

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

“**A**nd you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt'.”

It was the moment for which they had been waiting for more than two hundred years. The Israelites, slaves in Egypt, were about to go free. Ten plagues had struck the country. The people were the first to understand; Pharaoh was the last. G-d was on the side of freedom and human dignity. You cannot build a nation, however strong your police and army, by enslaving some for the benefit of others. History will turn against you, as it has against every tyranny known to mankind.

And now the time had arrived. The Israelites were on the brink of their release. Moses, their leader, gathered them together and prepared to address them. What would he speak about at this fateful juncture, the birth of a people? He could have spoken about many things. He might have talked about liberty, the breaking of their chains, and the end of slavery. He might have talked about the destination to which they were about to travel, the "land flowing with milk and honey". Or he might have chosen a more sombre theme: the journey that lay ahead, the dangers they would face: what Nelson Mandela called "the long walk to freedom". Any one of these would have been the speech of a great leader sensing an historic moment in the destiny of Israel.

Moses did none of these things. Instead he spoke about children, and the distant future, and the duty to pass on memory to generations yet unborn. Three times in this week's sedra he turns to the theme: "And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' you shall say..." (Ex. 12:26-27)

"And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.'" (Ex. 13:8)

"And when, in time to come, your child asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him..." (Ex. 13:14)

About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators. That is what made Moses not just a great leader, but a unique one. What the Torah is teaching is that freedom is won, not on the battlefield, nor in the political arena,

nor in the courts, national or international, but in the human imagination and will. To defend a country you need an army. But to defend a free society you need schools. You need families and an educational system in which ideals are passed on from one generation to the next, and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. So Jews became the people whose passion was education, whose citadels were schools and whose heroes were teachers.

The result was that by the time the Second Temple was destroyed, Jews had constructed the world's first system of universal compulsory education, paid for by public funds: "Remember for good the man Joshua ben Gamla, because were it not for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. At first a child was taught by his father, and as a result orphans were left uneducated. It was then resolved that teachers of children should be appointed in Jerusalem, and a father (who lived outside the city) would bring his child there and have him taught, but the orphan was still left without tuition. Then it was resolved to appoint teachers in each district, and boys of the age of sixteen and seventeen were placed under them; but when the teacher was angry with a pupil, he would rebel and leave. Finally Joshua ben Gamla came and instituted that teachers be appointed in every province and every city, and children from the age of six or seven were placed under their charge." (Baba Batra 21a)

By contrast, England did not institute universal compulsory education until 1870. The seriousness the sages attached to education can be measured by the following two passages: "If a city has made no provision for the education of the young, its inhabitants are placed under a ban, until teachers have been engaged. If they persistently neglect this duty, the city is excommunicated, for the world only survives by the merit of the breath of schoolchildren." (Maimonides, Hilkhot Talmud Torah 2:1)

"Rabbi Judah the Prince sent R. Chiyya and R. Issi and R. Ami on a mission through the towns of Israel to establish teachers in every place. They came to a town where there were no teachers. They said to the inhabitants, 'Bring us the defenders of the town.' They brought them the military guard. The rabbis said, 'These are not the protectors of the town but its destroyers.' 'Who then are the protectors?' asked the inhabitants. They answered, 'The teachers.'" (Yerushalmi Hagigah 1:6)

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No other faith has attached a higher value to study. None has given it a higher position in the scale of communal priorities. From the very outset Israel knew that freedom cannot be created by legislation, nor can it be sustained by political structures alone. As the American justice Judge Learned Hand put it: "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it." That is the truth epitomized in a remarkable exegesis given by the sages. They based it on the following verse about the tablets Moses received at Sinai: "The tablets were the work of G-d; the writing was the writing of G-d, engraved on the tablets." (Ex. 32:16)

They reinterpreted it as follows: "Read not 'charut', engraved, but 'cherut', freedom, for there is none so free as one who occupies himself with the study of Torah." (Mishnah Avot 6:2)

What they meant was that if the law is engraved on the hearts of the people, it does not need to be enforced by police. True freedom -- cherut -- is the ability to control oneself without having to be controlled by others. Without accepting voluntarily a code of moral and ethical restraints, liberty becomes license and society itself a battleground of warring instincts and desires.

This idea, fateful in its implications, was first articulated by Moses in this week's sedra, in his words to the assembled Israelites. He was telling them that freedom is more than a moment of political triumph. It is a constant endeavour, throughout the ages, to teach those who come after us the battles our ancestors fought, and why, so that my freedom is never sacrificed to yours, or purchased at the cost of someone else's. That is why, to this day, on Passover we eat matzah, the unleavened bread of affliction, and taste maror, the bitter herbs of slavery, to remember the sharp taste of affliction and never be tempted to afflict others.

The oldest and most tragic phenomenon in history is that empires, which once bestrode the narrow world like a colossus, eventually decline and disappear. Freedom becomes individualism ("each doing what was right in his own eyes", Judges 21:25), individualism becomes chaos, chaos becomes the search for order, and the search for order becomes a new tyranny imposing its will by the use of force. What, thanks to Torah, Jews never forgot is that freedom is a never-ending effort of education in which parents, teachers,

homes and schools are all partners in the dialogue between the generations. Learning, talmud Torah, is the very foundation of Judaism, the guardian of our heritage and hope. That is why, when tradition conferred on Moses the greatest honour, it did not call him 'our hero', 'our prophet' or 'our king'. It called him, simply, Moshe Rabbenu, Moses our teacher. For it is in the arena of education that the battle for the good society is lost or won. © 2013 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“May the renewal of the moon be for you [the Festival of] the first day of each month; this month being for you the first of the months of the year" (Exodus 12:2).

This interpretation of the verse, cited by Rashi and chosen by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch as the primary translation of the text, renders each phrase of the verse another lesson bound up with the Exodus from Egypt. We must mark the Festival of the New Moon, and Nisan is to be counted as the first of the months of the year.

I understand why Nisan was chosen as the first month; it is the month in which Israel became a free nation; but what has the renewal of the moon to do with the Exodus from Egypt? And why is this Festival of the New Moon the very first of G-d's commandments to the Israelites? The answer, and the most profound reason that we celebrate the Festival of the New Moon each month, harks back to the special Name of G-d identified with the book of Exodus, which points toward the realization of Redemption. The ineffable name Y-H-V-H (Exodus 6:1-3) is closely related to the name ehieh asher ehieh, which G-d revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:13-15). Generally, it is translated "I am that I am" or "I am whatever is, the Source for the animation of all life." It is more correctly translated "I will be what I will be."

The first translation emanates from Maimonides (at the beginning of his Mishne Torah), and is closely allied to Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover" and Tillich's "ground of all being." The second emanates from Yehuda Halevi (The Kuzari) and is more closely allied to the plain meaning of the biblical text ("I will be what I will be").

The first is the G-d of Aristotelian "being," the G-d of Creation; the second is the G-d of Platonic "becoming," the G-d of history and of redemption.

The G-d of Creation exudes power and establishes limits (El Shaddai); He operates alone, within a specific period of time (the seven primordial days of creation). The G-d of history exudes patience and only guarantees a successful end-game of redemption and world peace; during usual world-time. He operates with partners - human beings, especially the heirs to the Abrahamic covenant - for whom He

must wait and with whom He must be patient until they truly wish to be redeemed, until they are worthy of being redeemed.

Hence, the G-d of Creation and "let there be light" evokes certitude and precision, whereas the G-d of Redemption, "I will be what I will be," evokes openness.

Such is always the case when one takes on independent partners with freedom of choice to whom one grants empowerment. And G-d has chosen Israel to teach and ultimately lead the world to adopt ethical monotheism and realize redemption because He believes in us and in humanity.

However, unlike the seven specific and successful acts of Creation, Redemption is fraught with advances and setbacks, successes and failures, progression and retrogression.

That is the major distinction between creation and history; the laws of nature are basically unchanging, whereas history - "his story," our story, not only G-d's story - is dependent on human input and is therefore subject to change.

This change is positive and salutary. G-d created a functioning world, but one which is incomplete and therefore imperfect.

Conventional wisdom would have it that just as the laws of physics seem to be unchanging, so are the social structures of totalitarian empires unchanging and so human nature is unchanging.

The sun-god Ra - identified with Aries the ram (lamb) - is the zodiac sign of the spring month of Nisan. Indeed, the sun, from the perspective of people on earth, also seems unchanging.

Enter the Hebrews with their celebration of the renewal of the moon each month; sanctifying the changing moon over the static Egyptian sun. The Hebrew nation was formed out of the cataclysmic change that overthrew Egypt's slave society, the change that forced Egyptian power to bow before biblical concepts of human equality and freedom.

Hence the Jewish people fight for change, glory in change and even sanctify change. But change wrought by human faith and action demands human responsibility.

It is with this sense of responsibility that we must approach the miraculous change of our status as a nation state after close to 2,000 years of being dependent on host nations. Now we must believe in ourselves as G-d's full partners; we must resuscitate the vision of the prophets who insisted that our leaders and populace must be righteous and moral. We must promulgate laws that express human equality, especially in terms of women's rights and minority rights. If we expect to be respected; we must recognize the sea of change that has overtaken much of the leadership of the Christian world and warmly clasp the hand of friendship they are proffering. National commitments (such as service in the IDF) must be

taken into the account alongside religious commitments for those Israelis wishing to convert.

Clearly, we have a long way to go. But if we change, we will not only survive; we will prevail © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The extraordinary devotion of the Torah to all of the intricate details of the celebration of Pesach and of its sacrifice strikes one as demanding explanation. After all, the Torah will command many mitzvot to the Jewish people in the course of the next books of the Torah, without necessarily going into particulars and details about their method of observance.

All of that, so to speak, was left to the Oral Law and to Moshe to fill in the exact details to fulfill the commandment. The Mishna and Talmud comprise sixty-three volumes of these details and explanations, but somehow regarding Pesach and its mitzvot, the Torah itself provides this necessary information.

A simple understanding is that these laws and details were given to the Jewish people before they stood on Sinai and before the Oral Law was granted to Moshe -- and through him to all of Israel. Therefore Moshe had to instruct the people in clear detail what was expected of them and how to properly observe the Pesach sacrifice and holiday.

The Torah faithfully records for us Moshe's instructions to the people? instructions which remain valid and operative in future times as well and not only for the first Pesach commemoration in Egypt. Though all of this is, in effect, correct technically, it still, to a certain extent, begs our original question of why Pesach instructions are so detailed while the commandments regarding the other holy days of the year are certainly less explicit and detailed.

The answer to this can be found in the nature of the holiday of Pesach itself. It is not an agricultural holiday as are Shavuot and Succot. Its uniqueness is not purely in being an historical commemorative day, a reminder of past events and occurrences, for both Shavuot and Succot are also days of memory and national recollection. The uniqueness of Pesach lies in its miraculous occurrence from which all of later Jewish practice and life emanates. You could say that Pesach is G-d's holiday, while Shavuot requires the acquiescence of Jews to accept the Torah at Sinai and Succot requires an act by the people in building and living in succot during their sojourn in the desert. Pesach is a Divine event, G-d imposing His will so to speak on Pharaoh and Egypt and upon the Jewish people as well.

For this reason, it was necessary for the Torah to clearly delineate and detail for the Jewish people what G-d expected, hence the complexity of the laws of Pesach as they appear in this week's parsha. Pesach

is a top-down holiday while the other holidays are more of a two-way street type of commemoration.

By observing Pesach as commanded in every detail of the instruction manual the Jew submits Divine authority without question or logical demands. The laws of Pesach tested Jewish loyalty and discipline even before the Torah was given to them. It is therefore the leading holiday of the year, the one still mostly treasured and observed by the masses of Israel. © 2013 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As the Jews are leaving Egypt, G-d commands them to sacrifice the Paschal lamb. Following that commandment, a strange rule is spelled out. The Torah describes how a slave may partake of the offering. In the words of the Torah, "And every man's servant that is bought for money, thou may circumcise him and then he may eat thereof." (Exodus 12:44) After experiencing the horrors of slavery and entering a state of freedom, it would seem most logical for the Torah to outlaw the institution of slavery altogether.

In order to understand why the Torah permits slavery, it must be recognized that slavery was universally accepted in Biblical times. Rather than ignore that reality, the Torah deals with slavery in an extraordinarily ethical way.

First, as R. Samson Raphael Hirsch notes, "no Jew could make any other human being into a slave. He could only acquire by purchase, people who, by the then universally accepted international law, were already slaves." Hence, coming into a Jewish household - with its greater sensitivity towards the welfare of a slave - is considered a step up.

Secondly, a slave (eved Canaani) is mandated to keep all the commandments, except for those affirmative commandments that are time-based, and this for obvious reasons - slaves by definition have little control over their own time. From this perspective, it follows that the halakhic system views an eved Canaani as closer to being Jewish than even a ger toshav (resident alien) who is only expected to fulfill the seven laws of Noah. As such, the eved Canaani is a respected member of our community.

Thirdly, the Torah tells us that, if the slave wishes, he may be circumcised. The Talmud quotes the opinion that once circumcised and immersed (thereby becoming fully Jewish), the former slave can participate in eating the Paschal sacrifice. This is precisely the point of our aforementioned Biblical verse. (Yevamot 48b)

Fourth and most important is the alternative view found in the Talmud, which insists that if any Jew

has a slave who is not circumcised, not even the owner himself may partake of the Paschal lamb. In other words, when the Torah states "then he may eat thereof," the "he" refers to the owner. Indeed, this Talmudic opinion is making the stunning statement that it is incongruous for a Jew to celebrate Passover by eating the Paschal lamb - the symbol of freedom - while having a slave in his home (see the commentary of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch).

The Torah has been criticized for supporting the institution of slavery. In point of fact, it attempts to make ethical an already well-entrenched institution. The ethical sensitivity displayed by the Torah reveals that the concept of "eved" has nothing to do with slavery as understood in contemporary times. © 2013 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

Parshat Bo contains the very first commandment the Jews received as a nation; the Mitzvah to have a first Rosh Chodesh (new month), and to mark the beginning of every month thereafter (Exodus 12:2). What makes this commandment so important for it to be the very first commandment for the Jews? Also, when describing the first month that the Jews need to acknowledge, the Torah fails to name that month. If the Torah values the months, wouldn't it be important for the Torah to name those months, just like the Torah names important places the Jews had traveled through?

The Ramban explains that the Torah called the months as first, second and so on because the numbers refer to how many months the Jews were removed from the moment when we were established as a people. This helps focus our attention to the most important moment we had as a nation. But it also focuses us on something else; The months we now control (both in name and in timing) dictate when holidays occur, when customs are performed, and even when G-d judges us. The very first commandment is the one that empowers us. The first commandment as a nation makes us partners with G-d, because although we didn't determine the holidays to celebrate, we do determine when they are celebrated. So every time we celebrate Rosh Chodesh, we should celebrate our partnership with G-d, and our being empowered to individually "name" the month as we, as a people, see fit. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The last conversation between Moshe and Pharaoh in Pharaoh's palace was quite contentious, with

Pharaoh's final words to Moshe being "don't [come] see me anymore, for the day you [come] see me you shall die" (Sh'mos 10:28). Moshe wasn't too pleased with Pharaoh either (11:8), and confirmed that he wouldn't [come] see Pharaoh again (10:29). Before leaving the palace, though, Moshe gave Pharaoh one more warning (11:4-6), telling him that the smiting of the firstborn he was warned about at their first meeting (see 4:23) was imminent.

For the other plagues where Pharaoh was given a warning, a special trip was made (either to the Nile or to his palace) just to give him the warning; the warning was never part of a conversation that was already underway. This time, since Pharaoh had told Moshe not to come see him anymore, Moshe had to warn him about the next plague during the same visit. However, since he was standing before Pharaoh (in his palace), how could G-d have communicated the instructions about the next plague to Moshe (see Rashi on 11:4)? If Moshe had to leave Egypt before praying to G-d because it was such an unholy place (see Rashi on 9:29 and 12:1), how could he receive prophecy there?

Mizrachi says that although G-d would have preferred not communicating with Moshe in Egypt, doing so was preferable to making Moshe go back on his word not to come see Pharaoh again (see Sh'mos Rabbah 18:1). He adds that it's possible that G-d raised Moshe 10 tefachim (hand-breaths) off the ground, thereby taking Moshe "out of Egypt," before communicating with him. Maharshal differentiates between prayer/learning Torah and communicating instructions, with the latter being less problematic in a place of defilement.

According to Ibn Ezra (11:1 in his "long" commentary, 11:4 in his "short" one, see also Or Hachayim), this communication did not occur now, in Pharaoh's palace, but refers to earlier communication that took place in Midyan, when G-d informed Moshe that Pharaoh would refuse to let His nation go until being hit with all the plagues (3:19-20), that the Egyptian firstborn would be smitten (4:23) and that the nation would borrow their neighbors' valuables (3:21-22). Although this certainly takes care of the issue of G-d communicating with Moshe in Egypt (as He didn't), it raises several other issue instead. First of all, if this communication took place in Midyan, before any of the plagues hit, the expression "one more plague" (11:1) wouldn't apply; all ten were still to come. Secondly, there is a verse of narrative (11:3) included, telling us how the Children of Israel were able to borrow the valuables of the Egyptians and about Moshe's status among the people after the plagues; this occurred shortly before the exodus, not before Moshe began his mission. Thirdly, the earlier communication only included the fact that the Egyptian firstborn would be killed, not all the details contained here (11:4-7), such as that G-d would strike the firstborn at midnight. It certainly seems that this communication (or these

communications, as there are two separate paragraphs) occurred after the ninth plague had already started, during which the Children of Israel were supposed to search the homes of the Egyptians to see which valuables they would ask to borrow (see Rashi on 10:22), and when there was but one plague left, which was imminent. Nevertheless, even if it doesn't seem that this communication occurred as early as Ibn Ezra suggests, it might have occurred before Moshe was called back to Pharaoh's palace.

When Moshe quoted G-d saying that He would strike the firstborn at midnight (11:4), who was Moshe addressing? Well, since Moshe added that "all of these servants of yours will come down and prostrate themselves to me saying 'you and the entire nation should go'" (11:8), he was obviously talking to Pharaoh, right? Yet, when discussing why Moshe said "like midnight" rather than "at midnight" (B'rachos 4a), Rav Ashi says that Moshe was addressing the Children of Israel, talking to them at midnight after the 13th of Nisan became the 14th, telling them that at this exact time tomorrow night G-d will strike the Egyptian firstborn. How could Moshe have been addressing the Children of Israel if he concluded his "speech" by saying that "your servants will tell me to go," obviously referring to the Egyptians? It would therefore seem that this "speech" was given twice, first to the nation, telling them that G-d will strike the Egyptians tomorrow night, and then to Pharaoh, telling him that G-d will strike tonight. Even though the Torah only records Moshe's words once, the narrative is meant to apply to both, with the second aspect of the "dual narrative" continuing with Moshe's words to Pharaoh. [That Moshe added his own words after repeating G-d's is evident from the fact that first (11:4) G-d spoke in the first person ("I") and then (11:8) Moshe did ("to me").] Based on this, the two paragraphs between Moshe agreeing that he won't come see Pharaoh again (10:29) and his "leaving in anger" (11:8) flow rather well.

Moshe had already been told about the plague of the firstborn, which he shared with the nation prior to being called to Pharaoh's palace (10:24) after the plague of darkness. [Ramban (10:4-5) and Rabbeinu Bachye (10:5) say that the plague of darkness occurred in Nisan. Moshe was certainly told about the plague of the firstborn (see 12:12) by Rosh Chodesh Nisan (see 12:2), and he must have relayed the contents of this communication to the nation before the 10th, when they had to designate an animal for the Passover offering (12:3).] G-d told Moshe there is still one plague left (11:1) after the plague of darkness had started, telling him that although this isn't the last plague, the next one is, so the time has come to speak to the nation about borrowing valuables from the Egyptians (11:2). The Torah adds that G-d helped facilitate this borrowing by making the Egyptians look upon the nation favorably (11:3). Pa'anayach Raza (10:29) turns the logic used by the Midrash quoted by Mizrachi around, saying that

Moshe must have been told about the "one additional plague" beforehand; if he didn't know for sure that he had all the information that needed to be relayed to Pharaoh, how could he promise not to come back anymore? Including the commandment to borrow things from the Egyptians (11:2), which was meant for the Children of Israel and relevant during the plague of darkness, as well including the verse of narrative (11:3), both of which are out of place if this communication was said to Moshe while he was in the middle of a heated conversation with Pharaoh, also indicate that this paragraph was told to Moshe before he was called there.

Why was it included here? First of all, putting it earlier would have disrupted the flow of the narrative. The words "there is still one more plague" made perfect sense when told to Moshe even though the current plague had just started, whereas reading these words (in the narrative) while the Egyptians are still in the dark would seem convoluted. Additionally, inserting the communication before the narrative of the plague ends takes away from the immediacy of Pharaoh calling Moshe back in panic (10:24) and agreeing to let them go (as long as they leave their animals). Secondly, inserting a paragraph that obviously took place before Moshe went back to Pharaoh's palace clues us in that the next paragraph, or at least the first few verses of it, was also not (exclusively) said at the palace. True, these words were later repeated to Pharaoh, but they were first told to the Children of Israel and then, a day later, to Pharaoh. Even though, at first glance, it appears that these two paragraphs were said while Moshe was standing before Pharaoh in Egypt, a closer look indicates that the communication between G-d and Moshe occurred earlier, in a place more conducive to divine communication. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG

Do Not Resist

“**A**nd you shall safeguard the matzos" (12:17) The literal interpretation of the verse is that one should approach the preparation of the matzos with extreme caution, for the slightest delay could cause the dough to become "chameitz" -- "leavened", thereby invalidating the matzos for use on Pesach. Rashi cites a Midrashic interpretation which states that by changing the vowels, the word "matzos" can be read as "mitzvos", making the verse an injunction requiring us to perform all mitzvos with "zrizus" -- "alacrity"; When a person has the opportunity to perform a mitzva, he should not allow it to become "leavened", rather he should perform it immediately.

The comparison that the Midrash draws between the preparation of matzos and the performance of mitzvos raises the following difficulty: If a person prepares the matzos without the necessary alacrity, he invalidates them. However, while not the

preferred manner, procrastination in the performance of mitzvos does not invalidate them.

Additionally, the following Talmudic dictum requires explanation: "A person should always involve himself in Torah and mitzvos, even with improper motivation, for through their performance, he will come to do them with the proper motivation." (Pesachim 50b) Why does the performance of a mitzva with improper motivations have merit, while the performance of a mitzva with proper motivations but without alacrity is compared to valueless chameitz?

If a woman sends her child to buy some groceries, he goes out of a sense of obligation to his mother. If, when he returns, his mother informs him that she forgot a certain item, the child will make another trip to the store, albeit reluctantly. If this scenario persists, each time the mother asks him to make another trip, the child's reluctance will build, until he will get to the point where he resents his mother having asked him to go in the first place. He may, in fact, even voice his resentment by speaking disrespectfully to his mother. It would have been preferable for his mother not to have asked him to go altogether, for what began as an act of respect, spiraled into a flagrant display of disrespect. However, if the mother would offer her child a monetary incentive, then the child would perform the task happily. The explanation for this is as follows: The longer a person performs a task with resistance, the greater his reluctance will be. He will reach a point of such great resentment, that he will loathe performing this task. However, incentives would alleviate his reluctance, and he may even come to enjoy performing the task. Maimonides teaches that we should create incentives to get our children such as giving them candy to perform mitzvos so that they relate to the experience in a positive manner. (Hilchos Teshuva 10:5 The Talmud in Pesachim makes the same point as to how to keep children involved at the seder.) This is probably the pathology behind every synagogue having a "candy man". Experience has shown us that if we force our children to go to shul and the experience is a negative one, at the point where we no longer wield that control over them, they will stop going. If however, they identify the experience as a positive one, albeit for the wrong reasons, chances are they will continue to go. Hopefully, they will then grow to love the experience for the appropriate reasons.

A person may have the correct intentions in the performance of a mitzva, but if he performs it in a lax manner, he indicates that he is doing it with resistance. This resistance can grow to the point where he loathes the performance of the mitzva. Therefore, Chazal refer to a mitzva performed without alacrity as chameitz. On the other hand, if a person performs a mitzva enthusiastically, he may come to love the performance of that mitzva, even if that enthusiasm is generated by rewards or incentives. Therefore, Chazal encourage such behavior. © 2013 Rabbi Y. Zweig and torah.org

RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

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Two of the four parshios contained in the tefillin are found at the conclusion of parshas Bo. Many of the laws of tefillin are halacha l'Moshe miSinai, (i.e. taught to Moshe by Hashem during his tenure atop Mount Sinai.) Among these laws is the requirement for tefillin to be black square boxes containing four paragraphs from the Torah that reference the mitzvah of tefillin. Another such law requires that the tefillin worn on one's arm has one compartment that contains the four paragraphs on one long piece of parchment, while the tefillin worn on one's head has four compartments, each housing a separate paragraph.

The Torah does not give a reason for the aforementioned difference between the two tefillin. The Meshech Chachma (13:9) suggests an interesting approach. Regarding the Bais Hamikdash, Shlomo Hamelech speaks for Hashem (Melachim 1, 9:3) and declares, "My eyes and My heart shall be there all the days". The Meshech Chachma takes the liberty of extending this relationship of Hashem directed to the Bais Hamikdash, to the connection of man to Hashem when he dons his tefillin (see Rambam Hilchos Tefillin 4:24.) The Tefillin of the hand placed across from the heart corresponds to the love that Hashem has for all Israel. As a parent loves all their children equally, so does Hashem love all Israel, and hence the four parshios are included on one klaf (parchment) in tefillin worn on one's arm. The tefillin on one's head is placed between one's eyes and hints at Hashem's hashgaca pratis (divine providence), his watching over us. In this realm there are four compartments, corresponding to the four types of Jews. The Medrash (Vayikra Rabbah 30:12) teaches that the four species of esrog, lulav, hadassim and aravos correspond to those individuals with both Torah and good deeds, those with only one or the other, and those with neither. Commensurate with one's accomplishments is His divine providence.

With the above teaching we can now understand and appreciate the teaching of the gemarah (Menachos 37b) which identifies that the tefillin on one's head is to be worn on the high part of the head. The Talmud asks what is the source that the tefillin are to be donned above one's hairline and opposite the space between one's eyes? The answer given is a gezara shava, one of the thirteen rules by which the Torah is expounded. When similar words are used in two independent laws, there is a Sinaitic tradition that they are meant to shed light one upon the other. The Torah in parshas Bo (13:16) mandates that tefillin be "between your eyes", and the Torah teaches (Devarim 14:1) regarding a mourner "you shall not make a bold spot between your eyes for the dead". In both places the Torah mentions the space between your eyes; the gezara shava teaches that just as regarding a mourner

it must refer to the high part of the head, a scalp, as that is the place to potentially make a bold spot, so too regarding the tefillin the Torah mandates that it be placed on the high part of the head.

I believe the above cited gemarah is teaching a great deal more than where to place the tefillin; the Talmud is teaching an important philosophical lesson of the tefillin. In the very place that others would rip out their hair in an expression of despair and helplessness over the death of a loved one, our Holy Torah directs us to place the tefillin, a symbol of our faith in G-d, who in His Divine Providence controls and directs everything. Thus, the tefillin which contain the oneness of G-d as found in the Shema and the exodus from Egypt bolster the belief and faith of the Jew, enabling him to accept and appreciate all that Hashem does. The gezara shava not only explains the where of the Tefillin, but the why as well. © 2013 Rabbi B. Yudin & The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

In this week's Torah portion, we read the final chapter leading up to the exodus from Egypt. The ninth plague was a pivotal moment in the unfolding saga for it was during its execution that a striking distinction-obvious to all-was made between the Egyptians and the Jewish people. It was during the course of this plague that the unique and separate identity of the Jewish nation emerged.

The Torah tells us that in the thick darkness that descended upon the land during this plague, "No man could see his brother. Yet for all the children of Israel, there was light in their dwellings." Apparently it was this feature -- light amidst paralyzing darkness -- that determined the essential difference between the Jewish people and the Egyptians.

Why does the Torah stress the inability of each Egyptian to see his brother? Was that the most acute aspect of the affliction? One would imagine there were even more frightening consequences brought about this devastating plague in which people must have felt as if they were suddenly going blind.

Perhaps, herein lies the essential difference between the Egyptian nation and the Jews. The Egyptians were steeped in the pursuit of materialism. The more immersed we are in the pursuit of the material, the less we are able to truly care and feel for our fellow man. We become more absorbed in our needs and desires, thinking in terms of "I need," "I want," "I deserve." This self-preoccupation isolates and distances a person from others.

Disengaging from this all-consuming pursuit affords us the opportunity to see the other and to connect with him, to feel and empathize with our fellow man. It encourages us to recognize that we are essentially one with humankind, a single collective consciousness attached to the Heavenly throne.

The plague of darkness highlighted the core difference between the Jewish and Egyptian nations in that the darkness represented the all-consuming self-preoccupation of the Egyptians.

The Jewish people on the other hand, embraced their spiritual connectivity to one another, preparing themselves to become one nation defined by their service to the Creator.

The great Ponevezher Rov, Rav Kahaneman was a visionary builder of Torah life in Israel. To support his network of Torah institutions, he traveled the world raising significant funds on behalf his Yeshiva, orphanage and network of schools.

On a visit to South Africa, he attempted to raise funds in a community where the rabbi was unsympathetic to his religious cause. The rabbi denied him the opportunity to address the congregation and solicit their support for the Yeshiva. The Ponevez Rov asked the rabbi if he could simply wish the congregants "sholom aleichem." Unable to turn down this innocuous request, the rabbi assented.

The Rov ascended the podium and gazed intently at the faces before him. "Sholom aleichem, sholom aleichim, sholom aleichem!" he declared. "I welcome you three times, just as we say "Sholom Aleichem" three times during Kiddush Levanah, when we recite a blessing over the new moon each month. That is interesting," continued the Rav. "Why do we say "sholom aleichem" when we are blessing the new moon? Hmm. I would love to answer, but the rabbi has restricted me from saying anything more than "sholom aleichim."

With that, he stepped away from the podium. The community leaders swirled toward him, begging him to answer the intriguing question. The Rav looked questioningly at the rabbi, who had no choice but to nod his assent. Whereupon the Rav ascended the podium once again and addressed the congregation.

"My friends," he said, "let me share with you a story that took place not long ago. Two nations were pitted in a territorial battle against one another. Their armies amassed on both sides of a river and were poised to attack. One side sent out spies in the dead of night to reconnoiter the enemies' camp, to detect where they were most vulnerable. Stealthily, they stepped into enemy territory and started recording their findings.

All of sudden, they became aware of soldiers facing them with guns cocked. Terrified at having been discovered, they grasped their revolvers to defend themselves. Before they could shoot, the clouds abruptly parted and the moon shone in its full force. In that sudden burst of light, the spies saw that the "enemies" were simply another group of spies that had been sent by their general to spy out the enemy camp.

"Friends!" they called out, falling into one another's arms in a warm embrace, "Sholom Aleichem!" they cried out to each other.

"My friends!" declared the Ponevez Rov from the podium. "We are all one camp, we are one people, united in one mission to preserve our sacred Torah and tradition!"

As we know, the destruction of the Second Temple came about through sinas chinom, groundless hatred and it will be restored through the power of ahavas chinom, "groundless" love-love that needs no rationale or excuse for its existence. When we recognize that we are essentially one nation and one people, our difference evaporates. The profound realization of our fundamental oneness with our fellow Jews will hasten the ultimate redemption. © 2013 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

In this week's parashah, Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt. In the Aseret Ha'dibrot in Parashat Va'etchanan (Devarim 5:15) we read, "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem, your Elokim, took you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore Hashem, your Elokim, has commanded you to make the Shabbat day." In what way is Shabbat a reminder of the Exodus?

R' Ehud Rakovski-Avitzedek shlita (Yerushalayim) explains: Egyptians believed that the source of all blessings was the Nile, which was in their backyard, and that they needed no connection with an external source of blessing, i.e., with the Creator. Thus, Egypt is the antithesis of Shabbat, which testifies to the existence of a Creator.

He continues: Egyptians were involved with black magic, astrology, and other forces that conceal the identity of the only true power--Hashem. In contrast, when Moshe spoke to Pharaoh, he always referred to G-d by His "proper Name," Y-K-V-K (which we pronounce "Hashem"), not by the Name "Elokim," which refers to G-d as He appears through nature. [But Pharaoh replied (Shmot 5:2), "Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Israel!"]

Our Sages refer to Egypt as the "home of slaves." This means, R' Rakovski explains, that the Egyptians themselves were slaves--specifically, slaves to materialism. In contrast, Shabbat is the day of rest from materialism, a day of holiness. (Da'at Shabbat p.306) © 2013 S. Katz & torah.org

