

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The Torah sometimes says something of fundamental importance in what seems like a minor and incidental comment. There is a fine example of this near the beginning of today's parsha.

Last week, we read of how Moses was sent by G-d to lead the Israelites to freedom, and how his initial efforts met with failure. Not only did Pharaoh not agree to let the people go; he made the working conditions of the Israelites even worse. They had to make the same number of bricks as before but now they had to gather their own straw. The people complained to Pharaoh, then they complained to Moses, then Moses complained to G-d. "Why have you brought trouble to this people? Why did you send me?"

At the beginning of this week's parsha G-d tells Moses that he will indeed bring the Israelites to freedom, and tells him to announce this to the people. Then we read this: "So Moses told this to the Israelites but they did not listen to him, because their spirit was broken and because the labour was harsh." (Ex. 6:9)

The italicised phrase seems simple enough. The people did not listen to Moses because he had brought them messages from G-d before and they had done nothing to improve their situation. They were busy trying to survive day by day. They had no time for utopian promises that seemed to have no grounding in reality. Moses had failed to deliver in the past. They had no reason to think he would do so in the future. So far, so straightforward.

But there is something more subtle going on beneath the surface. When Moses first met G-d at the burning bush, G-d told him to lead, and Moses kept refusing on the grounds that the people would not listen to him. He was not a man of words. He was slow of speech and tongue. He was a man of "uncircumcised lips". He lacked eloquence. He could not sway crowds. He was not an inspirational leader.

It turned out, though, that Moses was both right

and wrong, right that they did not listen to him but wrong about why. It had nothing to do with his failures as a leader or a public speaker. In fact it had nothing to do with Moses at all. They did not listen "because their spirit was broken and because the labour was harsh." In other words: if you want to improve people's spiritual situation, first improve their physical situation. That is one of the most humanising aspects of Judaism.

Maimonides emphasises this in *The Guide for the Perplexed*. (Book III, ch. 27) The Torah, he says, has two aims: the well-being of the soul and well-being of the body. The well-being of the soul is something inward and spiritual, but the well-being of the body requires a strong society and economy, where there is the rule of law, division of labour and the promotion of trade. We have bodily well-being when all our physical needs are supplied, but none of us can do this on our own. We specialise and exchange. That is why we need a good, strong, just society.

Spiritual achievement, says Maimonides, is higher than material achievement, but we need to ensure the latter first, because "a person suffering from great hunger, thirst, heat or cold, cannot grasp an idea even if it is communicated by others, much less can he arrive at it by his own reasoning." In other words, if we lack basic physical needs, there is no way we can reach spiritual heights. When people's spirits are broken by harsh labour they cannot listen to a Moses. If you want to improve people's spiritual situation, first improve their physical conditions.

This idea was given classic expression in modern times by two New York Jewish psychologists, Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) and Frederick Herzberg (1923-2000). Maslow was fascinated by the question of why many people never reached their full potential. He also believed -- as, later, did Martin Seligman, creator of Positive Psychology -- that psychology should focus not only on the cure of illness but also on the positive promotion of mental health. His most famous contribution to the study of the human mind was his "hierarchy of needs".

We are not a mere bundle of wants and desires. There is a clear order to our concerns. Maslow enumerated five levels. First are our physiological needs: for food and shelter, the basic requirements of survival. Next come safety needs: protection against harm done to us by others. Third is our need for love and belonging. Above that comes our desire for



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recognition and esteem, and higher still is self-actualisation: fulfilling our potential, becoming the person we feel we could and should be. In his later years Maslow added a yet higher stage: self-transcendence, rising beyond the self through altruism and spirituality.

Herzberg simplified this whole structure by distinguishing between physical and psychological factors. He called the first, Adam needs, and the second Abraham needs. Herzberg was particularly interested in what motivates people at work. What he realised in the late 1950s -- an idea revived more recently by American-Israeli economist Dan Ariely -- is that money, salary and financial rewards (stock options and the like), is not the only motivator. People do not necessarily work better, harder or more creatively, the more you pay them. Money works up to a certain level, but beyond that the real motivator is the challenge to grow, create, find meaning, and to invest your highest talents in a great cause. Money speaks to our Adam needs, but meaning speaks to our Abraham needs.

There is a truth here that Jews and Judaism have tended to note and live by more fully than many other civilisations and faiths. Most religions are cultures of acceptance. There is poverty, hunger and disease on earth because that is the way the world is; that is how G-d made it and wants it. Yes, we can find happiness, nirvana or bliss, but to achieve it you must escape from the world, by meditation, or retreating to a monastery, or by drugs or trance, or by waiting patiently for the joy that awaits us in the world to come. Religion anaesthetises us to pain.

That isn't Judaism at all. When it comes to the poverty and pain of the world, ours is a religion of protest, not acceptance. G-d does not want people to be poor, hungry, sick, oppressed, uneducated, deprived of rights, or subject to abuse. He has made us His agents in this cause. He wants us to be His partners in the work of redemption. That is why so many Jews have become doctors fighting disease, lawyers fighting injustice or educators fighting ignorance. It is surely why they have produced so many pioneering (and Nobel Prize-winning) economists. As Michael Novak (citing Irving Kristol) writes: (This Hemisphere of

Liberty, Washington DC, American Enterprise Institute, 1990, pg 64) writes: "Jewish thought has always felt comfortable with a certain well-ordered worldliness, whereas the Christian has always felt a pull to otherworldliness. Jewish thought has had a candid orientation toward private property, whereas Catholic thought -- articulated from an early period chiefly among priests and monks -- has persistently tried to direct the attention of its adherents beyond the activities and interests of this world to the next. As a result, tutored by the law and the prophets, ordinary Jews have long felt more at home in this world, while ordinary Catholics have regarded this world as a valley of temptation and as a distraction from their proper business, which is preparation for the world to come."

G-d is to be found in this world, not just the next. But for us to climb to spiritual heights we must first have satisfied our material needs. Abraham was greater than Adam, but Adam came before Abraham. When the physical world is harsh, the human spirit is broken, and people cannot then hear the word of G-d, even when delivered by a Moses.

Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev said it well: "Don't worry about the state of someone else's soul and the needs of your body. Worry about the needs of someone else's body and the state of your own soul."

Alleviating poverty, curing disease, ensuring the rule of law and respect for human rights: these are spiritual tasks no less than prayer and Torah study. To be sure, the latter are higher, but the former are prior. People cannot hear G-d's message if their spirit is broken and their labour harsh. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**B**ut the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh" (Ex. 9:12) One of the more difficult theological problems raised in the book of Exodus is precisely this verse, in which the Bible declares that it was G-d who hardened Pharaoh's heart to be impervious to the cries of his forced laborers.

To be sure, during the first five plagues, it was Pharaoh himself who was responsible for his stubborn cruelty, who hardened his own heart. Now that we have come to the sixth plague of boils, how can we blame the Egyptian monarch if it was G-d who prevented him from freeing his Hebrew slaves?!

Such conduct on the part of the Creator of the Universe goes against those very axiomatic standards by which the world and humanity first came into being. "And G-d said, Let us make a human being in our image and like our likeness..." (Gen. 1:26), to which Seforno comments that only the human being has untrammelled and independent freedom of moral choice: the "angels" act with knowledge and recognition, but are totally functional and devoid of

volition, whereas G-d is volitional-He cannot, by definition, choose evil, as G-d is consummate goodness.

This Biblical commentary is therefore saying that the human being is created with the capacity to choose to do even that which G-d would not have wanted him to do-as we certainly see in the unfolding stories of the book of Genesis again and again (Gen. 6:6).

So how can it be that G-d hardened the heart of Pharaoh, preventing him from hearkening to G-d, Moses and the Hebrews, preventing him from repentance? Our Biblical text iterates and reiterates G-d's hardening of Pharaoh's heart, not only once but four more times, with reference to the plague of hail (Ex. 10:1), the plague of locusts (10:20), the plague of darkness (10:27), and the plague of the death of the first-born (11:10). How can G-d hold Pharaoh responsible for a heinous and ongoing crime when it was He, G-d, who prevented Pharaoh from repenting?

Seforno, in a most creative interpretation, does not believe that G-d prevented Pharaoh from repenting: "Had Pharaoh wished to submit himself to the Divine Will, may He be blessed, and to return to Him in complete repentance, there would have been nothing to serve as a deterrent. Behold, when G-d may He be blessed, says, I shall harden the heart of Pharaoh, it merely means that (Pharaoh) will be strengthened by the suffering of the plagues, and not release the Hebrews because of his fear of the plagues...." (ad loc. 7:3)

Seforno is almost turning the verse on its head by insisting that, in hardening Pharaoh's heart from "running scared" and freeing the Hebrews, He was only enhancing Pharaoh's freedom to make moral decisions; G-d was removing the malaise and mayhem being wrought upon Egyptian society by the plagues from becoming the cardinal reason for his sending the Hebrews out, which would have made the decision not at all a matter of morality but rather an issue of political expediency.

On the basis of this commentary, the entire logic of the plagues becomes much clearer. During the second plague of frogs, Moses explains that the reason for the horrific discomfiture, the turn-around of the Nile from being a life-giving god of Egypt into becoming a macabre and ridiculous repository of blood and frogs is "in order that you may know that there is none like the Lord (YHVH) our G-d" (Ex. 8:6); and the fourth plague of swarms of insects is "in order that you know that I am the Lord (YHVH) in the midst of the land" (Ex. 8:18).

In the beginning of our Biblical portion of Va'Era, G-d's opening words are: "I am the Lord YHVH; I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai, powerful G-d of omnipotence, but with My Name YHVH I did not make Myself known to them. Therefore say to the Israelites: I am YHVH; I

shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt..." (Ex 6:2,3,6).

What is in a Name? It is the most understandable partial definition of a being whose very essence insists that "he" will ultimately remain incomprehensible to mortal humans. The Hebrew letters of YHVH, in accordance with their vocalization, spell out the very "He will effectuate"; given the content, it means that He (G-d) will bring about redemption-freedom for the Israelites and ultimately freedom and redemption for all humanity. It is in the future tense because G-d acts in history ("I will be who I will be") and it is open-ended, because the G-d of history acts in concert with Israel and the nations, and is thereby "limited" by their actions or lack thereof. Most important of all, the root noun HVH, as in ahavah, means love, as our Talmudic Sages understood when they defined this particular ineffable Name of G-d (the Tetragrammaton) as referring to the G-d of love and compassion (Hebrew-midat ha'rahamim, Ex: 34:6, Rashi ad loc.). And therefore the G-d who loves humanity will turn His back, as it were, upon those who exploit, enslave and murder innocent human beings.

This is the lesson that G-d wanted to teach Pharaoh, totalitarian ruler of the most powerful nation at that time. G-d, YHVH, the unique creator and owner of all of creation who loves His creation, will act in history and in the world to free all slaves and redeem all who are oppressed. Hence, it was crucial that G-d harden Pharaoh's heart to free him from succumbing to pressure from the plagues; Pharaoh had to free the Israelites only because he recognized the ultimate authority of the one G-d whose universal laws of freedom must govern the world if there is to remain a world. ©2016 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The comparison of the complaint of Moshe to G-d about His lack of compassion regarding the enslaved and persecuted Jews in Egypt, to the more sanguine acceptance of G-d's will by the patriarchs of Israel of an earlier generation is somewhat puzzling. Moshe's complaint is really a cry of anguish and pain over the desperate situation of the Jews in Egyptian bondage rather than a statement of disbelief or denial of G-d's intent to deliver the Jews from their bondage. So, why is the implied criticism of Moshe justified and the subject of much discussion in the Talmud, Midrash and Rashi?

At first glance, it seems to be slightly harsh and unjustified. This issue has been the subject of much rabbinic contemplation and insight over the centuries. Here I will advance one of the many possible interpretations of this matter. Moshe was speaking of an existential crisis facing an entire people so that the Jewish future itself, so to speak, was in danger of

destruction. The patriarchs faced only personal, individual challenges and trusted that G-d's promises and plans would nevertheless be fulfilled somehow, even if not through them.

However, once Israel became a nation and no longer just individuals, the stakes of failure increased. This caused Moshe's reaction, as this is what he believed to be the case. However, the Lord, so to speak, taught Moshe that the fate of individuals in His eyes, again so to speak, is equal to the fate of large and mighty nations. And, though the patriarchs realized their cosmic and historic importance and were threatened by extinction, they never expressed their doubts or criticisms to G-d.

Here Moshe was being taught the lesson of the value and importance of individuals, those that shape and propel human history and progress. G-d's complaint to Moshe, so to speak, was that he underestimated the worth of an individual and also underestimated the true greatness and value of the patriarchs of the Jewish people.

This fits the general theme expressed throughout Jewish tradition that Moshe would always be treated differently than others by Heaven, simply because of his greatness of character and breadth of vision and prophecy. Anyone else that would have complained to G-d about the brutality of the Egyptian bondage of Israel would perhaps be considered a hero. But Moshe's level of prophecy and attachment to G-d was so extraordinary that he was held accountable for even the smallest misunderstanding caused by his words or deeds.

Even a cursory reading of the biblical narrative from beginning till end will inform one that the greater the stature of the person, the more miniscule the room for error in spiritual and public areas of speech and behavior. This was a lesson well learned by the patriarchs. Now Moshe would also receive training in this most important axiom of Jewish life. From now on he would always compare himself to the other great individuals of the Jewish story – the patriarchs. He never again would find himself wanting in this respect. ©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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

If the Egyptian magicians did not have godly powers, how were they able to perform miraculous feats and match Moshe (Moses) act for act by duplicating the first two plagues? A closer look at the text reveals that these people did not actually duplicate the acts, for they were charlatans.

In the plague of blood, the Torah states: "And

Moshe and Aharon (Aaron) lifted up their rod...and all of the waters turned to blood." (Exodus 7:20) Soon after, the Torah states: "And the Egyptians did in like manner with their secret arts (lateihem)." (Exodus 7:22) Here, the magicians apparently proved that Moshe and Aharon's powers were limited as they easily performed the same feat.

But the fraud surfaces from the precise language of this verse. First, the expression in "like manner" may mean that the Egyptian magicians were not able to bring forth blood at all, they merely copied the way Moshe and Aharon moved their hands.

Second, the Hebrew for "secret arts" – lateihem, literally means, "with a flash of fire." The magicians, using the cover of fire, moved their hands quickly to make it appear as if they brought forth blood, when indeed they did not.

This same language ("like manner" and "secret arts") is found prior to the plague of blood (when the rod is turned into a serpent) (Exodus 7:11) and in the second plague of frogs (Exodus 8:3) as well.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch points out that if the magicians were truly powerful and were looking after Egypt's best interests, they would have used their powers to remove the plague altogether. Instead, they seem to bring more of it to Egypt. In fact, Rabbi Hirsch suggests that they produced nothing new. They merely took a bit of the blood that Moshe and Aharon brought forth and deceptively placed it before Pharaoh.

By the third plague, Pharaoh finally catches on to the reality. After Egypt is full of lice, he turns to his magicians demanding that they use their powers to help remove the swarm. The magicians were obviously unable to follow the order. Hence, the Torah states that the Egyptians attempted to remove (lehozi) the lice but could not. (Exodus 8:14) This finally led to an admission by the magicians that their abilities never did and never could match those of G-d for the plagues revealed the true power of the true G-d. (Exodus 8:15) The gig was truly up.

Charlatans in any realm, whether they be in the world of magic, in the world of business or the world of politics, cannot fool people forever. In the end, their sham will be revealed, and the truth will become apparent not only to everyone around them, but even to themselves. ©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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And I will harden Pharaoh's heart" (Sh'mos 7:3). One of the questions discussed at length is how G-d could have taken away Pharaoh's free will, and then, after preventing him from letting the Children of Israel leave, punish him for it. If he had no

choice in the matter, what did he do wrong?

Ramban quotes Sh'mos Rabbah (5:6 and 13:4), and says that these Midrashim represent two different approaches to the issue. According to the first of these approaches (which is similar to Rambam's approach, see Hilchos T'shuvah 6:3), Pharaoh wasn't being punished for disobeying G-d by not letting the Children of Israel leave after G-d demanded that he do so, but for the things he had already done to the Children of Israel before that, the harsh decrees he made against them and the way they were mistreated. (Ramban adds that the extent of the mistreatment was so bad that G-d didn't give him a chance to repent, by hardening his heart.) The second approach, which may be similar to Rashi's (see Mizrachi), is that G-d only hardened (or strengthened, or made "heavy") Pharaoh's heart for the last five plagues (and after the tenth one, so that he would chase them into the Red Sea); his decision not to let the Children of Israel leave before the first five plagues was made using his own free will, and he could therefore be punished for it. True, without G-d preventing Pharaoh from giving in to His demands he would have let them go, but not because he realized the error of his ways; the reason Pharaoh would have given in was because he couldn't take the suffering of the plagues anymore, and that is not repentance (at least not repentance done through free will). Therefore, in order to teach everyone (including and especially us) the magnitude of G-d's "greatness," He didn't let Pharaoh succumb to the pressure of the plagues so that He could bring more plagues upon Egypt.

S'fornu's approach starts off in a similar way as Ramban's second approach, that after the first five plagues Pharaoh would only have given in because he couldn't take the beating anymore, not because he now recognized how great G-d is and he should therefore listen to Him. But instead of the "payoff" being that G-d therefore prevented Pharaoh from giving in so that He could bring the last five plagues and cause everyone to come to realize His "greatness," according to S'fornu G-d gave Pharaoh the ability to withstand the beating in order to allow him to decide, based on his own free will, whether or not to listen to G-d and let the Children of Israel leave. Rather than taking away Pharaoh's free will, G-d was restoring it by giving him the strength to tolerate the pain that was being inflicted upon him. [Malbim (4:22-23) has the same approach.] There are other approaches as well, and I would like to add one more possibility.

There are two additional issues raised regarding Pharaoh's punishment. First of all, this wasn't necessarily (or likely) the same Pharaoh that had enslaved the Children of Israel and mistreated them from the start. Although Rashi says that the "death" of Pharaoh that preceded G-d sending Moshe to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt (2:23) refers to this same

Pharaoh who was now stricken with "tzora'as," and also says that the "death" of those who wanted to kill Moshe (4:19) refers to Dasan and Aviram, who became poor, and not Pharaoh, a simple reading of the verses (see Rashbam, S'fornu, and many others) is that Pharaoh, who had tried to kill Moshe after finding out that he had killed the Egyptian who was beating an Israelite, had died, and a new Pharaoh had taken over. This question isn't such a strong one, though, as the new Pharaoh was at least as bad as the previous one (as evidenced by the national "sigh" that occurred when he took over), and, as pointed out by Bais Efrayim, his continuation of the policies of the previous Pharaoh is tantamount to agreeing with them. Since he had the opportunity to adjust the way the Children of Israel were being treated and didn't, it is as if he had issued those very same decrees himself. Nevertheless, let's keep this issue in mind as we proceed.

Another issue I have heard raised is why the Egyptians were punished for the decrees made by their king (Pharaoh). Just because Pharaoh was stubborn and haughty, refusing to give in to G-d's demands, why must everyone, young and old, rich and poor, the nobility and the peasantry, have to suffer the devastation of the plagues? However, this line of thinking has little basis, as it was the general populace that carried out the decrees (I will avoid the temptation to make a comparison to more recent regimes where totalitarian leadership does not absolve those who carried out the policies set forth by the government). As a matter of fact, our sages, of blessed memory (Sh'mos Rabbah 1:8, Tanchuma Sh'mos 5/7) tell us that it wasn't Pharaoh who started the servitude, it was those over whom he ruled. The Egyptians wanted to subdue the Children of Israel, but Pharaoh had refused, reminding them of everything that Yosef had done for them. As a result, they rebelled against him and removed him from power. Only after Pharaoh agreed to go along with their plan was he able to regain his position (although, as Sh'mos Rabbah 1:9 tells us, once that happened he initiated many of the decrees, so was punished first). When the "measure for measure" nature of the plagues is described (see pg. 3 of <http://tinyurl.com/grhzd55> and pg. 4 of <http://tinyurl.com/hzu5hmo>), many of the things the Egyptians did that corresponded to how they were affected by a specific plague were not things that could have been imposed by the authorities (such as certain menial tasks, and the way they made their personal slaves suffer when things didn't go as impossibly perfect as was demanded). The oppressiveness was so pervasive that even the servants and the captives took part, and rejoiced in the suffering of the Children of Israel (see Rashi on 11:5 and 12:29). If anything, it was the general populace that wanted, enjoyed, and benefited most from having and keeping the Children of Israel as slaves. Pharaoh could have anything he wanted done for him even if there was no slave class,

the peasants could not.

"The heart of a king is in G-d's hands" (Mishlay 21:1). This verse is quoted by Ramban to support his second approach, that G-d wouldn't let Pharaoh give in so that His "greatness" would become known. G-d makes decisions for kings (controlling their decision-making process) because of the impact a king's decisions have on so many people, especially those he rules over. Since the Egyptian people deserved to be punished, G-d made the decision for Pharaoh that he shouldn't let the Children of Israel leave (yet) so that his subjects would have to experience the suffering of the last five plagues. Even if this wasn't the same Pharaoh who decreed that the infants be tossed into the Nile (etc.), the Egyptian people (as a whole) were very much a part of it, and did so (as well as similar atrocities) enthusiastically. In order to carry out the full 12 months of punishment against the Egyptians, G-d may have overruled Pharaoh's free will. But rather than it being done specifically to punish him (as Ramban suggests in his first approach), it may have been done to punish his people. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

In this week's parsha, Moshe warns Pharaoh of the impending plague of Frogs. Moshe warned that the frogs would overwhelm the entire land of Egypt: "The Nile shall swarm with frogs, and they shall ascend and come into your house and your bedroom and your bed, and into the house of your servants and of your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls." [Shmos 7:28] Of course, Pharaoh ignored the warning. The frogs came and then Pharaoh called to Moshe, begging that he get rid of the frogs. The pasuk then states: "Moshe and Aharon went out from Pharaoh's presence; Moshe cried out to Hashem (va'Yitz'ak Moshe el Hashem) concerning the frogs that he had inflicted upon Pharaoh." [Shmos 8:8]. Moshe's prayer was answered "...and the frogs died -- from the houses, from the courtyards, and from the fields."

The expression used to describe Moshe's prayer here is noteworthy. Chazal say that there are ten distinct expressions used in Tanach to describe prayer. Among these expressions are tefilah, techinah, bakasha, and various other expressions used to express man's beseeching of the Almighty. (It is said that the Eskimos have ten different expressions for snow -- because they are so cognizant of this meteorological phenomenon. To the rest of us, snow is snow, but there are in fact different types of snow. L'Havdill [one should excuse the comparison] we have 10 different words describing prayer.)

Moshe Rabbeinu had many different occasions in which he had to daven for Klal Yisrael as leader of the Jewish nation. The Torah rarely uses the expression "Va'Yitz'ak Moshe el Hashem". More

common expressions include VaYispallel, VaYechal, Ve'Eschanan, va'Ya'ateeru and so forth. What does the word "Va'Yitz'ak" mean? In plain and simple language it means "he screamed". The connotation of scream connotes a certain urgency and pain. It would seem to us that the situation here did not warrant a scream, a "Va'Yitz'ak". Why is he screaming when he should have engaged in a more typical form of prayer? Moshe Rabbeinu was clearly in control here. Pharaoh was on the ropes, so to speak. He and his people were suffering -- not a bad thing. It was not such an urgent matter that required a "Va'Yitz'ak"! Why, then, did Moshe specifically engage in this form of prayer at this moment?

In the sefer Ner Uziel, Rav Uziel Malevsky, z"l, makes an interesting observation (based on a Kli Yakar). When Moshe warned of the impending plague of frogs, he prophesized that they would come "into your house and your bedroom and your bed, and into the house of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and kneading bowls". However, when the frogs departed, the Torah only testifies that they died "from the houses, from the courtyards, and from the fields". What happened to the frogs that jumped into the ovens? One would think that they certainly died. A frog that jumps into a hot barbecue is not going to live to tell the tale! Yet the pasuk does not mention that the frogs that went into the ovens in fact died.

The Kli Yakar suggests a novel interpretation: They did not die! Why did they not die? They did not die because the frogs here were a paradigm for the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem [Sanctifying G-d's Name by fulfilling His command]. These frogs could have safely jumped into the houses or into the bedrooms. However, in order to fulfill the Will of the Almighty, they jumped into the ovens, al Kiddush HaShem. This is not some mere story. The Talmud says [Pesachim 53b] "Tudos of Rome expounded: What did Chananya, Mishael, and Azariah (who were given the option by the King of Bavel to bow down to his idol or be thrown into the fire) see that allowed themselves to give themselves over to martyrdom and allow themselves to be thrown into the pit of fire? They applied a Kal V'Chomer reasoning upon themselves from the frogs (in Egypt): If the frogs who were not commanded to sanctify G-d's Name jumped into a fiery oven, we who are commanded to sanctify G-d's Name should surely do so."

Thus, the Kli Yakar writes, the frogs are the paradigm for so many Jews throughout the generations who gave up their lives to sanctify G-d's Name when the situation warranted it. The Ner Uziel uses this background idea to explain Moshe's use of the urgent "Va'Yitz'ak" mode of prayer regarding the end of the plague of frogs. The pasuk says, "He cried concerning the matter of the frogs". The Ner Uziel points out that the pasuk does not say he cried that the frogs should

leave. No. He cried about the matter of the frogs (al dvar ha'tzefardim). Merely praying for their departure from Egypt would not warrant a pained scream. Rather, he was "Tzo'ek" for the frogs, because he was really crying for all the Jews who throughout the generations would be moser nefesh [sacrifice their lives] in order to sanctify the Name of G-d. Moshe was praying that all those Jews should meet the same fate as Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah. This is something that is indeed worthy for a person to scream about. © 2016 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

RABBI YAKOV HABER

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"Therefore say to the Children of Israel: I am G-d ('Ani Hashem), and I shall take you out (v'hotzeisi) of the heavy burdens of Egypt; and I shall save you (v'hitzalti) from their enslaving you; and I shall redeem you (v'ga'alti) with an outstretched arm and great judgments. And I shall take you (v'lakachti) unto Me as a nation and I shall be for you [your] G-d, and you shall know that I am Hashem, your G-d, who takes you out of the heavy burdens of Egypt." (Va'Eira 6:6-7)

With these powerful words our parsha presents the famous four l'shonos hageula, the four expressions of redemption. Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:1) refers to these four as "arba ge'ulos" implying that the four are not just four ways of expressing the same redemption, but four separate redemptions. The most popular reason given for the usage of four cups at the Seider is that they are parallel to these four expressions (ibid.). Why are there exactly four and what is the precise meaning of each of these four expressions?

Rabbeinu B'chaye in his commentary to these verses explains that "v'hotzeisi" refers to G-d's freeing us from the actual harsh labor while we were still technically slaves. This took place at the beginning of the makkos, when, according to Chazal's tradition (Rosh HaShana 11a), the Jews did not actively work for the Egyptians. The second stage of the redemption, "v'hitzalti", was when the Jews achieved total freedom from Egyptian slavery to exit "mitachas reshusham", from Egyptian dominion. It would seem that this took place after makkas bechoros even before the actual Exodus. Midrash Tehillim (113:2) writes that Pharaoh ran through the streets of Goshen after losing his first-born child, heir to the throne, screaming "You are free! You are now servants of G-d!"

But the redemption was not complete. Whereas Benei Yisrael had achieved freedom from slavery, there was a real danger, actualized at Yam Suf, that Pharaoh would attempt to reclaim the Jewish people as slaves to Egypt. "What have we done that we have sent away the Jewish people from serving us!" (Beshalach 14:5). Pharaoh's chase of the Jews ending in Hashem's utterly destroying his armies by drowning them in the

Sea comprised the next step of ge'ula, that of "v'ga'alti", the stage after which the Jews would never return to Pharaoh's dominion.

The final step was that of "v'lakachti eschem li l'am"; this took place at Har Sinai, when Hashem gave us the Torah. As presented in the birchos haTorah, "asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim v'nossan lanu es Toraso -- G-d has chosen us from all the other nations and given us His Torah"; it was the crucial moment of the giving of the Torah at Sinai that made the Jewish people into G-d's people, not just a nation of freed slaves. We recite in the Hallel, "halelu avdei Hashem"; on this Chazal comment "v'lo avdei Pharaoh!" (Midrash Tehillim 113:1). The slavery of Egypt ended; as a result, we became servants of the Source of the World thus achieving our whole purpose of creation -- to elevate ourselves by serving Avinu Malkeinu (see Pirkei Avos 6:2).

Maharal (Gevuros Hashem 30) presents a somewhat different breakdown of the four ge'ulos. Hashem told Avraham Avinu at the bris bein habesarim, "Your children shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall enslave them and afflict them four hundred years" (Lech Lecha 15:13). This prophecy included three components of the Egyptian exile: 1) the exile itself, Avraham's descendants would be strangers in a foreign land -- "gairim"; 2) the slavery, the Jewish people would serve another nation; 3) the harsh affliction, the slavery would not be a benign one as Yosef's slavery to Potiphar had been or as Eliezer's to Avraham, but harsh back-breaking labor becoming even more difficult as the exile came close to ending. Hashem now told Moshe Rabbeinu that each of these three components of the exile would be removed in reverse order. First, the harshness of the slavery would be removed, "v'hotzeisi". Then, the slavery itself would terminate, "v'hitzalti". In these interpretations, the Maharal closely follows the approach of Rabbeinu B'chaye. Third, the Jewish people would exit the foreign land on the road to their eventual return to their own land, Eretz Kana'an to become Eretz Yisrael, "v'ga'alti". They were "birshus atzmam", no longer in a foreign land; they were in their own control, but they were not yet birshus Hashem. Finally, Hashem took them as His unique nation, "v'lakachti".

Elsewhere (Netzach Yisrael 1), Maharal states that the three components of exile: being strangers, servitude and harsh labor would be characteristics of future exiles as well. There Maharal combines servitude and harsh labor into one aspect and adds a third component, scattering across the world. This was a new component of future exiles; in Egypt all the Jews were together. (It would be informative to explore this difference more fully.) In the future redemption, G-d would reverse all of these dimensions as He did in Egypt, but on an even grander scale. Maharal elaborates that the exile is unnatural. The Jewish

people, by their very nature, belonged in their land, not a foreign one, were destined to be under their own control, not in the control of any other nation, and were designed to be unified, not scattered. The very existence of the unnatural state of exile thus necessitates the redemption. Maharal (ibid. 24)

explains that the need for G-d to impose three oaths assuring the continuation of the exile until the time for Redemption comes is because exile is unnatural. This unnatural state must be "forced" by G-d to exist. This same analysis can be applied to the Egyptian exile; the unnatural state which this exile artificially maintained was guaranteed to be reversed on all of its levels.

(Once an experiment was performed which attempted to prove the theory of evolution. A fruit fly was irradiated causing its descendants' eyes to be suppressed. Several generations of eyeless flies emerged. Elated at the apparent proof that mutations can indeed last, the experimenters were disappointed when, mysteriously, the genes repaired themselves and the eyes "popped back" out in a later generation. If one were to chop up several sea sponges into many pieces, they recombine into their original organisms! G-d always provides natural parallels to fundamental, cosmic historical trends. Exile and disunity, however long they last, must reverse to the original natural states of redemption and unity.)

Rav Shalom Noach Berzovsky zt"l, the last Slonimer Rebbe, in his Nesivos Shalom, presents another level of meaning of the four leshonos hage'ula. The Egyptian exile comprised not only physical slavery but spiritual servitude as well. Famously, the Ari z"l teaches that the Jewish people sunk into the deepest depth of impurity; if not for G-d's kindness, we would never be able to get out of it. This spiritual impurity of the exile was of different levels: the most intense was so all encompassing that we were trapped in it as an embryo is enclosed in its mother's womb unable to "escape" on its own. Based on this, the redemption from Egypt is compared to the birth of a fetus exiting its mother's womb (Midrash Tehillim 107:4). Another kind was our connection to foreign values, a foreign lifestyle -- a slavery of sorts to an impure lifestyle; we obeyed the call of evil. The last kind was that we were "meshubad" to the Egyptian

culture such that we were not free to think properly on our own. In the language of Pharaoh (famously applied by Mesillas Yesharim), "let the labor be harder, and let them not talk of matters of falsehood!" (Shemos 5:9). On a spiritual level this can mean, "Let the pre-occupation with foreign values be so all-encompassing, that the Jews will not be free to think of lofty, exalted matters!"

Just as this spiritual servitude existed in Egypt on a national level, so too an individual can have three types of connections to sin in his own "galus Mitzrayim". (Mitzryaim is etymologically related to meitzarim, being

in a constricted, confining unnatural state.) Sometimes the person is just "meshubad", is connected to and feels he is not independent from a certain drive. At other times, such as with addiction, the sinner is so mired in the behavior that there does not seem to be a way out. But "Vayeianchu Benei Yisarel min ha'avoda... vata'al shav'asam lifnei HaElokim -- the Children of Israel moaned from the service... and their cries came before G-d" (Shemos 2:23). As long as there is a G-d above, an ultimate Redeemer, no exile -- personal or communal -- is so deep as to be unredeemable. The Slonimer Rebbe writes that the four leshonos hageulah are introduced by the phrase "lachein emor liBenei Yisrael Ani Hashem! --

tell the Jewish people: 'I am Hashem!'" Hashem represents middas harachamim. Tell them that even though they are mired in the idolatrous ways of Egypt, I will have mercy on them! So too, however distant we are from Hashem, chas v'shalom, our Father in Heaven mercifully awaits our return and stands ready to redeem us.

R. Nechemia says: "The voice of my beloved", this is Moshe. The [Jewish people] said, "Our master Moshe, how can we be redeemed when the Land of Egypt is sullied with the filth of our idolatry!" Moshe responded, "Since G-d wishes to redeem you, He will not look at your idolatry; rather he will "leap over the mountains", over your idolatrous ways. (Shir HaShirim Rabba 2:2)

May the uplifting message of the fourfold redemption described in our parsha serve as a source of inspiration and hope to long for redemption in our own individual lives by returning fully to Divine service with Hashem's merciful assistance, and in our national lives though the final redemption. May it be soon!

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