

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

Appreciating the Good

In each of the first two books of the Torah we are introduced to the beginnings of the Jewish people. In the first book of Breishit, the focus is on the family; the three patriarchs and their families- the striving and the bickering within the families. The second book of Shemot begins with the emergence of the Jewish people as an entity, their rise to greatness and their perceived threat and eventual expulsion from the land. It is a story of love and hate, jealousy and adoration. Breishit in essence deals with the beginnings of the family of the Jewish people, while the book of Shmot stresses the initial stages of the formation of the great nation of Israel.

The bridge between both books is the dramatic account of Joseph and his brothers; his rise to power and his innovations in the land of Egypt. Because of his efforts, Shmot begins with the surfacing of the Jewish people as a powerful nation, and finally "there arose a new king of Egypt who did not know of Joseph"-or at least he pretended that he did not know-and the persecuting of the Jews leading to their final ouster from the land.

A dominant theme in the book of Shmot, is the attention to the importance of "Hakarat Hatov", recognizing the good. The Torah references times when Pharaoh did not recognize the good that Joseph had brought upon Egypt, while at the same time spotlighting the sensitivities of our teacher Moses in refusing to punish the Egyptians with the plagues of blood, frogs and lice, for the waters saved his life when he was cast onto the Nile as a baby, and the land rescued him by providing a place to bury the Egyptian that he slew, ultimately saving his life. This theme of "Hakarat Hatov" appears in other instances in this story as well and brings home the lesson of the importance of this attribute in a Jew's daily life.

An added display of the reaction of Almighty G-d when one denies "Hakarat Hatov" can also be seen in the way G-d punishes Pharaoh.

Pharaoh denies Joseph's existence. He rejects any good or benefit that the Jews of Egypt have bequeathed his land. He snubs their existence. G-d's response for this obvious lack of "Hakarat Hatov", recognition for the good, is that the land of Egypt would be inundated with plagues, each a symbol of how Egypt

would have appeared had Joseph not been there during the famine to save it.

The blood represents the lack of water; this leads to the frogs and amphibians engulfing the land in search for water. As a consequence of the lack of water, lice befell the people. Wild animals then ascended upon the land for there was no food to be found and they had no alternative but to seek their sustenance within the vulnerable population of humans. Further, when there is no food the cattle and livestock die (Dever, Pestilence). All these unsanitary conditions lead to boils (Shichin). Finally the hail and the Locusts destroy all the remaining food leaving the land barren and in darkness, ultimately leading to the death of children, the very future of Egypt's existence.

G-d needed to show Pharaoh how his land would have looked had Joseph and all the Jews not been there. The result was desolation and emptiness; total destruction.

In essence, this is also the cycle of Jewish History throughout the ages. Despite contributions of the Jewish people, and their work to better society, they are often taken for granted and are not given the proper Hakarat Hatov, recognition of the good, that they so deserve.

One has only to look at the amount of discoveries in science and medicine, the Arts and in education to appreciate the vital role that the Jews have played. Yet they are constantly ridiculed and blamed for all of the world's troubles, very often becoming the scapegoats for societies.

This is the story of the book of Exodus. And this story is the basis for all the stories of the Jewish sojourn in world history.

In each land that we visit we grace it with our knowledge and drive. We improve their society. When finally we are chased out, often the land we sojourned in is left void and empty. One need only look at the land of Israel after the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash. Only the Jews were able to eventually return in the late 1800's and till the soil and make it fruitful and beautiful; a land flowing with milk and honey.

The message of the importance of Hakarat hatov therefore becomes apparent. Its lack is a plague which also affects Jews as well. It stems from a feeling of entitlement



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and the wielding of power and influence.

How many of us thank the schools that our children attend and receive such a fine education? How many of us thank their teachers, their Rabbis and the people who work so hard to keep the doors of the Day School or Yeshiva open? How many of us thank our parents for all their love and support? And yes, how many of us thank the simple person who performs menial tasks like cleaning the bathrooms at the airport or in our offices? A simple "thank you" would go a long way!

And a simple "thank you" would bring our redemption that much closer! ©2009 Rabbi M. Weiss. Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for over forty years. He and his wife D'vorah recently made Aliya and are living in Allon Shvut. All comments are welcome at rvmordechai@aol.com

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. The impossible had happened. The mightiest army in the ancient world -- the Egyptians with their horse-drawn chariots -- had been defeated and drowned. The people were now free. But the relief proved short-lived. Almost immediately they faced attack by the Amalekites, and they had to fight a battle, this time with no apparent miracles from G-d. They did so and won. This was a decisive turning point in history, not only for the Israelites but for Moses and his leadership of the people.

The contrast between before and after the Red Sea could not be more complete. Before, facing the approaching Egyptians, Moses said to the people: "Stand still and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today... The Lord will fight for you; you need only be silent" (Ex. 14:13). In other words: do nothing. G-d will do it for you. And He did.

In the case of the Amalekites, however, Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us, and prepare for battle against Amalek" (Ex. 17:9). Joshua did so and the people waged war. This was the great transition from a situation in which the leader (with the help of G-d) does it for the people, to one in which the leader empowers the people to do it for themselves.

As this was happening, the Torah focuses our attention on one detail. As the battle began Moses climbed to the top of a hill overlooking the battlefield, with a staff in his hand: "As long as Moses held his hands up, the Israelites prevailed, but when he let his hands down, the Amalekites prevailed. When Moses' hands became weary, they took a stone and placed it under him, so that he would be able to sit on it. Aaron and Chur then held his hands, one on each side, and his hands remained steady until sunset." (Ex. 17:11-12)

What is going on here? The passage could be read in two ways. The staff in Moses hand -- with which he had performed miracles in Egypt and at the sea -- might be a sign that the Israelites' victory was a miraculous one. Alternatively, it might simply be a reminder to the Israelites that G-d was with them, giving them strength.

Very unusually -- since the Mishnah in general is a book of law rather than biblical commentary -- a Mishnah resolves the question: "Did the hands of Moses make or break [the course of the] war? Rather, the text implies that whenever the Israelites looked up and dedicated their hearts to their father in heaven, they prevailed, but otherwise they fell." (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8)

The Mishnah is clear. Neither the staff nor Moses' upraised hands were performing a miracle. They were simply reminding the Israelites to look up to heaven and remember that G-d was with them. This gave them the confidence and courage to win.

A fundamental principle of leadership is being taught here. A leader must empower the team. He cannot do the work for them. They must do it for themselves. But he must, at the same time, give them the absolute confidence that they can do it and succeed. He is responsible for their mood and morale. During the battle he must betray no sign of weakness, doubt or fear. That is not always easy. Moses' hands "became weary." All leaders have their moments of exhaustion. At such times the leader needs support -- even Moses needed the help of Aaron and Hur. In the end, though, his upraised hands were the sign the Israelites needed that G-d was giving them the strength to prevail, and they did.

In today's terminology, a leader needs emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, best known for his work in this field, argues that one of the most important tasks of a leader is to shape and lift the mood of the team: "Great leaders move us. They ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. When we try to explain why they are so effective, we speak of strategy, vision, or powerful ideas. But the reality is much more primal: Great leadership works through the emotions." (Daniel Goleman, *Primal Leadership*, Harvard Business Review Press, 2002, pg 3)

Groups have an emotional temperature. As individuals they can be happy or sad, agitated or calm, fearful or confident. But when they come together as a

group, a process of attunement -- "emotional contagion" -- takes place, and they begin to share the same feeling. Scientists have shown experimentally how, within fifteen minutes of starting a conversation, two people begin to converge in the physiological markers of mood, such as pulse rate. "When three strangers sit facing each other in silence for a minute or two, the one who is most emotionally expressive transmits his or her mood to the other two -- without speaking a single word." (Ibid. pg 7) The physiological basis of this process, known as mirroring, has been much studied in recent years, and observed even among primates. It is the basis of empathy, through which we enter into and share other people's feelings.

This is the basis of one of the most important roles of a leader. It is he or she who, more than others, determines the mood of the group. Goleman reports on several scientific studies showing how leaders play a key role in determining the group's shared emotions: "Leaders typically talked more than anyone else, and what they said was listened to more carefully... But the impact on emotions goes beyond what a leader says. In these studies, even when leaders were not talking, they were watched more carefully than anyone else in the group. When people raised a question for the group as a whole, they would keep their eyes on the leader to see his or her response. Indeed, group members generally see the leader's emotional reaction as the most valid response, and so model their own on it -- particularly in an ambiguous situation, where various members react differently. In a sense, the leader sets the emotional standard." (Ibid., pg 8)

When it comes to leadership, even non-verbal cues are important. Leaders, at least in public, must project confidence even if inwardly they are full of doubts and hesitations. If they betray their private fears in word or gesture, they risk demoralizing the group.

There is no more powerful example of this than the episode in which King David's son Absalom mounts a coup d'etat against his father, proclaiming himself king in his place. David's troops put down the rebellion, in the course of which Absalom dies, caught by his hair in a tree, and stabbed to death by Joab, David's commander-in-chief.

When he hears the news, David is heartbroken. His son may have rebelled against him, but he is still his son and he is devastated by his death, covering his face and crying, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" News of David's grief quickly spreads throughout the army, and they too -- by emotional contagion -- are overcome by mourning. Joab regards this as disastrous. The army have taken great risks to fight for David against his son. They cannot now start regretting their victory without creating confusion and fatefully undermining their morale:

"Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, 'Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and

daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now.'" (2 Samuel 19:6-8)

David does as Joab insists. He accepts that there is a time and place for grief, but not now, not here, and above all, not in public. Now is the time to thank the army for their courage in defence of the king.

A leader must sometimes silence his or her private emotions if he is not to demoralize those he or she leads. In the case of the battle against Amalek, the first battle the Israelites had to fight for themselves, Moses had a vital role to perform. He had to give the people confidence by getting them to look up.

In 1875 an amateur archaeologist, Marcelino de Sautuola, began excavating the ground in a cave in Altamira near the north coast of Spain. At first he found little to interest him, but his curiosity was rekindled by a visit to the Paris exhibition of 1878 where a collection of Ice Age implements and art objects was on display. Determined to see whether he could find equally ancient relics, he returned to the cave in 1879.

One day he took his nine-year-old daughter Maria with him. While he was searching through the rubble, she wandered deeper into the cave and to her amazement saw something on the wall above her. "Look, papa, oxen," she said. They were, in fact, bison. She had made one of the great discoveries of prehistoric art of all time. The magnificent Altamira cave paintings, between 25,000 and 35,000 years old, were so unprecedented a finding that it took twenty-two years for their authenticity to be accepted. For four years Sautoula had been within a few feet of a monumental treasure, but he had missed it for one reason. He had forgotten to look up.

One of the ongoing themes of Tanakh is the need to look up. "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things," says Isaiah (Is. 40:26). "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From there will my help come" said King David in Psalm 121. In Deuteronomy Moses tells the Israelites that the Promised Land will not be like the flat plain of the Nile Delta where water is plentiful and in regular supply. It will be a land of hills and valleys, entirely dependent on unpredictable rain (Deut. 11:10-11). It will be a landscape that forces its inhabitants to look up. That is what Moses did for the people in their first battle. He taught them to look up.

No political, social or moral achievement is without formidable obstacles. There are vested interests to be confronted, attitudes to be changed, resistances to be overcome. The problems are immediate, the ultimate goal often frustratingly far away. Every

collective undertaking is like leading a nation across the wilderness towards a destination that is always more distant than it seems when you look at the map.

Look down at the difficulties and you can give way to despair. The only way to sustain energies, individual or collective, is to turn our gaze up toward the far horizon of hope. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that his aim in philosophy was "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle". The fly is trapped in the bottle. It searches for a way out. Repeatedly it bangs its head against the glass until at last, exhausted, it dies. Yet the bottle has been open all the time. The one thing the fly forgets to do is to look up. So, sometimes, do we.

It is the task of a leader to empower, but it is also his or her task to inspire. That is what Moses did when, at the top of a hill, in full sight of the people, he raised his hands and his staff to heaven. When they saw this, the people knew they could prevail. "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit," said the prophet (Zechariah 4:6). Jewish history is a sustained set of variations on this theme. A small people that, in the face of difficulty, continues to look up will win great victories and achieve great things. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The miracle at the Re(e)d Sea was expressed through song: the song sung by Moses and the Children of Israel and the song sung by Miriam with all of the women, amid drumming and dancing.

The miracle of the revelation at Sinai was expressed through words: "And Moses descended to the nation and he said unto them, 'And G-d spoke all these words, saying...'" (Exodus 19:25, 20:1).

Song and music enter the heart and soul, whereas speech and words speak to the mind, the brain. Song and music create emotions, feelings; while speech and words create understanding and cognition. Song and music develop spirituality and faith; speech and words develop intellect and knowledge. Song and music lead to the wisdom of the heart; speech and words lead to the wisdom of the mind.

Song and music produce religious prophets; speech and words produce learned sages. Song and music can touch every individual deeply and profoundly. Speech and words can only move those with an intellectual background and innate ability.

Song and music reach out to all - as a group experience, inclusive, with everyone joining in. Speech and words - meant for one who understands - are a teaching experience, an exclusive experience in which the most learned dominate.

Hence, Moses sings at the Red Sea, but it is a song-speech; Moses is a master of words and speech, not of music and song. Hence, our Sages delay the

timing of his song to the Messianic Age. Only then, "Moses will truly sing" (Talmud, Sanhedrin 91b). Now, at the Red Sea, Moses speak-sings and he, the teacher, speaks alone, after which everyone repeats the lesson in unison.

"Moses and the children of Israel after him." But Miriam sings with the beat of the drums. She responds to the miracle together with, and at the same time as, all the other women, in the united group experience of ecstatic joy. "And Miriam responded along with them, 'Sing all of you unto the Lord...'" (Ex 15:21) Song and music lead to movement, dance and human embrace. Words and speech lead to meditation, books and authoritative judgments. Song and music lead to the drum of the rhythmic heartbeat.

Words and speech lead to the staff of the ruler and judge. Hence, Moses left a legacy of a Book of Books and a Code of Laws and Commandments, while Miriam left a legacy of a well from which poured living spring waters of regeneration and rebirth.

And as the sea is song-speech, the mountain is the speech-song. The entire nation saw the sounds of Sinai; they saw the words, they saw the cantillations and the musical notes, they heard the music within the commandments and they felt the love within the laws.

A story is told that at a bitterly cold seuda shlishit (third meal of Shabbat), the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) was sitting with his hassidim when he instructed his beadle to go outside into the snow and bring in a teenage boy who was looking and listening through the icy windowpane. "But he is only a young Russian peasant," said the beadle. "He is a Yiddishe neshama [Jewish soul]," the rebbe replied.

The young man was seated next to the rebbe. When the rebbe asked him who he was and where he came from, the boy explained that his Russian-Christian parents had found him one morning on their doorstep.

They had brought him up as their son and taken him to church every Sunday - but he had always felt drawn, as if by a magnet, to Jews and Judaism. "You were left by Jewish parents escaping a pogrom; you are a Jew with a Yiddishe neshama," explained the rebbe.

The rebbe began to speak words of Torah, transporting his hassidim to exalted, supernal heights. "Do you understand?" he asked the boy in Russian. "No, I don't understand," the boy replied. The rebbe began to give an involved analogy, a story within a story. "Do you understand now?" he asked. "No, I don't understand," the confused boy replied. Whereupon the rebbe began to sing a nigun - a tune without words. He sang, his hassidim sang, he clapped his hands and his hassidim clapped their hands.

And then they all rose, clasped hands, linked arms and danced rapturously around the holy ark. And the boy also sang, danced and clapped his hands. With tears streaming down his face, he cried out, "Now I understand, I understand everything, the Torah and the

analogy too!" We must join the staff of Moses to the drums of Miriam, the song-speech of the sea to the speech-song of the mountain, the lovingkindness of Miriam's well to the laws of Moses. Moses' commandments, the wisdom of the heart, must be joined to the hermeneutic interpretations of the mind. Then everyone will understand everything. ©2014 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The centerpiece of this week's parsha is naturally the great song of Moses and of the Jewish people after their moment of deliverance from Pharaoh and the flooding sea. This song of Moses and of Israel is repeated daily throughout the centuries of Jewish life in our morning prayer service.

The exultation of the moment is still retained and felt many generations later in the unmatched prose and poetry written in the Torah. What makes this song unique is that there is no reference to human bravery, to the courage of the Jewish people in plunging into the sea or to the leadership of Moses and Aaron in shepherding the Jewish people through this crisis. Rather the entire poem/song is a paean of praise and appreciation dedicated to the G-d of Israel.

G-d operates, so to speak, through human beings and world events. Many times His presence is hidden from our sight. Sometimes it is even willfully ignored. In later victories and triumphs of the Jewish people and of Israel, it is the human element that helps fashion those victories and triumphs that is acknowledged and celebrated.

But here in the song of Moses and Israel we have an acknowledgement of G-d's great hand without ascribing any credit to human beings and natural and social forces. I think that this is perhaps the one facet that makes this song so unique. Compare it to the song of Deborah, which forms the haftora to this week's parsha. In that song the prophetess assigns a great deal of credit to the armed forces of Israel, to Barak its general, and even to Deborah herself, a fact that does not escape the notice of the rabbis of the Talmud. No such self-aggrandizement appears in the song of Moses and Israel at Yam Suf.

This is completely in line with the character of Moses who is described in the Torah as being the most humble and self-effacing of all human beings. There is no question that without Moses there would not have been an exodus from Egypt nor salvation of Israel on the shores of the Yam Suf. But it would be completely out of character for Moses to assign any of the credit for these enormous and miraculous achievements to himself or his actions and leadership.

Thus the greatest of leaders and the most gifted of prophets attains that championship of leadership and prophecy by downplaying his role.

Moses is well aware of his greatness and his unique relationship with the G-d of Israel. He is not naïve enough to think of himself as a plain ordinary human being. To do so would really be a form of ersatz humility. But he is wise enough to realize that this exalted status that he has attained is little more than a gift that G-d has bestowed upon him.

From the beginning of his leadership career, when he attempted to refuse becoming the leader of Israel till his last days on earth, he retains this innate humility, which in fact allows him to be the strongest of leaders and most courageous of prophets. There is a lesson in this for all later generations and for all of us that aspire to positions of leadership and importance. That is why this song of Moses and Israel is repeated daily in Jewish life. ©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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

An examination of the first time Jews praised G-d after leaving Egypt offers an understanding of two distinct models of approaching G-d.

In the song after the splitting of the sea, the Jews proclaimed: "This is my G-d and I will glorify him ve-anveihu; the G-d of my father and I will exalt him, va-aromemenhu." (Exodus 15:2)

One approach to G-d is that of "Elokei avi, the G-d of my father," to believe simply because of my inherited history, to believe because my parents believe.

Hence, the text states va-aromemenhu; from the root rum meaning "above." In other words, although G-d is above me and I have little personal relationship with Him, nonetheless, I accept G-d because my parents accepted Him.

A second approach is implicit in the first part of the sentence. Here the Jews proclaimed, "This is my G-d, zeh Kei-lee," the G-d with whom I have a very personal relationship.

Hence, the modifying term ve-anveihu (and I will glorify Him). Anveihu is a compound of ani-Hu. This is what Martin Buber referred to as the most intense of relationships, that of the I-Thou. This points to one who has a personal relationship with G-d, and believes because he or she has been closely touched by the Almighty.

Which approach is more meaningful and more critical? Since both are mentioned, each has truth. Indeed, when reciting the amidah, we similarly state that, "G-d is our G-d Elokeinu" and, "G-d is the G-d of our ancestors Elokei Avoteinu, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Note the inclusion of both a personal relationship and a belief in G-d because He was the G-d of our patriarchs.

The sequence of these terms in both the biblical text and in the amidah shows us which approach has the most significance. In both instances, G-d is first described as being a personal G-d.

An important educational lesson can be learnt here: It is not enough for parents to expect their children to believe simply because they believe. Transmission of a belief in G-d to our youngsters is not automatic. What is most necessary is an atmosphere wherein a child comes to experience belief through sincere strivings and actions; not merely through rote approaches to prayer and ritual.

Such children are in the best position to maintain their belief and to transmit it to their children and they to their children until the end of time. ©2012 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd G-d did not lead them via the road to the land of the P'lishtim, for it was close, for G-d said, 'lest the nation become regretful when they see war and return to Egypt' (Sh'mos 13:17). The wording of this verse, with two clauses explaining why G-d took the Children of Israel through the desert rather than along the Mediterranean Coast ("because it was close" and "because they might become regretful") has generated much discussion.

Some (quoted by Ibn Ezra; see Ramban and Chizkuni) explain the first clause not as a reason why G-d avoided the coastal road, but a reason why it would have been preferable to take it (it's a much shorter route), with the verse reading "G-d did not lead them via the road to the land of the P'lishtim even though it was closer, because G-d said, 'lest the nation become regretful when they are faced with war and return to Egypt.'" However, since the Torah used the same term ("ki") for both clauses, it would seem that both are meant to explain why G-d chose the route He did.

Rashi combines the two clauses into one, with facing war likely causing the nation to turn around and go back because they were still so close to Egypt (making it easy to return). However, as Ramban points out, if it was meant as one long clause it shouldn't have been interrupted by "for G-d said." Either that part is superfluous, or it should have preceded both parts of the clause (with only one "ki" being necessary).

Chazal give various explanation for both clauses. Among the explanations offered by the Mechilta (and other Midrashim) as to what was "too close" are: that it was too short a distance to return to Egypt (when facing adversity); that it was too close (time wise) to when Avraham had sworn that his children wouldn't harm Avimelech's (see B'reishis 21:23); that it was too early to drive out the Canaanites;

that it was too soon after the Canaanites had destroyed their own property (thinking that the Children of Israel were coming to inherit the land from them) so more time was needed for everything to grow back/be rebuilt; and that entering the Promised Land so soon after the exodus would mean having to take care of it (plowing/planting/harvesting, etc.) instead of having time to learn Torah and absorb it properly. The explanation for the second clause is rather straightforward; the nation might regret leaving Egypt when they are faced with the prospect of fighting a war, a war that they may be able to avoid by taking another route.

The fact that each clause is explained independently, as a separate reason why G-d didn't lead the nation along the Mediterranean coast, indicates that Chazal understood them to be two separate reasons. This would explain why the word "ki" ("for" or "because") is used twice, with each introducing a different reason for G-d not choosing the coastal road. However, it would not explain why the words "for G-d said" are inserted between the two reasons.

The expression "for he said" (or "for He said") is used throughout the Torah as a means of expressing why a certain choice was made. Taking a closer look at one example (which appears twice) may shed light upon why the word "said" is included when giving the reason, even though the word "for" or "because" ("ki") should be enough of an introduction to let us know that what follows is the reason this choice was made.

After escaping Pharaoh's death sentence (Sh'mos 2:15), Moshe ends up in Midyan, where he marries Yisro's daughter, Tziphora (2:21). They have a son, whom Moshe names Gershom, "for he (Moshe) would say 'I was a sojourner in a foreign land'" (2:22, see also 18:3). Later (18:3-4), we learn that Moshe and Tziphora had a second son, Eliezer, "for the G-d of my father helped me, saving me from Pharaoh's sword." Since Gershom was born in Midyan, why did Moshe use the past tense ("I was a sojourner") rather than the present tense ("for I am a sojourner")? Additionally, the order of the names should have been reversed, as first Moshe was first saved from Pharaoh and then he fled to Midyan. Yet Moshe names his firstborn by referencing his living in a strange land and his second son for G-d having saved him.

The Ba'al Haturim (18:4) asks why when referring to Gershom (both in 2:22 and in 18:3) the Torah says "ki amar" (for he said), yet by Eliezer it just states why he was given that name, without prefacing it with "for he said." In order to explain this, the Ba'al Haturim brings a Midrash (Mechilta, Yisro 1:3) that says that before Yisro let Moshe marry his daughter, he made him promise that their first son would worship idols, while any others born could worship Moshe's G-d. Therefore, Gershom, the firstborn, was not circumcised until the angel tried to kill him (4:24-26). [When Tziphora circumcised him, she relinquished Moshe from

this oath.] Moshe wanted it known that he was forced to accept Yisro's condition, so he not only named his son appropriately ("for I was a stranger in a foreign land"), but also explained why he gave him that name ("ki amar"). On the other hand, Moshe didn't want it known that he had killed someone and was sentenced to death because of it, and therefore didn't publicize the reason for Eliezer's name. [Moshav Zekainim (a compilation of the commentary of the Ba'alei Tosfos) says (4:24) that the reason the Torah doesn't call Gershom his "first" son and Eliezer his "second" son (18:3-4), instead referring to each as "one son," is precisely because Eliezer was his first son designated to serve G-d.]

Even though Moshe was saved from Pharaoh before fleeing to Midyan, since it was specifically the first son that had been promised to Yisro, this son had to be named Gershom. Moshav Zekainim (18:3-4; see also Panayach Razah on 18:4) adds that this son could not have been named Eliezer, as it was inappropriate to include G-d's name when referencing a son who was designated to be an idol worshipper. [This is not the place to explain what Moshe, or Yisro, was thinking. Suffice it to say (for now) that some suggest Yisro wanted his grandson to find G-d by first experiencing other forms of worship, as he did, thereby (eventually) having a greater appreciation of the One True G-d.]

While he was still living in Midyan, there was no need for Moshe to explain why he had accepted Yisro's prerequisite. It was only when rejoining his brethren, who were fellow monotheists, that he would want the reason for Gershom's name publicized. Therefore he used the past tense, "for I was a stranger in a foreign land."

The take-away (for our purposes) is that the expression "for he said" refers to when the reason is "said" to others, whether the information is intended for a small audience or a large one. Moshe wanted others to know why he gave his first child the name Gershom (or, more precisely, why he agreed to Yisro's condition), so publicized it ("for he said"). He didn't want to share why his second son was named Eliezer, so the expression "for he said" is not used in connection with his name.

Applying this to our verse, there are two clauses stating why G-d didn't lead the Children of Israel along the coastal road. The first one, "because it was too close," was not shared with anyone (at least not until the text of the Torah was given). Whether because most wouldn't understand why they had to take the long way (even if the reasons, stated above, had been shared with it) or because G-d didn't want to share those reasons yet, we are told why G-d chose the route he did, but those who left Egypt were not privy to this information (at least not right away), so "for G-d said" is not used to introduce this clause. That the nation would be afraid of war, on the other hand, was shared; knowing that taking the coastal road meant going to war was important enough to be explained as soon as they

started traveling. Therefore, before stating the second clause the Torah adds "for G-d said," telling us that this was shared with others right away, when they started on their trip. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI ARI WEISS

Tu b'Shevat

[Ed. note - this was written last year. Tu B'Shevat will be this upcoming Thursday]

This shabbat, besides being Shabbat Shirah, is also Tu B'shevat, the Jewish new year for trees. The importance of trees in Jewish life is expressed in many areas, not the least of which is in this week's parsha, B'Shalach. In it we read how Moshe used a tree to sweeten the waters at Marah, and how the Jews found seventy date palms waiting for them in the oasis of Elim.

Interestingly, the Talmud makes the statement that one who is studying Torah and stops to admire a tree, is worthy of death (although not literally punishable by death). Additionally, we read that no trees were allowed to be planted or cultivated anywhere on the Temple mount in Jerusalem. From these sources, one might question the perspective the sages had regarding trees and their importance, but in truth these statements relate the depth of their understanding regarding the specialness of trees.

Throughout the Torah and Talmud, trees have profound mystical symbolism. The Torah itself is referred to as the "Etz Chaim" - the tree of life. The righteous are likened to the date palm and the mighty cedar, while the book of Shir HaShirim is replete with metaphoric representations of the nation of Israel as trees. Indeed, the connection that a tree has with the ground, while constantly reaching skyward with its limbs is symbolic of the human condition: grounded in the physical, yet striving for the spiritual. In trees we see not only a model of our own spiritual growth, but in fact a representation of our connectedness to our history and G-d Himself.

The meaning, therefore, of the previously mentioned sources, is not, G-d forbid, that our sages didn't appreciate the importance and necessity of the trees. Rather, they understood that our appreciation of plant life needs to be utilized as a method of connecting with the Divine, not as an end in itself. One who loses that connection between G-d's creations and G-d Himself, Heaven forbid, is referred to as a "kotzetz B'nitiyot" - one who severs a tree from that which sustains it. In a similar way, the idolatrous religion of Asheira, involving the worship of trees, evolved when people began to disassociate the trees with G-d, and worshipped the trees as an end in itself. Therefore, on the temple mount, the location of the ultimate connection with G-d, it is not appropriate for there to be representations and symbols. Why notice a tree as a symbol of the connection with the Divine, when you can

partake in the real thing? The same is true with Torah study; one who is connecting with G-d through Torah, but then stops to focus instead on a metaphor of that connection, is missing the proverbial point.

So this Shabbat, on Tu B'Shevat, please take the time to appreciate the beautiful and vital role trees play in our world, but then be sure to thank Hashem for creating them. Indulge in the delicious and nutritious fruits and vegetables with which we've been blessed, but be sure to begin and end with the appropriate blessings, giving praise and thanks to the Creator who saw fit to grace us with His abundance. Use the wonderful creations of this world as stepping stones to bring us even closer to our loving and caring G-d, and our appreciation of those creations will be that much more profound. ©2013 Rabbi A. Weiss

RABBI HERSCHEL SCHACHTER

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In several places the Talmud records (Mishna Yodayim end of chapter 3, Shabbos 13b, Megillah 7a) discussions and debates amongst the Tanoim regarding the inclusion of various seforim in the canon of the kisvei ha'kodesh. Before deciding which seforim to include, how did the Tanoim know that there was supposed to be an entity of kisvei ha'kodesh at all? The chamisha chumshei Torah were dictated word for word and letter for letter to Moshe Rabbeinu by Hakadosh Boruch Hu, and therefore the gemoroh derives halochos from the fact that a specific word is spelled molei or choseir, from seemingly extra words, awkward expressions, or irregular grammatical constructs. Most assume, however, that the seforim in neviim and kesuvim were not dictated min ha'shomayim. (See comment of Netziv to Sheiltos, chapter 8, #10) How, then, did the chachomim know that they should add neviim and kesuvim on to the body of Torah shebichsav?

Rambam (at the end of Hilchos Purim) understood the Talmud Yerushalmi as having said that in the time of moshiach the neviim and kesuvim will lose their kisvei ha'kodesh status. According to his understanding it would seem as if the inclusion of neviim and kesuvim in the canon of kisvei ha'kodesh is merely a horoas shoah m'drabbonon. (Even though Megillas Esther will remain in the times of moshiach, it seems that it will be a text of Torah shebichsav but will not be part of kisvei ha'kodesh; this is a similar notion to the opinion from the days of the Talmud that the Book of Esther was never incorporated into Tanach and yet one can only fulfill the mitzvah m'drabbonon of reading the Megillah if it is written properly on parchment, etc.) However, according to Ra'avad, who thinks that Tanach will remain even after the coming of moshiach, it appears that the idea of the Tanach is a real halacha min haTorah. From where, then, did the anshei k'nesses ha'gedolah know this halacha min haTorah?

Towards the end of parshas B'shalach Hashem used three expressions when instructing Moshe Rabbeinu to record the story of Amalek into the chumash: zos, zikoron, and ba'sefer. The gemoroh (Megillah 7a) comments that this references the division of Torah shebichsav into the three sections of Torah, neviim, and kesuvim.

The expression "zeh hadovor" introducing a nevuah only appears in the chumash when Moshe Rabbeinu was given halochos which will be binding throughout all generations. (See Rashi at the beginning of parshas Matos and the interpretation of the Kedushas Levi there. See B'ikvei Ha'tzon page 135.) Only in these instances did Hashem dictate to him word for word and letter for letter. Perhaps this is the meaning of the gemoroh's comment that the word zos is an illusion to Toras Moshe, since zos has the connotation of direct dictation.

Regarding distinction between neviim and kesuvim, the following comment is attributed to Reb Chaim Soloveitchik: both neviim and kesuvim were composed with ruach hakodesh, but whereas the kesuvim were initially intended to be written down, and only then to be read, and therefore are referred as kesuvim (writings), the books of the neviim were initially intended to serve as prophecies to be delivered orally and only later to be written down and therefore are referred to as neviim based on the biblical expression, "niv sifosayim -- the produce of the lips", i.e. the spoken word. This is also the meaning of the Talmudic statement (Menachos 30a) that Hakadosh Boruch Hu dictated the entire chumash (except for shiras Ha'azinu) to Moshe, and Moshe would first deliver the nevuah orally to Bnei Yisroel and only then write it down. (Netziv in his commentary to Devorim 31:19) Only after the prophecy was first delivered was it considered nevuas Moshe, and only thereafter could it be written down to obtain the status of Toras Moshe. ©2014 Rabbi H. Schachter and the TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

