who knows what will happen next? Royal authority will seem to have been defeated. A fracture would appear in the political structure. The seemingly unshakable edifice of power will be seen to have been shaken. And that, for those who fear change, is the beginning of the end.

Under those circumstances it is possible to see why Pharaoh would refuse to listen to his advisors. They are weak, defeatist, giving in to pressure, and any sign of weakness in leadership only leads to more pressure and more capitulation. Better be strong, and continue to say No, and simply endure one more plague.

We see Pharaoh as both wicked and foolish, because we have read the book. His advisors could see clearly that he was leading his people to disaster, but he may well have felt that he was being strong while they were merely fearful. Leadership is only easy, and its errors only clearly visible, in retrospect.

Yet Pharaoh remains an enduring symbol of a failure to listen to his own advisors. He could not see that the world had changed, that he was facing something new, that his enslavement of a people was no longer tolerable, that the old magic no longer worked, that the empire over which he presiding was

growing old, and that the more obstinate he became the closer he was bringing his people to tragedy.

Knowing how to listen to advice, how to respond to change and when to admit you've got it wrong, remain three of the most difficult tasks of leadership. Rejecting advice, refusing to change, and refusing to admit you're wrong, may look like strength to some. But usually they are the beginning of yet another march of folly. ©2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**P**eople who are released from bondage or any other type of incarceration usually find their adjustment to freedom difficult if not even very problematic. More often than not the look on their newly freed faces is one of bewilderment-of being in a dazed condition-rather than one of pure joy.

Past unpleasant and painful experiences are not easily forgotten, or sublimated and assigned purely to one's subconscious. When the Exodus from Egypt finally occurs in this week's parsha, the Jewish people leave "with a high hand" but with weakness of spirit. They will despair of their future.

When Pharaoh continues to pursue them to the shores of the Yam Suf sea and throughout their forty year sojourn in the desert of Sinai, they are always on the verge of abandoning their special mission and returning somehow to the accustomed bondage and servitude of Egypt.

In the past generation of our people, many of the survivors of the Holocaust faced enormous challenges after being liberated from Nazi tyranny. The adjustment of most of them to freedom and to their ability to rebuild their lives is a testimony to the greatness and resilience of the Jewish spirit. But it was not an easy journey back to normalcy in a free society.

The Jewish people after leaving Egypt would require forty years and a new generation of Jews before they were ready and able to undertake the task of building a free Jewish society in their own land and under their own rule and sovereignty. As the old paraphrase goes "You can take the Jew out of exile and bondage but it is much more difficult to remove the mentality of exile and bondage from within the Jew."

The Torah seems to indicate to us quite clearly that the Lord has the ability to save us from bondage and destruction. Beginning with the Exodus from Egypt throughout the generations, G-d has performed this miraculous task for us many times over. But it is also clear from the Torah that once that has been accomplished, the Lord intends for us to take over and finish the task.

He will supply us with food and water, physical sustenance and spiritual and temporal leadership but what we do with those blessings is purely up to us. We

are taught that "when the Lord returns the captivity of Zion we will be as dreamers." A dreamer is in a dazed state of being. But once being awakened we are bidden to act and build and accomplish-to be bold and courageous and of optimistic heart.

The great Rav of Ponivezh, Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Kahaneman told me numerous times that "I am a dreamer but I do not allow myself to sleep." The Exodus from Egypt is not the end of the story of the Jewish people or of Moshe. It is only the beginning, for freedom is a never ending challenge fraught with difficulties, naysayers and doomsday pessimists.

The Lord took us out of Egypt forcibly for we would have remained there-as we say every year in the Hagada of the Pesach Seder. But then it was up to us. That remains the same situation in today's Jewish world as well. ©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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**“T**his renewal of the moon shall be for you [the Festival of] the New Moons - the first month for you of the months of the year." (Exodus 12:1) A new nation, Israel, is being born, and it celebrates its birth with a new festival and a new calendar. Our calendar has a strong lunar factor, the monthly festival which marks the renewed moon which appears - almost miraculously, but also consistently - from a lightless, frightening sky. The Jewish calendar also has a strong solar element, its first month being Nisan, the time of longer days and agricultural renewal after a cold and lifeless winter.

The key word here is "hodesh," month, which also connotes "hidush," change, and "hadash," new. It is a calendar born of hope, an optimism which arose from the experience of cataclysmic, miraculous social changes which enabled powerless Hebrew slaves to overwhelm mighty Egypt and emerge a free nation.

A stubborn, irrational optimism has characterized the Jewish people for its 4,000-year existence. Even in the worst periods of exile, persecution, torture and pogrom, we proclaimed: "I shall not die, but I shall live, and declare the deeds of the Lord" (Psalm 118:17). This optimism was born on this first Rosh Hodesh, and it emerged out of the miraculous renewal of a family/nation reborn. Hence we are enjoined to remember the exodus from Egypt every day (Deuteronomy 16:3), to celebrate and re-experience it during our Pessah Seder celebration each year (Ex. 13:3), and to study history with an inner vision which sees the marvelous changes wrought by the majestic partnership between G-d and Israel: "Remember the days of yore, understand the changes

[Hebrew shnot, shana, shinui] from generation to generation; ask your father and he will tell you, your sages and they will say it to you" (Deut. 32:7).

Egypt, Greece and Rome all had the seemingly consistent sun as their god and guide, a beacon which breeds the pessimism of "whatever has been is what will be, and whatever has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new [hadash] under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9) and "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day, To the last syllable of recorded time" (Macbeth 5:5).

It was the Bible, with its account of the Egyptian change and renewal, which gave the world the symbolism of the moon, the possibility of light emerging from darkness, freedom from slavery, which enabled us to dare hope for a perfected world and a time of peace and Redemption.

Moses was a product of this faith in change and redemption in the midst of slavery and oppression. When we are first introduced to him, we don't even know if he will survive the homicide decreed against Hebrew male infants. He is anonymous, as a slave is devoid of a name. Likewise, he lacks a clear pedigree: "A man went from the house of Levi and took a daughter of Levi" (Ex. 2:1). It is only four chapters later, when his mission as "redeemer" is defined, that we are given the names of his parents and grandparents.

The family names are extremely significant. I know little about Moses's parents, but I know a world about his grandparents, who undoubtedly influenced his parents. These grandparents, in the midst of bleak Egyptian servitude, named their son Amram, exalted nation - and their daughter Jochebed, glory to G-d.

"Exalted nation," in the midst of slavery? "Glory to G-d" in the midst of persecution? Apparently, they had the tradition of a "covenant between the pieces," of an emergence from poverty and affliction, and infused their grandson with that faith. Only one who believes in the possibility of change will struggle to bring it about.

One of the strangest rituals of our people is the "Sanctification of the Moon" (Kiddush Halevana), which takes place on the Saturday evening following Rosh Hodesh (the New Month festival). The congregation leaves the synagogue and assembles beneath the renewed moon. There, they bless the G-d who "renews the months," wish each other peace, and sing and dance to words which promise ultimate Redemption - a moon which will never wane but will shine forever with G-d's light of love.

Peculiar? Ridiculous? Not at all. A people that believes in a G-d who is invisible, that has experienced a promised return to its ancient homeland, must continue to dream of a world at peace, though skeptics think it's impossible! ©2010 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI NAFTALI REICH****Legacy**

**W**hat is the worst calamity that can befall a person? What agonies are the most difficult to endure? To find the answer, we need only look at the plagues that afflicted the Egyptians when they refuse to let the Jewish people out of bondage.

The Ten Plagues were designed to break down the stubborn resistance of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Each successive plague turned up the pressure another notch or two higher, until Pharaoh, no longer bear the pain, finally capitulated. The final and most crushing blow was the death of the firstborn. The runner-up in sheer torture was the ninth plague, which enveloped Egypt in such a dense, palpable darkness that all the people were completely immobilized. The agony of a prisoner in solitary confinement does not compare to the living death that gripped the benighted Egyptians.

While all the Egyptians were trapped in the darkness, life for the Jewish people continued as usual. As with all the other plagues, they were completely impervious to the effects of the catastrophes to which Egypt was being subjected. And yet, the Torah tells us that during the plague of darkness "the Jewish people had light in all their dwelling places." Why was it necessary to tell us that the Jewish people were unaffected by the darkness? Furthermore, what is the significance of their having light in "their dwelling places"? Surely, they enjoyed light wherever they were.

Earlier in Genesis (28:10), we read that "Jacob departed from Beersheba and went to Haran." The Midrash observes that the Torah finds it appropriate to mention his point of departure in addition to his destination point. This teaches us that "when a righteous person is in a city he represents its glory, light and beauty, and when he departs, its glory, light and beauty are removed." What is the significance of this redundant language?

The commentators explain that all too often we do not appreciate what we have until we lose it. When do people realize that the righteous person is the glory of his city? When he departs and the glory is removed.

In Egypt as well, the Jewish people did not appreciate fully the wonderful gift of light until the plague of darkness struck Egypt. Watching the Egyptians immobilized by the darkness, they were suddenly extremely grateful that they had light to illuminate their lives.

On a more mystical level, the commentators see darkness and light as metaphors for the Egyptian and Jewish cultures. Egyptian society, steeped in superstition, magic and idolatry, was blind to the Presence of the Creator in the world. It was a place of darkness. The plague of darkness tapped into the Egyptian way of life and produced a physical

manifestation of the spiritual darkness. And the severity of the plague was clear proof of the extent to which the spiritual light had been extinguished in Egypt. The absence of spirituality immobilizes a person and prevents him from moving forward.

When the Jewish people perceived the spiritual blight of the Egyptians, they recognized the Presence of the Creator in every grain of sand, every blade of grass, and this profound faith illuminated their world. The purity of life in "the Jewish dwellings," therefore, shone with a transcendent light that reflected the inner spirituality of the Jewish people.

A young student was sitting in the back of the classroom and daydreaming. At the front of the room, the teacher was explaining the intricacies of a difficult subject, but the student paid no attention. He was lost in the faraway world of his imagination.

Suddenly, he heard another student speaking loudly and disrupting the class. The teacher asked the troublemaker to be quiet, but to no avail.

The daydreamer's interest was piqued. He ears perked up, attuned to every word that transpired in the classroom. He listened to the teacher trying to convey important ideas, and he listened with revulsion as the troublemaker blotted out the teacher's words with his disrespectful noise.

How foolish I've been, thought the daydreamer. My teacher is telling us such important things, and I wasn't paying attention. Unfortunately, it took the troublemaker's antics to make me aware of what I was missing.

In our own lives, we sometimes become so caught up in the hustle and bustle of daily life that we lose sight of the deeper truths of life, of a sense of which things that are important and which are not. But then when we see the extreme degradation of the society in which we live, we are snapped back to reality and regain our innate appreciation for Jewish values and ideals. It is better, of course, never to lose sight in the first place, not to wait for the darkness of others to inspire us to choose light. ©2010 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

**RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN****TorahWeb**

**I**n parshas Bo (Shemos 12:51), we read with excitement "it happened on that very day, Hashem took the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." The Exodus is not only at the root of our performance of many mitzvos (tefillin, sukkah, Shabbos), but indeed it is the first of the aseres hadibros (Ten

Commandments) wherein we are commanded to believe in G-d "Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery" (Shemos 20:2).

Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt"l, the Alter of Slabodka, highlights the connection between the Exodus and Hashem as the Creator. The question is

asked why Hashem did not introduce Himself as the Creator in the first of the aseres hadibros? Rav Finkel suggests that in fact, He does, as the Exodus sheds new light on creation.

The rabbis inform us that the back-breaking servitude ended months before the actual exodus (Rosh Hashanah 11a). Why, then, were we kept for an additional half year? To learn of the personal relationship that each individual has with Hashem. The nine plagues that preceded the killing of the first-born were not only punitive to the Egyptians (measure for measure), but were also educational for the Jewish nation. The Jews were taught through the plagues which preceded the Exodus that not only there is a G-d Who "plays a role in the midst of the land" (Shemos 8:18), but also that He is the Creator and creates, on an ongoing basis, a personalized creation for each individual.

Rav Finkel cites the following examples of a personalized creation for each individual within the plagues:

1. Regarding the plague of Blood: not only did Hashem distinguish the Jewish nation by maintaining their water supply as water and transforming the water to blood for the Egyptians, but also if a Jew and Egyptian were drinking from a glass with two straws at the very same moment, the Jew continued to drink water, and the Egyptian blood. This is a personalized act of creation. That a Jew was able to sell water to an Egyptian showed a personalized act of creation on the part of Hashem for the Jew at that moment.

2. Regarding the plague of Dever: Moshe warns Pharaoh (Shemos 9:4) "not a thing that belongs to the children of Israel will die". Thus if an Egyptian had one animal that he had stolen from a Jew amidst his hundred animals, ninety-nine died but one survived. Even if the Jew had only part ownership in an animal, it did not die. These were personalized acts of His Hashgacha Pratis-Divine Providence.

3. The hail, we are taught, was a miracle within a miracle. Not only was the intensity of the hail unprecedented, but fire and water were intermingled, co-existing to perform the will of Hashem (Shemos Rabbah 12:4). Hashem created this new phenomenon to punish the Egyptians, and to teach the Jewish nation that He not only "renews creation on a daily basis" (as we recite every morning at the conclusion of the first blessing before the Shema) but He renews creation at every moment for each individual.

4. In the plague of darkness, each Egyptian was paralyzed due to the intensity of the darkness, and each Jew had the gift of creation to function in his usual way. Similarly, the splitting of the Red Sea included personalized acts of creation in that it was dry land for each Jew and water for each Egyptian.

Thus, when Hashem mentions the Exodus in the first of the aseres hadibros, He is not only reminding the Jewish People of the favor they owe Him for liberating them from slavery. Rather, He is informing them that He has a personalized relationship with every individual and renews creation constantly for each one personally. The Hakaras Hatov (personal appreciation) that one must have is truly "kol haneshama t'hallel ka" (Psalms 150:6) -- al kol nishima v'nishima-for every breath, we owe Him a thank you.

In this same vein, we are taught in Sanhedrin (37A) "that each individual is obligated to say and believe that the world was created for me" and Ben Zoma (Brachos 58A) teaches that a good guest says "how much trouble my Host took for my sake." Just as the Torah states (Braishis 32:32) "the sun rose for him" (Yaakov), each Jew is to feel gratitude daily to Hashem for his sunrise. Indeed, each morning the bracha is in the present "Who spreads out the earth upon the waters" because there is an ongoing creation.

Too often people lack a personalized relationship with Hashem. If we only realized that all day long there is a tailor-made personal creation for each of us, we would connect very differently with prayer.

I believe that this has a very practical lesson for all. Not only in terms of our personal belief and relationship, but in the way we relate to others. Schools open with the promise of personalized attention for each student. Most often the system itself doesn't allow this to occur.

Hashem is the exception. Thus the directive, the 611th mitzvah of v'halachta b'drachav-to walk in His ways-is not only to do kindness, but to act to each individual, child, and student, differently, realizing that they are unique. The rule with Hashem is that there is no limiting set of rules. ©2010 Rabbi B. Yudin and Project Genesis, Inc.

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah reflects the painful reality that people do not learn from the past and history will undoubtedly be repeated. The setting is the Babylonian destruction of the Egyptian Empire. The prophet Yirmiyahu states in the name of Hashem, "I will direct my attention to the multitudes of Alexandria and to Pharaoh and all of Egypt... I will deliver them into the hands of their killer, Nebuchadnezar, the King of Babylonia." (46: 25,26)

The Radak explains that these passages refer to a massive massacre predicted for Egypt and her Pharaoh. Radak reminds us that the Egyptian people have a long history of hostility towards the Jewish nation. After an extended period of calm following her devastation at the Sea of Reeds, Egypt resumed her hostility towards her Jewish neighbors. It resurfaced

during the reign of the Egyptian premier, Shishak, who invaded the Land of Israel shortly after the demise of Shlomo Hamelech. During this vulnerable Jewish era, Shishak forced his way into Israel and cleared out the treasury of the king. Our Chazal (quoted in Rashi's commentary to M'lochim I, 14-6) cite that Shishak even had the audacity of stealing the glorious throne of Shlomo Hamelech. Egypt continued her hostility towards Israel, and after receiving heavy sums from Israel in exchange for military protection, betrayed her Jewish "ally" and abandoned her. But Egypt's final crime came when Pharaoh N'cho executed the pious King Yoshiyahu because he refused to allow Pharaoh's army to enter Israel enroute to Assyria.

Because of this full record, Hashem decided that the time had arrived to repay Egypt for all her cruelty. Although, in truth, she had previously received forty years of exile, apparently this was not sufficient treatment for her. This time, a massive massacre was being planned and an appropriate execution was awaiting her Pharaoh. With this, Hashem would remind Egypt of the very special relationship He maintained with the Jewish people. Hashem's historic lesson to the earlier Pharaoh was characterized in His opening statement that the Jews are "My son, My first-born" (Shmos4: 24). Through these words Hashem warned Egypt at the outset that her hostility toward His chosen nation would be repaid in full. And now, nearly a thousand years later, the time had come for Egypt to review this lesson. Egypt would soon be massacred in response to her cruelty and hostility towards Hashem's first born, the Jewish people.

It is interesting to note the particular analogy Yirmiyahu uses when predicting the Babylonian army's invasion. He says "They cut down her forest, for the enemy could not be counted; they exceeded the locusts, beyond any imaginable limit." (46: 25, 26) Yirmiyahu compares the Babylonians to locusts invading the land in unimaginable proportions. In fact, he describes the totality of this massacre as even greater than the work of the locusts. This analogy seems to bring us back to the historic plague of locusts in this week's parsha. It suggests a corollary between the Egyptian plague in earlier times and the invasion of Egypt by the king Nebuchadnezar in later times.

The explanation of this may be gleaned from the insightful words of the Kli Yakar in this week's sedra. He notes the Torah's introduction to the plague of locusts and explains it through a shocking Egyptian phenomenon. The Torah introduces the plague and states, "I have hardened the hearts of Pharaoh and his servants in order to place My signs in his midst. And for you to tell your children and grandchildren how I played with Egypt." (Shmos 10: 1, 2) "Why,"

asks the Kli Yakar, "was this introduction chosen for the plague of locusts and not for any other plague?" He responds by citing the testimony of

Rabbeinu Chananel regarding an indisputable fact about the land of Egypt. Rabbeinu Chananel testifies that there has never been a locust invasion in Egypt since the massive plague of locusts sent to her by Hashem. Nowadays, even when all surrounding countries are infested with locusts these devouring insects will not penetrate the Egyptian borders. And if they remotely filter into Egypt they never destroy the existing crop.

He explains that this miraculous phenomenon was meant to serve as an everlasting testimony about the plague of locusts. In response to Moshe Rabbeinu's plea for the removal of locusts the Torah states, "There did not remain one locust throughout the entire Egyptian border." (Shmos 10:19) Apparently, this passage became an everlasting statement and from that point on locusts would never remain in the land of Egypt. This indisputable testimony reminds the world of Hashem's harsh response to Egypt for all the cruelty she showed His chosen people. The plague of locusts therefore deserves a special introduction stating the purpose for all the plagues, to tell of their occurrence to our children. Because, in fact, the plague of locusts and its everlasting testimony were to serve as the perfect vehicle through which to remember Hashem's revelations in Egypt.

We now appreciate the perfect analogy of Yirmiyahu regarding the Babylonian invasion. The prophet was hinting to the fact that Egypt's attitude towards the Jewish people could not be condoned. They, more than anyone, should have anticipated the consequences of their cruel actions. The total absence of locusts from Egypt should have been a constant reminder to them of their past experiences for mistreating the Jewish people. Obviously no one could claim that Egypt hadn't been fairly warned. However, typically, people do not learn their lesson and history must undoubtedly be repeated. If the historic plague of locusts was not a sufficient reminder for them, then the present Babylonian "locusts" would do the trick. Hashem therefore ordered a full scale massacre for Egypt to repeat their earlier experience. They would once again realize that the Jewish people are very dear to Hashem and hostility towards them is certainly not a welcomed policy. Eventually Hashem will protect His people and respond to all hostility in a most befitting fashion. © 2010 Rabbi D. Siegel and Project Genesis, Inc.

