

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS**

### Hakarat Hatov

#### 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.



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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

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA  
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL  
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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 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 (ravmordechai@aol.com) has been involved in Jewish education for the past forty-six years, serving as principal of various Hebrew day schools. He has received awards for his innovative programs and was chosen to receive the coveted Outstanding Principal award from the National Association of Private Schools. He now resides in Israel and is available for speaking engagements.

### **RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## **Covenant & Conversation**

**T**he first translation of the Torah into another language – Greek – took place in around the second century BCE, in Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy II. It is known as the Septuagint, in Hebrew Hashiv'im, because it was done by a team of seventy scholars. The Talmud however says that at various points the sages at work on the project deliberately mistranslated certain texts because they believed that a literal translation would simply be unintelligible to a Greek readership. One of these texts was the phrase, "On the seventh day G-d finished all the work he had made." Instead the translators wrote, "On the sixth day G-d finished."<sup>1</sup>

What was it that they thought the Greeks would not understand? How did the idea that G-d made the universe in six days make more sense than that He did so in seven? It seems puzzling, yet the answer is simple. The Greeks could not understand the seventh day, Shabbat, as itself part of the work of creation. What is creative about resting? What do we achieve by not making, not working, not inventing? The idea seems to make no sense at all.

Indeed we have the independent testimony of the Greek writers of that period, that one of the things they ridiculed in Judaism was Shabbat. One day in seven Jews do not work, they said, because they are lazy. The idea that the day itself might have independent value was apparently beyond their comprehension. Oddly enough, within a very short period of time, the empire of Alexander the Great began to crumble, just as had the earlier city state of Athens that gave rise to some of the greatest thinkers and writers in history. Civilisations, like individuals, can suffer from burnout. It's what happens when you don't have a day of rest written into your schedule. As Achad ha-Am said: more than the Jewish people has kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jewish people. Rest one day in seven and you won't burn out.

Shabbat, which we encounter for the first time in this week's parsha, is one of the greatest institutions the world has ever known. It changed the way the world thought about time. Prior to Judaism, people measured time either by the sun – the solar calendar of 365 days aligning us with the seasons – or by the moon, that is, by months ("month" comes from the word "moon") of roughly thirty days. The idea of the seven-day week – which has no counterpart in nature – was born in the Torah and spread throughout the world via Christianity and Islam, both of which borrowed it from Judaism, marking the difference simply by having it on a different day. We have years because of the sun, months because of the moon, and weeks because of the Jews.

What Shabbat did and still does is to create space within our lives and within society as a whole in which we are truly free. Free from the pressures of work; free from the demands of ruthless employers; free from the siren calls of a consumer society urging us to spend our way to happiness; free to be ourselves in the company of those we love. Somehow this one day has renewed its meaning in generation after generation, despite the most profound economic and industrial change. In Moses' day it meant freedom from slavery to Pharaoh. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century it meant freedom from sweatshop working conditions of long hours for little pay. In ours, it means freedom from emails, smartphones and the demands of 24/7 availability.

What our parsha tells us is that Shabbat was among the first commands the Israelites received on leaving Egypt. Having complained about the lack of

<sup>1</sup> Babylonian Talmud Megillah 9a.

food, G-d told them that he would send them manna from heaven, but they were not to gather it on the seventh day. Instead a double portion would fall on the sixth. That is why to this day we have two challot on Shabbat, in memory of that time.

Not only was Shabbat culturally unprecedented. It was so conceptually as well. Throughout history people have dreamed of an ideal world. We call such visions, utopias, from the Greek *ou* meaning “no” and *topos*, meaning “place”.<sup>2</sup> They are called that because no such dream has ever come true, except in one instance, namely Shabbat. Shabbat is “utopia now”, because on it we create, for twenty-five hours a week, a world in which there are no hierarchies, no employers and employees, no buyers and sellers, no inequalities of wealth or power, no production, no traffic, no din of the factory or clamour of the marketplace. It is “the still point of the turning world”, a pause between symphonic movements, a break between the chapters of our days, an equivalent in time of the open countryside between towns where you can feel the breeze and hear the song of birds. Shabbat is utopia, not as it will be at the end of time but rather, as we rehearse for it now in the midst of time.

G-d wanted the Israelites to begin their one-day-in-seven rehearsal of freedom almost as soon as they left Egypt, because real freedom, of the seven-days-in-seven kind, takes time, centuries, millennia. The Torah regards slavery as wrong,<sup>3</sup> but it did not abolish it immediately because people were not yet ready for it. Neither Britain nor America abolished it until the nineteenth century, and even then not without a struggle. Yet the outcome was inevitable once Shabbat had been set in motion, because slaves who know freedom one day in seven will eventually rise against their chains.

The human spirit needs time to breathe, to inhale, to grow. The first rule in time management is to distinguish between matters that are important, and those that are merely urgent. Under pressure, the

<sup>2</sup> The word was coined by Sir Thomas More in 1516, who used it as the title of his book of that name.

<sup>3</sup> On the wrongness of slavery from a Torah perspective, see the important analysis in Rabbi N. L. Rabinovitch, *Mesillot Bilvavam* (Maaliyot, 2015), 38-45. The basis of the argument is the view, central to both the Written Torah and the Mishnah, that all humans share the same ontological dignity as the image and likeness of G-d. This was in the sharpest possible contrast to the views, for instance, of Plato and Aristotle. R. Rabinovitch analyses the views of the sages, and of Rambam and Meiri, on the phrase “They shall be your slaves forever” (Lev. 25:46). Note also the quote he brings from Job 31:13-15, “If I have denied justice to any of my servants ... when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when G-d confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One form us both within our mothers?”

things that are important but not urgent tend to get crowded out. Yet these are often what matter most to our happiness and sense of a life well lived. Shabbat is time dedicated to the things that are important but not urgent: family, friends, community, a sense of sanctity, prayer in which we thank G-d for the good things in our life, and Torah reading in which we retell the long, dramatic story of our people and our journey. Shabbat is when we celebrate *shalom bayit* – the peace that comes from love and lives in the home blessed by the *Shekhinah*, the presence of G-d you can almost feel in the candlelight, the wine and the special bread. This is a beauty created not by Michelangelo or Leonardo but by each of us: a serene island of time in the midst of the often-raging sea of a restless world.

I once took part, together with the Dalai Lama, in a seminar (organised by the Elijah Institute) in Amritsar, Northern India, the sacred city of the Sikhs. In the course of the talks, delivered to an audience of two thousand Sikh students, one of the Sikh leaders turned to the students and said: “What we need is what the Jews have: Shabbat!” Just imagine, he said, a day dedicated every week to family and home and relationships. He could see its beauty. We can live its reality.

The ancient Greeks could not understand how a day of rest could be part of creation. Yet it is so, for without rest for the body, peace for the mind, silence for the soul, and a renewal of our bonds of identity and love, the creative process eventually withers and dies. It suffers entropy, the principle that all systems lose energy over time. The Jewish people did not lose energy over time, and it remains as vital and creative as it ever was. The reason is Shabbat: humanity's greatest source of renewable energy, the day that gives us the strength to keep on creating. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**W**e don't require the magical mystery of a Cecil B. DeMille extravaganza production of The Ten Commandments or the dramatic pyrotechnics of the Steven Spielberg depiction of the splitting of the Red (Reed) Sea to marvel in astonishment as the massive waves pugnaciously and punitively buffet and plummet the doomed Egyptians into an icy cold watery grave, then those same waves majestically stand strong and supportive of the marching tribes of Israel, enabling them to find succor and salvation on the dry land between their embracing, protective womb-walls of freedom and security. Israel saw and believed the power of the sight of a supernatural miracle! Now this may well be in consonance with the poetic imagery sung by Moses and the Children of Israel at the time of the splitting of the Red Sea, but it is decidedly not the picture given by the biblical text itself: “Moses extended

his hand over the sea, and the Lord caused the sea to progress with a powerful easterly wind all that night and He turned the sea into dry, damp land, and the waters split [receded]. And so the Children of Israel came into the midst of the sea into dry land [just as the tide was going out]" (Ex.14:21, 22).

The Bible continues to record that just at this moment, the Egyptians dived into the receding waters in hot pursuit of the Hebrews: "Egypt pursued and came after them-every horse of Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen-into the midst of the sea" (ibid. 14:23). But the water was receding, and the land beneath was obviously wet. The chariot wheels of the Egyptian horsemen got stuck in the mud and most came off. The great asset of the Egyptian army suddenly became a game-changing liability; the Egyptians were then busy trying to put together their chariots with their severed wheels mired in the mud.

As they see the Hebrews escaping into the "dry land," they panic, shouting: "I had better flee before Israel, because the Lord is doing battle on their side against Egypt." By this time the high tide returns; the Egyptians running in the opposite direction to the Hebrews flee right into the menacing waters, which completely cover the horsemen, their chariots and the severed wheels, causing every remnant of Egypt to be drowned. From an Israelite perspective, the waters which receded from them but toppled and drowned their Egyptian enemies had truly served as a wall of protection to the right of them and to the left of them (ibid. 14:23-29). And it is at this point that the Israelites-who have just seen the tides working in their favor to such a magnificent extent-declare their faith in the Lord and in Moses, His servant. Is this not strange? Would they not have been better served had they declared their faith in the natural order of things, in science and oceanography? You will certainly remember the famous contest initiated by Elijah the Prophet during the first commonwealth in the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel between the prophet of the Lord and the prophets of the idol Baal. Each had an altar and a sacrificial bull atop Mount Carmel; whichever sacrifice would be accepted by G-d-with a fire descending from heaven consuming the sacrifice-would be the representative of the true G-d. As he fire descends upon Elijah's sacrifice, all 600,000 people in attendance cry out: "The Lord He is our G-d." This is obviously a magnificent miraculous triumph for Elijah (I Kings 18).

In the very next chapter, Elijah goes into the wilderness and begs G-d to take his soul 'for I am no better than my forefathers" (ibid. 19:5). The Lord then sends him to Horeb, Mount Sinai, where He first sends him a great and powerful wind, "but the Lord is not in the wind"; after the wind came an earthquake; after the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord is not in the fire; and after the fire a thin silent voice" (ibid. 19:12)-and apparently therein was to be found the Lord. What

could this possibly mean? Allow me a modern-day midrash: Elijah left Mount Carmel in ecstasy; he had "proven" G-d by means of a supernatural miracle, a fire coming down from heaven and consuming his sacrifice. He was up all that night; after all, 600,000 people had witnessed the miracle-all the former Baal followers would be coming to synagogue the next morning, would be standing on line for the daf yomi class, would be switching their children to religious schools. He had to organize rooms, educators, books and supplies! But, alas, the next morning arrived and there were hardly any additional students. The prophet is dismayed and disillusioned. He has no encore to suggest; he failed even after the miraculous fire from heaven.

G-d explains: It's not the supernatural extravaganzas, the miraculous events, which bring people to G-d. After the Six Day War, which was truly a miracle in our time, there was still no mad rush from the Diaspora to come on aliya. Even after G-d Himself revealed Himself at Sinai, the Hebrews still worshiped the Golden Calf not six weeks after the event.

Indeed, G-d Himself will always be silent. He operates through human beings, through nature, through science, through the life force and the compassionate goodness with which the world pulsates and which each of us must search for and discover. "Where is G-d?" asked the Kotzker Rebbe. He is all around us and even within us. We must search for Him and let Him in! If you but believe in him you will see Him. Just allow your eyes to see the return of G-d to Zion. ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**here is a great difference in the perception of a momentous historic event, between the generation that actually experienced it, was witness to and perhaps even participated in it, and later generations who know of the event through tradition and history. The facts regarding events can be transmitted from one generation to the next, even for thousands of years, but the emotional quality, the pervading actual mood and atmosphere present at the time never survives the passage of time and distance from the event itself.

Perhaps nowhere is this truism more strikingly evident than in the drama of the salvation of the Jewish people at the shores of Yam Suf. At the moment of Divine deliverance, Moshe and Miriam and the people of Israel burst into exalted song, registering their relief and triumph over the destruction of their hated oppressors.

This song of triumph is so powerful that it forms part of the daily prayer service of Israel for millennia. But, though the words have survived and been sanctified by all generations of Jews from Moshe till the present, the original fervor, intensity and aura of that moment is no longer present with us.

The Pesach Hagadah bids us to relive the Exodus from Egypt as though we actually were present then and experienced it. But it is beyond the ability of later generations do so fully and completely. We can recall and relive the event intellectually and positively in an historic vein but the emotional grandeur of the moment has evaporated over time.

We are witness as to how the events of only a century ago – the two great World Wars, the Holocaust, the birth of the State of Israel, etc. – have begun to fade away from the knowledge, memory and recall of millions of Jews today, a scant few generations after these cataclysmic events took place. In this case, it is not only the emotion that has been lost but even the actual facts and their significance – social, religious and national – are in danger of disappearing from the conscious thoughts and behavior of many Jews.

In light of this, it is truly phenomenal that the deliverance of Israel at Yam Suf is so distinctly marked and remembered, treasured and revered in the Jewish memory bank. The reason for this exceptional survival of historic memory is that it was made part of Jewish religious ritual, incorporated in the Torah itself, and commemorated on a special Shabbat named for the event. It thus did not have to rely on historic truth and memory alone to preserve it for posterity.

Religious ritual remains the surest way of preserving historical memory, far stronger than May Day parades and twenty-one gun salutes and salvos. Ritual alone may be unable to capture the emotion and atmosphere of the actual event but it is able to communicate the essential facts and import of the event to those who never witnessed or experienced it. The song of Moshe, Miriam and Israel still reverberates in the synagogues of the Jewish people and more importantly in their minds and hearts as well. ©2016 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 AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**A**n 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. ©2016 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**T**he Torah states: "The entire assembly of the Children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the Wilderness... "You have taken us out to this Wilderness to kill this entire congregation by famine." G-d said to Moses, "Behold! -- I shall rain down for you food from heaven; let the people go out and pick each day's portion on its day." (Ex. 16:2-4).

Rabbi Mendel of Rimanov taught that the manna was a necessary precursor for accepting the Torah. The Torah forbids stealing and coveting others' possessions. It forbids lying, cheating, taking usury and all methods of unlawful enrichment. These laws are in opposition to the innate acquisitive drives within people.

How can people abide by laws that defy innate drives?

The manna served as a lesson that a person would get only that which he actually needed. If he had less, G-d would increase his portion to meet his needs. If he took more than his needs, his greed would result in the excess portion rotting. Once the Israelites developed the trust that G-d would provide for their needs and that accumulating excess was futile, they could accept laws that opposed their acquisitive drives. *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. © 2016 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

### HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

## Bais Hamussar

**A**fter the awesome miracles witnessed at the splitting of the sea, the Torah tells us -- and we recite it daily during Shachris -- "Bnei Yisrael saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Mitzrayim and the nation feared Hashem and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant." Rav Wolbe (Shiurei Chumash, Beshalach 14:31) asks the obvious question. How is it that their fear of Hashem preceded their belief in Hashem? Shouldn't the order have been reversed? Only after one believes in the Creator is there the possibility of fearing Him.

He quoted the answer given by his Rebbi, Rav Yeruchom Levovitz, the Mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva in prewar Europe. Rav Yeruchom was wont to say, "One cannot discuss emunah with a drunkard." It is only after the drunkard sobers up that he has the clarity of mind needed to discuss belief in the Creator.

Rav Wolbe cites a Medrash (Shemos Rabba 30:11) that corroborates this idea. Iyov, who suffered tremendous misfortunes, declared in his misery, "If only I knew how to find Him... I would set out my case before Him" (Iyov 23:3). Chazal explained his declaration with a parable. An officer once proclaimed, "Show me the king and I'll teach him a lesson." They then brought the officer to the palace and he observed the king blind a lieutenant, jail a princess, exile a general, cripple a captain and banish a prime minister. Consequently the officer announced, "I apologize for I was drunk and did not realize the power of the king." Likewise, Iyov was shown how Hashem caused Yitzchak to become blind, Miriam to remain in solitude due to her tzara'as, Avraham's offspring to be exiled, Yaakov to be crippled (in his fight with the angel) and Moshe to be banished from Eretz Yisrael. Consequently Iyov announced, "I apologize for I was drunk and did not realize the power of The King."

Without a proper appreciation of Hashem's exacting standards of retribution, a person is, to an extent, "in the dark." The emunah discussed in the Torah is not the basic knowledge that there is a Creator. After the miraculous redemption from Egypt, the fact that there is a G-d was not a subject for debate.

The Torah is referring to an understanding and acknowledgment that every single aspect of the world is run completely and solely by Hashem. Although they had previously questioned the prudence of their exodus from Egypt, they were aroused from their "stupor" by the exacting punishment meted upon the Egyptians. This occurrence initiated a new level of appreciation of Hashem's providence in every aspect of the running of the world. The fear brought them to faith.

In a similar vein, continues Rav Wolbe, someone who is entirely caught up in a materialistic lifestyle, is for all intents and purposes a drunkard. There is no way to speak to him about emunah when he can't see past his bottle of wine i.e. his self-indulgent lifestyle. Only after he awakens from his stupor can he have the clarity of mind to discuss spirituality in general and belief in Hashem in particular.

Unfortunately, we have all too many alarm clocks trying to awaken us from our slumber.

The terror in Eretz Yisrael, the tragedies and suffering that have befallen numerous people are all wake up calls from The King. These occurrences should instill awe in our hearts so that we wake up and realize that, "If this is the power of the King, then we indeed have been drunk up until now." Since we haven't appreciated His omnipotence and providence in every last aspect of the running of the world, He is trying to teach us a lesson in emunah. We need to wake up from the deep slumber brought upon us by our very materialistic world and rub our eyes to enable ourselves to discern Hashem in every facet of our lives! ©2016 Rabbi S. Wolbe zt"l & AishDas Society

### RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Beshalach includes the famous splitting of the Sea (14:21), where Moshe led them into the water, and the sea split for them. Psalms 114 offers that "the sea saw, and ran", and commentators explain that what the sea saw was Yosef's remains, and withdrew in their merit. As Rabbi Shmulevitz asks, what was so special about Yosef's remains that the sea split because of them, rather than because of Moshe or the Jews?

Rabbi Shmulevitz answers by introducing a fundamental concept in Judaism: avoiding temptations. Yosef was in a position where he might have been tempted to sin (with Potifar, and generally living in Egypt as the only Jew), and rather than be placed in a position to overcome his urges, he avoided those urges altogether, even placing himself in danger by leaving an article of clothing behind. This great act is not only an example for us today, but it's also the reason why the Jews were faced with crossing the sea in the first place. Had human logic prevailed, the Jews would have headed straight to Israel, which would have taken them 4 days. However, that might have tempted the Jews to

consider returning to Egypt, so G-d had them go the long way, which included crossing the sea. The splitting of the sea and Yosef's life join efforts in conveying a critical lesson: Avoid conflict as much as you can. Whether it's our internal temptations, friends, parents, spouses or those we share borders with, the Parsha offers us 3000 year old advice that we still holds true today: Avoid conflict and temptation by minimizing confrontations. ©2012 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**"W**hen G-d wanted to drown the Egyptians in the sea, Uza, the ministering angel of Egypt, stood up and said, 'Master of the World, You are referred to as being righteous and straight, never doing wrong nor showing favoritism; why then do you want to drown my sons in the sea? Did they drown even one of Your sons, or kill even one of Your sons? And if it's because of the hard servitude that [my sons] put Your sons through that You want to drown them, [Your sons] have already been paid for it, as all the silver and gold that [my sons] had was taken by [Your sons].' Before addressing the seemingly obvious question on the argument that Midrash Avkir, quoted by Yalkut Shimoni (241) and Midrash Vayosha, says Uza made to stop G-d from drowning the Egyptians ("his sons") in the sea, let's see how G-d responded, when He addressed all the angels so that they could decide whether or not G-d was justified in drowning the Egyptians. (Although I will present G-d's response in an edited form, all the words are from the Midrash, presented in context. It should be noted that there are some slight differences in how the Midrash is quoted; I translated Midrash Vayosha's version here.)

"They (My sons, i.e. Israel) did every kind of hard labor for [the Egyptians], and they cried out from the abundance of labor and their outcry ascended before Me, so I sent my trustworthy emissaries to Pharaoh, Moshe and Aharon, and they said to him, 'so says G-d: send out My people so that they can serve Me,' and [Pharaoh] said, 'who is G-d that I should listen to what He says.' Because he denied My existence I sent ten plagues against him, until he sent My people out against his will. Yet despite all this he didn't hold himself back from his wickedness, and he still chased after [My sons] to bring them back to his servitude. And because he did all of this and did not acknowledge Me, we want to drown him and his entire army in the sea." (You can guess which way the verdict went.) There are two (separate) issues in this Midrash that I'd like to discuss, one at a time.

The first issue is how Uza could have claimed that the Egyptians didn't drown even one of G-d's sons, or kill any of them, if there was a royal edict (Sh'mos 1:22) to throw the Israelites into the Nile. [Although Yalkut Shimoni doesn't say "even one," the same

question applies to "any of them."] Four possible ways to deal with this issue will be presented.

The first possibility is that no infants ever really drowned, so Uza's claim was accurate. Pirkay d'Rebbi Eliezer (42) quotes Rabbi Shila, who says "all the children who were thrown into the Nile survived, as it expelled them, tossing them to the Egyptian desert." There, G-d nourished them by bringing each two rocks, one that provided honey and one that provided oil, the way a new mother nurses a child. Similarly, Eliyahu Rabbah (7) says that G-d commanded the angels to descend and save the infants who were being tossed into the river. The angels caught them (before they hit the water) and placed them on rocks, and G-d caused small protrusions to extend from the rocks, from which the babies suckled and were nourished (with honey).

The Talmud (Sotah 11b) says that when the mothers were about to give birth, they went out to the fields and gave birth under orange trees, where G-d took care of the infants (including nourishing them with oil and honey). When the Egyptians realized what was happening, they tried to seize the children, but the ground swallowed them up, and after the danger passed, the youngsters sprouted from the ground. Midrash Vayosha (on the Shirah) presents a very similar scenario (although the nourishment there was butter and honey) to explain what happened to the children who were supposed to be tossed into the Nile. [There are other Midrashim with a similar scenario as well. Since the Midrash we are trying to explain is quoted by Midrash Vayosha, this is likely how the compiler of the Midrash understood it.]

Rabbi Eli Steinberg, Sh'lita, (Minchas Eliyahu), in order to explain why Yisro said that the Egyptians were punished for what they tried to do (Sh'mos 18:11) as opposed to what they actually did, references Tosfos (Sotah 12b), who says that Moshe was the first infant to be thrown into the water, and the Talmud itself (ibid), which says that after Moshe was put into the water (in a basket) no infants were thrown into the Nile. If none were thrown in before Moshe, and none were thrown in afterwards, and Moshe himself survived, then no infants actually drowned!

If no infants were ever tossed into the Nile, or if those who were survived, we can understand how Uza could have claimed that none of his sons ever drowned any of G-d's sons. Nevertheless, since the Egyptians deserved to be punished because they denied G-d's existence and/or His abilities, drowning was the method by which they were punished because of what they wanted to do. [I will address the "not killing" part shortly.]

Rabbi Menachem Kasher (Torah Sh'laimah, Sh'mos 1:212\*), explaining a Midrash which implies that the decree to toss the children into the Nile was only made against those who did not fulfill their quota of bricks, with the bodies of the drowned infants used to

compensate for the materials that were not supplied, seems to suggest that Uza didn't consider those who were thrown into the river because of the "negligence" of the parents to have been killed by the Egyptians (as it was the parents' fault for not fulfilling the quota). This approach would also explain how Uza could say that "my sons did not kill any of Your sons" even though there are Midrashim that say they used infants as bricks; if they only used infants whose parents hadn't fulfilled their quota, and didn't consider their deaths to be attributable to the Egyptians, Uza wouldn't have considered it as "his sons" killing "G-d's sons." It should be noted, though, that one source (Sanhedrin 111a) says explicitly that the Egyptians drowned some of our ancestors, killed some of them, and used some for bricks; since the Midrash obviously disagrees with the first two aspects (drowning and killing), it can easily be said that it disagrees with the third as well. In any event, if Uza thought that the Egyptians shouldn't be blamed for any of those deaths, we can understand how he could have claimed that his sons did not drown (or kill) any of G-d's sons. [Even if his line of thinking was wrong, G-d responded by giving a different reason why they deserved to be punished, one that Uza could accept even with his mistaken thought process.]

A third possibility [also suggesting a mistaken thought process on Uza's part] could be that the Egyptians didn't consider newborn infants to be full-blown "people" (a "ben-kayama" is an infant who is at least 30 days old), so drowning them (and killing them by using them as building material) was not, according to them, considered drowning (or killing) any of G-d's sons. [The word "son" may be the same for those decreed to be thrown into the Nile and for those who Uza claimed was not drowned, but the former clearly refers to infant sons, while the latter is compared to "his sons," who were adults.] This would explain why Pharaoh thought he could get away with telling the midwives to kill the new-born males, and how he could extend the decree to include tossing Egyptian babies into the Nile (see Rashi on Sh'mos 1:22), as in Egyptian culture, doing so wouldn't be considered a serious crime.

A fourth possibility is based on the fact that the generation that drowned in the sea was not the same generation that tossed the infants into the Nile, which took place 80 years earlier (Moshe's age at the time of the exodus). Uza could therefore claim that none of those whom G-d wanted to drown had drowned any of G-d's sons (even if their parents had).

Moving on to the second issue, G-d's response was that the Egyptians deserved to be drowned because they denied G-d's existence and/or His abilities, despite experiencing the ten plagues. However, for the last five of these plagues, the Egyptians only refused to let G-d's people go because He had hardened their hearts. How could they be

punished for not listening to G-d if G-d didn't let them listen? I discussed this issue a couple of weeks ago (<http://tinyurl.com/j26bdjf>) in regards to the consequences of the last five plagues; how it applies to being punished by drowning in the sea deserves a closer look as well.

Removing the possibility of repentance as a punishment for previous transgressions may explain why Pharaoh's free will was taken away (with the punishment of the plagues coming for those previous transgressions, not for disobeying G-d after his free will was removed), but it cannot explain how drowning could be a punishment for not giving in after each of the ten plagues if there was no option of giving in after the last five. Not being allowed to give in in order to demonstrate G-d's greatness (through the last five plagues) may also be a valid approach if the punishment was for previous transgressions, but it doesn't explain how they could be punished for not giving in if they did not have the ability to do so. Although the very fact that Pharaoh would have given in only because of the suffering he endured, not because he finally recognized G-d, could be reason enough to punish him for still "denying His existence," the Midrash adding that "despite all this he didn't hold himself back from his wickedness, and he still chased after [My sons] to bring them back to his servitude," when he only did so because "G-d strengthened [his] heart" (14:4 and 14:8), precludes this approach from being consistent with the Midrash.

It would therefore seem that this Midrash supports S'fornu and Malbim's approach, that the hardening/strengthening of Pharaoh's heart (and the hearts of his servants) did not take away their free will, but gave it back to them, allowing them to withstand the suffering of the plagues and choose whether or not to recognize G-d and His abilities/dominion. As the Midrash says, "Pharaoh was forced to let them go" (after the 10th plague), but he never accepted G-d as the Creator and Ruler of the world. Therefore, he, and his army, deserved to drown. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

