

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

It was a unique, unrepeatable moment of leadership at its highest height. For forty days Moses had been communing with G-d, receiving from him the law written on tablets of stone. Then G-d informed him that the people had just made a golden calf. He was about to destroy them. It was the worst crisis of the wilderness years, and it called for every one of Moses' gifts as a leader.

First, he prayed to G-d not to destroy the people. G-d agreed. Then he went down the mountain and saw the people cavorting around the calf. Immediately, he smashed the tablets. He burned the calf, mixed its ashes with water and made the people drink. Then he called for people to join him. The Levites heeded the call and carried out a bloody punishment in which three thousand people died. Then Moses went back up the mountain and prayed for forty days and nights. Then for a further forty days he stayed with G-d while a new set of tablets was engraved. Finally he came down the mountain on 10 Tishri carrying the new tablets with him as a visible sign that G-d's covenant with Israel remained.

This was an extraordinary show of leadership, at times bold and decisive, at others slow and persistent. Moses had to contend with both sides, inducing the Israelites to do teshuvah and G-d to exercise forgiveness. At that moment he was the greatest ever embodiment of the name Israel, meaning one who wrestles with G-d and with people and prevails.

The good news is: there once was a Moses. Because of him, the people survived. The bad news is: what happens when there is no Moses? The Torah itself says: "No other prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34: 10). That is the problem faced by every nation, corporation, community and family. What do you do in the absence of heroic leadership? It is easy to say, "Think what Moses would have done." But Moses did what he did because he was what he was. We are not

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Moses. That is why every human group that was once touched by greatness faces a problem of continuity. How does it avoid a slow decline?

The answer is given in this week's parsha. The day Moses descended the mountain with the second tablets was to be immortalised by turning its anniversary into a holy day, Yom Kippur. On it, the drama of teshuvah and kapparrah, repentance and atonement, was to be repeated annually. This time, though, the key figure would not be Moses but Aaron, not the prophet but the High Priest.

That is how you perpetuate a transformative event: by turning it into a ritual. Max Weber called this the routinization of charisma.<sup>1</sup> A once-and-never-again moment becomes a once-and-ever-again ceremony. As James MacGregor Burns puts it in his classic work, *Leadership*: "The most lasting tangible act of leadership is the creation of an institution – a nation, a social movement, a political party, a bureaucracy – that continues to exert moral leadership and foster needed social change long after the creative leaders are gone."<sup>2</sup>

There is a remarkable midrash in which various sages put forward their idea of klal gadol ba-Torah, "the great principle of the Torah." Ben Azzai says it is the verse, "This is the book of the chronicles of man: On the day that G-d created man, He made him in the likeness of G-d" (Gen. 5: 1). Ben Zoma says that there is a more embracing principle, "Listen, Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one." Ben Nannas says there is a yet more embracing principle: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Ben Pazzi says we find a more embracing principle still: "The first sheep shall be offered in the morning, and the second sheep in the afternoon" (Exodus 29: 39) – or, as we might say today, Shacharit, Mincha and Maariv. In a word: "routine." The passage concludes: The law follows Ben Pazzi.<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of Ben Pazzi's statement is clear: all the high ideals in the world – the human person as G-d's image, belief in G-d's unity, and the love of

<sup>1</sup> See Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, University of California Press, 1978, 246 ff.

<sup>2</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*, 454.

<sup>3</sup> The passage is cited in the Introduction to the commentary HaKotev to Ein Yaakov, the collected aggadic passages of the Talmud. It is also quoted by Maharal in *Netivot Olam, Ahavat Re'a 1*.

neighbours – count for little until they are turned into habits of action that become habits of the heart. We can all recall moments of insight or epiphany when we suddenly understood what life is about, what greatness is, and how we would like to live. A day, a week, or at most a year later the inspiration fades and becomes a distant memory and we are left as we were before, unchanged.

Judaism's greatness is that it gave space to both prophet and priest, to inspirational figures on the one hand, and on the other, daily routines – the halakhah – that take exalted visions and turn them into patterns of behaviour that reconfigure the brain and change how we feel and who we are.

One of the most unusual passages I have ever read about Judaism written by a non-Jew occurs in William Rees-Mogg's book on macro-economics, *The Reigning Error*.<sup>4</sup> Rees-Mogg (1928-2012) was a financial journalist who became editor of *The Times*, chairman of the Arts Council and vice-chairman of the BBC. Religiously he was a committed Catholic.

He begins the book with a completely unexpected paean of praise for halakhic Judaism. He explains his reason for doing so. Inflation, he says, is a disease of inordinacy, a failure of discipline, in this case in relation to money. What makes Judaism unique, he says, is its legal system. This has been wrongly criticised by Christians as drily legalistic. In fact, Jewish law was essential for Jewish survival because it "provided a standard by which action could be tested, a law for the regulation of conduct, a focus for loyalty and a boundary for the energy of human nature."

All sources of energy, most notably nuclear energy, need some form of containment. Without that, they become dangerous. Jewish law has always acted as a container for the spiritual and intellectual energy of the Jewish people. That energy "has not merely exploded or been dispersed; it has been harnessed as a continuous power." What Jews have, he argues, modern economies lack: a system of self-control that allows economies to flourish without booms and crashes, inflation and recession.

The same applies to leadership. In *Good to Great*, management theorist Jim Collins argues that what the great companies have in common is a culture of discipline. In *Great By Choice* he uses the phrase "the 20 mile march," meaning that outstanding organisations plan for the marathon, not the sprint. Confidence, he says, "comes not from motivational speeches, charismatic inspiration, wild pep rallies, unfounded optimism, or blind hope."<sup>5</sup> It comes from doing the deed, day after day, year after year. *Great*

<sup>4</sup> William Rees-Mogg, *The Reigning Error: The crisis of world inflation*, London, Hamilton, 1974, 9-13.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, London, Random House Business, 2001. *Great By Choice*, London, Random House Business Books, 2011.

companies use disciplines that are specific, methodical and consistent. They encourage their people to be self-disciplined and responsible. They do not over-react to change, be it for good or bad. They keep their eye on the far horizon. Above all, they do not depend on heroic, charismatic leaders who at best lift the company for a while but do not provide it with the strength-in-depth they need to flourish in the long run.

The classic instance of the principles articulated by Burns, Rees-Mogg and Collins is the transformation that occurred between Ki Tissa and Acharei Mot, between the first Yom Kippur and the second, between Moses' heroic leadership and the quiet, understated priestly discipline of an annual day of repentance and atonement.

Turning ideals into codes of action that shape habits of the heart is what Judaism and leadership are about. Never lose the inspiration of the prophets, but never lose, either, the routines that turn ideals into acts and dreams into achieved reality. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he three main vices that tempt leadership are misuse of power, greed and sexual licentiousness. We here in Israel are unfortunately well aware of all of these vices. We know how they have affected our political leaders and even important national decisions. The Torah, here in our weekly parsha reading, addresses both directly and indirectly these dangers and vices.

The two sons of Aaron that died during the dedication of the Tabernacle/Mishkan exploit their priestly power. They were convinced that they had the right to substitute their own form of worship and service for the instructions that they were given by G-d through Moshe. The Talmud also ascribes to them impatience and unacceptable ambition.

They looked at their father and uncle and thought: "When will these two old men pass from the scene so that you and I can become the leaders of the generation." The corruption of power affects even the closest family bonds and relationships. The Torah sees itself as the final arbiter of power, clearly limiting and defining in detail the roles and actions of the priests and kings of Israel.

The prophets of Israel, as well as its religious leaders throughout the generations, always served as a brake against runaway power. The moral law was meant to accomplish what the legal law alone would be unable to achieve. The value system of the Torah, with its stress on humility, obedience to the law and the realization that the Lord takes all of our actions into consideration and judgment, is meant to temper and channel ambition and power into the constructive national good.

We are warned against the vice of greed. The Talmud states the case very succinctly: "He who has one hundred, wishes to have two hundred." Such is human nature. The Torah warns us many times against the corruption that the pursuit of wealth can bring to leadership. It blinds otherwise great leaders and distorts and skews the thoughts and words of even holy people.

Even a cursory review of the books of the prophets of Israel reveals constant emphasis on rooting out corruption and graft from the highest levels of government. Of course, this innate quality of greed, which exists amongst us all, when it is combined with the above described vice of overreaching power, becomes lethal to all concerned. It is greed that blinds our vision to the consequences of our behavior. Greed forces us to somehow believe that enough is never enough.

This week's parsha clearly details for us the forbidden sexual relationships enjoined by Torah law. This section of the parsha constitutes the Torah reading for the afternoon services of Yom Kippur. A holy people cannot be a society that condones all types of sexual activity and promiscuity. This type of behavior has become the scourge of our society. Untold tragedies and family dysfunction have resulted because of this very dubious type of "freedom" that is now such an entrenched part of Western civilization.

The Torah again points the way towards normal, productive and healthy living. All of the lessons and messages of this week's Torah reading should be the constitutional basis for current Jewish life and our continuing national renaissance. ©2014 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

"**A**nd you shall observe My decrees and My laws which a human being shall perform and he shall live by them; I am the Lord." (Leviticus 18:5). It is fascinating that our Bible commands us to perform the laws and statutes of the Lord, and then it adds "and he shall live by them." Would any moral individual think to perform laws that could cause them to die? Our Sages use this seemingly superfluous phrase to teach a most important lesson, one which distinguishes Judaism from some other religions: "You shall live by these My laws and not die by them. If someone says to you, 'Desecrate the Sabbath or I'll kill you,' you must desecrate the Sabbath; desecrate one Sabbath so that you will live to observe many more Sabbaths" (BT, Yoma 85b).

Our religion revels in life. To be sure, there are instances when one must be ready to die for one's faith, but this is limited to three most egregious crimes: murder, sexual immorality and idolatry. If one says to a Jew "kill X or I'll kill you; rape Y or I'll kill you," the Jew must give up his or her life rather than commit these crimes. Similarly, in times of persecution, Jews must demonstrate that they will not give in to gentile pressure - even pressure unto death - to relinquish their faith. But under ordinary conditions, no Jewish law overrides the preservation of human life.

Even the famous test of Abraham, the apparent Divine command that Abraham sacrifice his son to Him, concludes with Abraham being forbidden to harm his son (Kierkegaard notwithstanding). The most classic commentary, Rashi, even goes so far as to say that Abraham misunderstood the Divine command, that G-d never meant that he should slaughter his son, but rather dedicate him in life and not in death.

Unlike the Christian symbol of the cross, which eternalized the martyrdom of the founder of Christianity, and far from the glory some militant Islamic groups ascribe to the shahidim - the so-called martyrs who are urged (and handsomely paid) to blow themselves up together with innocent Israelis amid the promise of eternal bliss with 72 virgins-Judaism has never courted martyrdom.

Indeed, our priests-kohanim aren't even allowed to come into contact with a dead body, so consistent are we in promoting Judaism as a life-fostering and this-world oriented religion.

What still remains strange and difficult to understand is that immediately following the biblical mandate to "live by G-d's laws," in our weekly portion of Acharei Mot comes a long list of prohibited sexual relationships which fall under the rubric of "one must die rather than transgress." If living by G-d's laws is so important, why follow that stricture with laws for which one must be willing to die rather than transgress?

I believe the answer is to be found in a difficult conundrum suggested by the Elders of the Negev. The Talmud (BT, Tamid 32b) records a discussion between Alexander the Great and the Elders of the Negev: Alexander asked, "What ought people do if they wish to keep on living?" The Elders answered, "They must slay themselves". Asked Alexander: "What ought people do if they wish to die?" Answered the Elders. "They should try to stay alive!" Permit me to explain. Let us answer the second question first. If an individual lives only in order to keep on living, he is bound to fail, and he will die in the end; after all, I am not aware of any individual who got out of this world alive! Hence if a person wishes to die, let him continue to try to stay alive forever. He will surely die because he will surely fail.

And what ought someone do if he wants to keep on living? Let him slay himself, or at least let his find an idea to live for which is more significant than his

own life. Then even if he dies in pursuit of that ideal, his life will have gained ultimate meaning, and he himself will be linked to eternity.

Martin Luther King, Jr. put it very well in his Detroit speech in June 1963: "And I submit to you that if a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he ain't fit to live."

The only life that is truly meaningful is a life dedicated to an idea which is greater than one individual's life.

Hence our portion praised the value of life, "You shall live by My laws," appears within the context of a group of laws for which one must be willing to give up his life. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**hose In this week's portion, the Torah tells us that Aharon (Aaron) the High Priest, cast lots upon two goats, "one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for Azazel." (Leviticus 16:8)

Rashi explains the procedure as follows: "One goat he (Aharon) placed on his right hand, the other on his left. He then put both hands in the urn, took one lot in each hand and placed it upon the corresponding goat. One of the lots was inscribed 'for the Lord' and the other 'for Azazel.'" Ibn Ezra explains that Azazel was a height from which the goat was hurled.

Sforno argues that the goat inscribed "for the Lord" was sacrificed as an offering to atone for sins committed in connection with the Sanctuary. The goat sent away was meant to expiate the sins of the community. (Sforno, Leviticus 16:5)

Other explanations come to mind. It can be suggested that the lots teach us that there are aspects of life that are based purely on mazal. This doesn't mean that we do not have the power to precipitate change. What it does teach however, is that in life we all face a certain fate over which we have no control. The Talmud says it this way "life, children and sustenance are not dependant upon merit but on mazal." (Moed Katan 28a) No wonder we read about the lots on Yom Kippur, the day in which we recognize that there are elements of life that are only in the hands of G-d.

The Talmud also notes that the goats were similar in appearance, height, size and value (Yoma 62 a,b). Yet, a slight shift of Aharon's hand brought about different destinies for the goats—one to the Lord, the other to Azazel.

It has been noted that life is a game of inches. This is even true in the world of sports. For example, a hard ground ball to the short stop could result in a double play. Had the ball gone an inch to the left or right, the winning run could have been driven in. So too in worldly affairs. It is often the case that an infinitesimal amount can be the difference between life and death,

between belief and heresy, between doing the right and wrong thing.

This may be the deepest message of the lots. The slightest movement could make the difference between heaven and earth, between being sent to the Lord and being cast to Azazel. ©2003 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 YISSOCHER FRAND

## RavFrand

**T**he Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos on our parsha quotes a Medrash that clearly speaks to our times. The Medrash, discussing the death of Aharon's two sons, who were consumed by fire for having offered a "foreign fire" on the Mizbayach, links this incident with a pasuk in Tehillim [78:63]: "Fire consumed His young men, and His maidens had no marriage celebration." The Medrash comments: Why were the two young sons of Aharon consumed by fire? It was because they allowed the young maidens to go unmarried. In other words, they were punished for not having gotten married themselves. Many young maidens remained single waiting for the prospect that one of these two very eligible bachelors would marry them.

Nadav and Avihu said to themselves (according to the Medrash) "Our uncle (Moshe Rabbeinu) is King, our father (Aharon) is the Kohen Gadol, our other uncle is Prince, we are Vice-Priests (Seganei Kehunah) -- which woman is good enough for us?" That is why they never got married. They thus died without children.

The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos uses this Medrash to explain an apparent redundancy in the pasuk: "After the death of the two sons of Aharon when they approached before Hashem and they died." [Vayikra 16:1]. The first expression "After the death" refers to their own death; the second expression "and they died" refers to the fact that they died childless and had no one to carry on their lineage."

We need to understand that we are speaking about Nadav and Avihu, who our Sages say were righteous individuals, pillars of the world. We cannot speak of their faults in the same way that we speak of the faults of other people. We do not understand who they were and we certainly cannot ascribe pettiness to them. Moreover, I am acutely aware because of the position I occupy, how difficult it is sometimes for a young man to find a suitable marriage partner. There are certainly young men who try and try and try as they might, yet they cannot readily find their destined soul-mate. This is not always because of over pickiness or pettiness. Sometimes they get turned down; whatever it is, this is sometimes the reality.

However, all that having been said, the lesson

we need to learn from this Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos is that Nadav and Avihu rejected too many girls because they thought that they were not good enough for them. Part of what is happening in our society today -- and this is a crises in our society -- is that there are so many single men and single women who are not getting married. Again, I am not making universally applicable accusations, but certainly PART of the problem is that people are looking for perfection. The girl needs to have everything. She needs to be beautiful and she needs to have money and she needs to have yichus and she must have this and must have that, the list goes on. If they do not fit all the categories on my list, she is not good enough for me (and vice versa).

The problem is that we have become such a pampered society and we can achieve perfection in so many areas of life that we think we can achieve perfection in 'shidduchim' as well. We can order a car and the car can be exactly to our liking from the exterior color to the interior color to the sound system, to all the options and bells and whistles. Forget cars -- we can go into the coffee aisle of the supermarket. It used to be that there was Folgers and Maxwell House, and that was it. Today, there are so many options of how to order a cup of coffee -- to custom design it to one's ultimate taste of perfection -- that we expect to be able to custom design our future spouses as well! The problem is that people are not cars and they are not coffee. People are NOT perfect. One should not expect to achieve perfection in this area of life.

We need to stress and stress again to our single young men and women in the community that we cannot achieve perfection in a shidduch. The 'list' has to be cut down to one or two major items and that is it! If there is any lesson we can take out from the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu, this is that lesson. ©2014 Rabbi Y. Frand and torah.org

### RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

## Symbolism Over Substance

**T**he entire Seder ceremony is replete with symbolic gestures. We drink four cups of wine to represent four Biblical expressions of redemption. We dip and lean like kings to represent freedom, and eat bitter herbs to remind us about the bitter slavery. We also eat other symbolic foods that portray our Egyptian bondage: salt water to remember tears, and charoses, a mixture of apples, nuts and wine that looks like mortar, to remind us of the laborious years in Egypt.

The service is truly filled with symbolism -- some direct, and some seemingly far-fetched -- and all the symbols are meant to remind us of the slavery we endured centuries ago. But, why not take a direct approach? There are overt ways to declare our

gratitude, and there are more immediate ways to mark the celebration. Why don't we just recite the four expressions of redemption as part of the liturgy instead of drinking four cups of wine to symbolize them? Why don't we actually place mortar on the table (problem of muktzeh not withstanding) instead of making a concoction to represent it? And instead of reminding ourselves of backbreaking work by eating horseradish, why not lift heavy boxes?

A Jewish intellectual in post-war England approached Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky, who headed the London Beth Din, with a cynical question: "In reviewing our Hagadah service," he sniped, "I was shocked at the insertion of, 'Who Knows One', a childish nursery rhyme, at the end. Why would the sages put a silly rhyme -- 'One is Hashem, two are the Tablets, three are the fathers,' and so on, at the end of the solemn, intellectual Seder night service? It is very unbecoming!"

Rabbi Abramsky was not shaken. "If you really want to understand the depth of that song, then you must travel north to the town of Gateshead. There you will find a saintly Jew, Reb Elya Lopian. I want you to discuss the meaning of every aspect of life with him. Ask him what are the meaning of the sea and fish, ask him what is the meaning of the sun and the moon. Then ask him what is the meaning of one, of six, of eleven and so on."

The philosopher was very intrigued. He traveled to Gateshead and located the Yeshiva at which Reb Elya served as the Mashgiach (spiritual advisor). He was led into the room where a saintly looking man greeted him warmly.

"Rabbi, I have many questions," the skeptical philosopher began. "What is the meaning of life?" "What is the essence of the stars?"

Rabbi Lopian dealt with each question with patience, depth, and a remarkable clarity. Then the man threw out the baited question. "What is the meaning of the number one?"

Rabbi Lopian's face brightened, his eyes widened, and a broad smile spread across his face. "The meaning of one?" he repeated. "You would like to know the meaning of one? One is Hashem in the heaven and the earth!"

The man was shocked. "What about the depth of the numeral five?"

"Five?" repeated the sage. Why five has tremendous symbolism! It represents the foundation of Judaism -- the Five Books of Moses!" The rabbi then went on to explain the mystical connotations that are represented by the number five, and exactly how each Book of the Torah symbolizes a component of the sum.

The man left with a new approach and attitude toward the most simple of our rituals.

At the Seder, we train ourselves to find new meaning in the simple things in life. We teach ourselves

to view the seemingly mundane with historical and even spiritual significance. We should remember that when Moshe saw a burning yet non-consumed bush, he realized that his nation is similar -- constantly persecuted and harassed, yet never consumed. At our Seder, we view horseradish not as a condiment for gefilte fish, but as representative of our suffering. The Matzoh is no longer a low-fat cracker, but symbolizes the hardships of exile and the speed of our redemption. In addition, we finish the Seder with a simple song that reminds everyone at the Seder, next time you ask, "who's number one?" don't accept the answer: the New York Yankees or the Chicago Bulls -- think on a higher plane! One is Hashem in the heaven and the earth!  
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### RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

## Haftorah

**T**his week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Hagadol, depicts the Jewish scene moments before the advent of Mashiach. Malachi, the last prophet before our first exile, shares with us the prevalent conversations during the final moments of our final exile. The masses of our people will reflect upon the generation's unprecedented affluence and conclude that Torah observance is a wasted exercise. Their argument will be, "What material gain has ever come from observing His commandments or walking the downtrodden path for His sake? We constantly praise the agnostics and the wicked who met much success and yet, escaped the wrath of Above." (3:14, 15) The impressive financial success of so many unaffiliated Jews will suggest an indifference on the side of Hashem, almost to the extent of condoning their inexcusable behavior.

What will be the response of the righteous? The prophet continues, "Then the G-d fearing people will speak amongst themselves and Hashem will hearken, listen and preserve the comments of those who revere Him and respect His name." (3:16) During those dark moments G-d fearing people will be scarce. However, those who will endure and persevere, despite the fierce influences of exile, will remain steadfast in their faith. They will gather and strengthen one another sharing their true perspectives on life. They do not seek tangible benefits from life and certainly do not expect a reward in this finite world (see Malbim to 3:16) Their service is based on reverence and respect rather than reward or material gain. To them, the absence of fame or financial success will not present a serious challenge to their commitment. Instead, they will patiently await the era of redemption wherein the glory of Hashem will become revealed to all.

Our Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (591) explain this unwavering faith with the following parable. The queen was once confronted by a maidservant in the midst of a dark night. The latter argued that she was more

attractive than the queen herself! The queen responded calmly, "Say all you wish now because tomorrow in the light of day the truth will be revealed." In the same vein righteous people, during our dark exile, find themselves at a serious disadvantage. In the absence of Hashem's clear revelations, anything can be presented and said. Allusions can easily be construed that promise eternal bliss for those who walk the unethical and immoral path. It requires men of great character and commitment to rise above public opinion and speak the truth. Their response to this senseless talk is, "The truth is around the corner." "Soon Mashiach will arrive and the clear revelations of Hashem will tell the real story." Regarding these devout, the prophet says, "And for you who fear Hashem a gracious and healing sun will shine upon you." (3:20) Those who firmly awaited the light of redemption will merit its light, the brilliant radiance of Hashem. The light of day will finally arrive and those clear perspectives of the righteous will become self evident truths.

In truth, these very same discussions took place in Egypt and served as an essential factor in the preservation of our people. The Midrash Rabba (Shmos 5:18) reveals to us that the Jewish people observed Shabbos long before they were commanded. In defense of his people, Moshe Rabbeinu approached Pharaoh and insisted on a day of rest. After being granted his request, Moshe conveniently dedicated the seventh day of the week for this purpose. The Midrash adds that the Jewish people effectively utilized this day to study scrolls of redemption. In the midst of heavy persecution, the Jews maintained their faith in Hashem. Although no trace of Hashem could be seen, they remained devoted to Him. They didn't question Hashem's lack of involvement and were not influenced by the darkness of their exile. Although their wicked taskmasters enjoyed a comfortable life this could not seduce the Jewish people into straying from Hashem. They, too, gathered together and encouraged each other with the truths of Hashem. They understood that daylight would eventually arrive and, in the radiance of Hashem, the truth would become self evident. In this merit, they did experience those long awaited results. Eventually, Hashem did shine His light upon them as it says, "For the Jewish people there was light in their settlement." (Shmos 10:23) May we merit to experience this light speedily in our days. © 2014 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

### RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

## Weekly Dvar

**D**id you know that the airline safety announcements were taken from this week's Parsha, Acharei Mot? When the Torah says that the Kohen Gadol (high priest) worked for forgiveness of himself, his family and of the nation as a whole (16:17), one should wonder why he couldn't just work on forgiveness for everyone,

which would clearly also include himself and his family.

The answer is that before we can think about fixing the world, we need to fix ourselves and our immediate surroundings. As the airlines say, "secure your mask before assisting others." What's even more interesting in the wording is that the word "forgiveness" is only mentioned once, and yet it affects the Kohen, his family and the entire nation. It seems that a single positive action can have the affect of improving ourselves, our families AND the nation, all at once. It's clear from this that finding ways to improve ourselves has a cumulative affect far greater than the improvements themselves, an important concept which should motivate us to secure our own mask of introspection. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### **Taking a Closer Look**

**"T**he judgment of the Egyptians [lasted for] 12 months" (Eiduyos 2:10). There is much discussion about what this "judgment" consisted of, and how it could have lasted for 12 months. The starting point for much of the discussion is Rashi's explanation of the "seven days" given for the plague of blood (Sh'mos 7:25); "the plague was active for a quarter of a month (the seven days mentioned in the verse) and [for] three [quarters of the month] he (Moshe) warned them (about the next plague)." If each plague lasted for one month, and there were 10 plagues, the "judgment of Egypt" should have only lasted 10 months, not 12. Why are there two additional months that are considered part of the "judgment of Egypt," and what was happening for them to be considered part of their judgment? Numerous approaches have been suggested to deal with this issue.

Y'feh To'ar, commenting on Sh'mos Rabbah (9:12, the Midrash that Rashi is based on), says explicitly that this Midrash is not consistent with the Mishna in Eiduyos, as according to the Midrash the "judgment of Egypt" only lasted nine months (one month each for the first nine plagues; the tenth plague followed immediately after the ninth, so no additional time passed). However, there is no need (aside from thereby sidestepping having to reconcile the Mishna with the Midrash) to say that the term "judgment" must refer to the actual plagues. As a matter of fact, the Vilna Ga'on, in his commentary on Seder Olam (3), says that even though "the plagues of Egypt [lasted] 12 months," Seder Olam does not mean "the plagues" literally, as the 12 months started from the time G-d spoke to Moshe at the burning bush, which Seder Olam (5) says was during the time of Pesach. (The Vilna Ga'on brings a couple of proofs that Seder Olam could not have meant that the actual plagues lasted 12 months.) Therefore, even though attributing the discrepancy between the Mishna and the Midrash to a difference of

opinion avoids having to attempt a reconciliation, the attempt to understand what the Mishna meant by "the judgment of Egypt" is much more inviting than just sweeping the issue aside.

Midrash Seichel Tov is among the commentators who count incomplete months in the number 12. Moshe and Aharon came to Paro at the end of Iyar in 2447, and the nation left in the middle of Nisan 2448, so when you add those two partial months to the ten complete months in between them, you have a "judgment" of "12 months." Among the issues this approach has to deal with is that the "12 months" of the "judgment of the Egyptians" is just one set of "12 months" listed in the Mishna, and the others seem to be complete months without having to count any partial months. As a matter of fact, if we count partial months as months, the "generation of the flood" would have been judged for 13 months, not 12, as Noach entered the ark on the 17th day of the 7th month (B'raishis 7:11) and the land "dried" on the 27th day of the 7th month of the following year (B'raishis 8:14, with the extra 11 days completing a solar year).

Rav Yaakov Emden (Lechem Shamayim, his commentary on the Mishna) suggests that Moshe went to see Paro (Pharaoh) in the middle of Nisan (2447), asking him to send G-d's people out, at which point G-d started "sitting in judgment of the Egyptians" and Paro started to feel G-d's punishment (as his power was being challenged). A month later (in the middle of Iyar), Moshe went back to Paro, which was when he and Aharon did the snake/stick trick (Sh'mos 7:10). After another month (till the middle of Tamuz) the process of the first plague began. By adding two months before the first plague, and explaining why they were considered part of the "judgment of Egypt," our issue has been resolved. However, other issues are now raised in its place.

Seder Olam uses Iyar as a reference point in his timeline (how it is used depends on how his timeline is understood, a matter of discussion that we will put aside for now) because that is when the straw Paro made the Children of Israel collect (Sh'mos 5:7) is available in the fields. Paro added this task right after Moshe's first trip to Paro, which Rabbi Emden says was in the middle of Nisan, not in Iyar. Nevertheless, Seder Olam (5) says that Moshe spent a week trying to get out of being the person to take the nation out of Egypt, meaning that he left the "burning bush" with only a week left in Nisan, not halfway through it. And he went back to Midyan to get his family and take leave of his father-in-law (Sh'mos 4:18-20) before heading to Egypt, which had to take more than one day (since G-d had to tell Moshe again in Midyan to go back to Egypt, see 4:19, and he stayed at an inn on the way to Egypt, see 4:24). All of this occurred before going to Paro, meaning that Moshe didn't see Paro the first time until the very end of Nisan (at the earliest), which fits with

the “straw season” being in Iyar. Although this removes the possibility of there being exactly 12 months from Paro’s first refusal to send the Children of Israel out until they actually left Egypt, if we include the drowning in the sea as part of their “judgment” (which is quite reasonable), we can be off by only a couple of days (in the last week of Nisan).

Other issues with this approach that need to be resolved are the Midrashim (e.g. Bamidbar Rabbah 11:2) that say Moshe disappeared for three months after he saw Paro the first time before going back to see him the second time, as well as the fact that a month is not needed for the tenth plague (Rabbi Emden only accounts for two “missing months,” not three). However, if the plagues started a month later (in Av), and we move the “snake/stick” scene to shortly before the first plague, we have a three month interval between Moshe’s first visit to Paro and his second.

Midrash HaGadol (7:25) is among the sources who say that even though each plague lasted for a month, there was a week in between one plague and the warning of the next one. First Moshe would warn Paro about the upcoming plague for (approximately) three weeks, then the plague would last a week (to complete the month), then G-d would wait a week before sending Moshe to warn Paro about the next one. If we don’t put a week between the ninth and tenth plagues (since they came back-to-back), and don’t give the tenth plague its own month (since the nation left the next day), we are still one month short. Nevertheless, if we don’t need a three week warning before the third, sixth and ninth plagues either (since the Torah doesn’t mention Moshe going to Paro before these plagues), we now have three months plus an additional week that we can assign to Moshe’s disappearance. Some (e.g. Or Hachayim on Sh’mos 7:25) say that when Paro asked Moshe to remove the plague, that plague didn’t last a full week. If that plague’s “month” was thereby cut short, and the week between plagues started right away rather than waiting until the previous plague would have ended, the extra week besides the three months attributed to Moshe’s disappearance could easily be accounted for.

Seder HaDoros has Moshe’s three month disappearance coming after the first plague. By adding three months to the nine months of the first nine plagues, a “12 month judgment” started with the first plague and ended after the tenth plague. However, the first plague couldn’t have started until, at the earliest, the very end of Nisan 2447 (accounting for the week spent by the burning bush, the trip to and from Midyan, the first two trips to Paro (made before the third trip when Paro was warned about the first plague, see Sh’mos 7:14-17), and all that happened in between those first two trips (adding to the chores of the slaves, their complaints to Paro about it, the complaints to Moshe for making things worse, and Moshe complaint

to G-d for making it worse, see 5:6-23), while the tenth plague hit in the middle of Nisan 2448, leaving us about a half a month short of 12 months. Additionally, Moshe’s three month disappearance can be easily explained if it occurred after his first trip to Paro made things worse (the Midrashim that mention his disappearance are discussing this time period). But why would Moshe disappear for three months after the plagues had already started?

[It should be noted that some Midrashim (e.g. Sh’mos Rabbah 5:20) have Moshe disappearing for six months, not three. It is obviously much more difficult to make this time frame work if each plague lasted a month and we are limited to a 12 month period of time. (Midrash Seichel Tov says that according to this opinion the plagues started in Sh’vat -- hence its name, which connotes a stick of retribution -- with each plague lasting a week, i.e. ten plagues in ten weeks.)]

The most straightforward timeline is the one put forth by Y’feh To’ar (see also Y’dai Moshe), despite the fact that he says there’s no need to reconcile the Mishna that says the “judgment of the Egyptians” lasted 12 months with the Midrashim that have each plague lasting a month. (He doesn’t get as specific as I am about to get.) Moshe agreed to go to Paro after a week-long discussion at the burning bush which started on what would become the first day of Pesach. The “12 months” of the “judgment of the Egyptians” started after Moshe agreed to go, and ended when G-d “threw the [Egyptian] chariots and horseman into the sea,” a week after the nation left Egypt. Moshe disappeared for three months after his first visit to Paro because he was so distraught about things having become worse. Although Y’feh To’ar says that each of the first nine plagues last a month (even those where no warning to Paro about it is mentioned in the Torah), it is more likely (as many commentators say explicitly) that there was no warning before the third, sixth or ninth plagues (as each set of three plagues taught a specific message, and once a warning was ignored the first two times for each message, there was no third warning). This gives us an additional nine weeks (or more, if the warnings were longer than 21 days and/or the week of the actual plague was shortened when Paro temporarily gave in), but it allows for a healthy amount of time for Moshe’s return to Midyan, his first trip back to Egypt, and the time between the “snake/stick” showdown and Moshe being instructed to warn Paro about the first plague. As long as we aren’t limited to the “12 months” starting with the first plague (and the Vilna Gaon presents a strong argument why we are not), and the “judgment of Egypt” can start when everything was set to begin their punishment (i.e. Moshe agreeing to be G-d’s messenger), there is no contradiction between the formula for each plague being three weeks of warning plus one week of implementation and the “judgment of Egypt” lasting 12 months. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer