

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Why did Moses tell Pharaoh, if not a lie, then less than the full truth? Here is the conversation between him and Pharaoh after the fourth plague, *arov*, “swarms of insects” (some say “wild animals”): Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Go, sacrifice to your G-d here in the land.” But Moses said, “That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the Lord our G-d would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us?? We must take a three-day journey into the wilderness? to offer sacrifices to the Lord our G-d, as He commands us.” (Ex. 8:21-23)

Not just here but throughout, Moses makes it seem as if all he is asking is for permission for the people to undertake a three day journey, to offer sacrifices to G-d and (by implication) then to return. So, in their first appearance before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron say: “This is what the Lord, the G-d of Israel, says: ‘Let My people go, so that they may hold a festival to Me in the wilderness.’”

Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.”

Then they said, “The G-d of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take? a three-day journey into the wilderness? to offer sacrifices to the Lord our G-d, or He may strike us with plagues or with the sword.” (Ex. 5:1-3)

G-d even specifies this before the mission has begun, saying to Moses at the burning bush: “You and the elders of Israel will then go to the king of Egypt. You must tell him, ‘The Lord, G-d of the Hebrews, revealed Himself to us. Now we request that you allow us to take? a three day journey into the desert, to sacrifice to the Lord our G-d’” (3: 18).

The impression remains to the very end. After the Israelites have left, we read: The king of Egypt received news that the people were *escaping*. Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds regarding the people, and said, “What have we done? How could we have released Israel from doing our work?” (14:5)

At no stage does Moses say explicitly that he is proposing that the people should be allowed to leave permanently, never to return. He talks of a three day

journey. There is an argument between him and Pharaoh as to who is to go. Only the adult males? Only the people, not the cattle? Moses consistently asks for permission to worship G-d, at some place that is not Egypt. But he does not speak about freedom or the promised land. Why not? Why does he create, and not correct, a false impression? Why can he not say openly what he means?

The commentators offer various explanations. R. Shmuel David Luzzatto (Italy, 1800-1865) says that it was impossible for Moses to tell the truth to a tyrant like Pharaoh. R. Yaakov Mecklenburg (Germany, 1785-1865, *Ha-Ktav v'ha-Kabbalah*) says that technically Moses did not tell a lie. He did indeed mean that he wanted the people to be free to make a journey to worship G-d, and he never said explicitly that they would return.

The Abarbanel (Lisbon 1437 – Venice 1508) says that G-d told Moses deliberately to make a small request, to demonstrate Pharaoh’s cruelty and indifference to his slaves. All they were asking was for a brief respite from their labours to offer sacrifices to G-d. If he refused this, he was indeed a tyrant. Rav Elhanan Samet (*Iyyunim be-Parshot Ha-Shevua*, Exodus, 189) cites an unnamed commentator who says simply that this was war between Pharaoh and the Jewish people, and it war it is permitted, indeed sometimes necessary, to deceive.

Actually, however, the terms of the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh are part of a wider pattern that we have already observed in the Torah. When Jacob leaves Laban we read: “Jacob decided? to go behind the back? of Laban the Aramean, and did not tell him that he was leaving” (Gen. 31: 20). Laban protests this behaviour: “How could you do this? You went behind my back and led my daughters away like prisoners of war! Why did you have to leave so secretly? You went behind my back and told me nothing!” (31:26-27).

Jacob again has to tell at best a half-truth when



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Esau suggests that they travel together: "You know that the children are weak, and I have responsibility for the nursing sheep and cattle. If they are driven hard for even one day, all the sheep will die. Please go ahead of me, my lord" (33:13-14). This, though not strictly a lie, is a diplomatic excuse.

When Jacob's sons are trying to rescue their sister Dina who has been raped and abducted by Shechem the Hivite, they "replied deceitfully" (34:13) when Shechem and his father proposed that the entire family should come and settle with them, telling them that they could only do so if all the males of the town underwent circumcision.

Earlier still we find that three times Abraham and Isaac, forced to leave home because of famine, have to pretend that they are their wives' brothers not their husbands because they fear that otherwise they will be killed so that Sarah or Rebecca could be taken into the king's harem (Gen. 12, 20, 26).

These six episodes cannot be entirely accidental or coincidental to the biblical narrative as a whole. The implication seems to be this. Outside the promised land Jews in the biblical age are in danger if they tell the truth. They are at constant risk of being killed or at best enslaved.

Why? Because they are powerless in an age of power. They are a small family, at best a small nation, in an age of empires. They have to use their wits to survive. By and large they do not tell lies but they can create a false impression. This is not how things should be. But it is how they were before Jews had their own land, their one and only defensible space. It is how people in impossible situations are forced to be if they are to exist at all.

No one should be forced to live a lie. In Judaism, truth is the seal of G-d and the essential precondition of trust between human beings. But when your people is being enslaved, its male children murdered, you have to liberate them by whatever means are possible. Moses, who had already seen that his first encounter with Pharaoh made things worse for his people – they still had to make the same quota of bricks but now also had to gather their own straw (5:6-8) – did not want to risk making them worse still.

The Torah here is not justifying deceit. To the

contrary, it is condemning a system in which telling the truth may put your life at risk, as it still does in many tyrannical or totalitarian societies today. Judaism – a religion of dissent, questioning and "arguments for the sake of heaven" – is a faith that values intellectual honesty and moral truthfulness above all things. The Psalmist says: "Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord and who shall stand in His holy place? One who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not taken My name in vain nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps. 24:3-4). Malachi says of one who speaks in G-d's name: "The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips" (Mal. 2:6). Every Amidah ends with the prayer, "My G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from deceitful speech."

What the Torah is telling us in these six narratives in Genesis and the seventh in Exodus is the connection between freedom and truth. Where there is freedom there can be truth. Otherwise there cannot. A society where people are forced to be less than fully honest merely to survive and not provoke further oppression is not the kind of society G-d wants us to make. © 2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd I will bring you into the land that I promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you as a [morasha] heritage: I am the LORD." [Ex.6:8] It is only natural for parents to desire to leave their children and grandchildren with a legacy. For those fortunate enough to be able to do so, this wish expresses itself in the form of an inheritance. But for most people, this is simply not realistic. How might they transmit a legacy to the next generation? I believe that the answer can be found in an important distinction in the Torah between the words yerusha (inheritance) and morasha (heritage).

We are all more familiar with the concept of yerusha, used throughout the Torah to describe the passing down of material possessions from parents to children. Far less common is the concept of morasha, mentioned in the Torah in reference to only two things: Torah ["Moses prescribed the Torah to us, an eternal heritage (morasha) for the congregation of Jacob" (Deut. 33:4)] and Land of Israel (the verse cited above at the outset).

The different contexts in which these words appear is quite revealing about the different kinds of relationships between parents and children, and different priorities handed down from generation to generation, that these bequests engender. I would like to explore three different examples in which the differences between yerusha and morasha will clarify the significance of each.

The first point of distinction is in the realm of effort. The Jerusalem Talmud [Bava Batra 8:2] speaks

of yerusha as something that comes easily. When a person dies, leaving a yerusha, the heir need not do anything other than receive the gift. Morasha, however, requires much more.

The added letter mem in morasha, suggests the Jerusalem Talmud, is a grammatical sign of intensity, the pi'el form in Hebrew grammar. In order for an individual to come into possession of a morasha, they must work for it.

While an inheritance is what you receive from the previous generation—without your particular input—a heritage requires your active involvement and participation. A yerusha is a check your father left you; a morasha is a business that your parents may have started, but into which you must put much sweat, blood and tears.

This certainly explains why morasha is used only with regard to Torah and the Land of Israel. Our sages [Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 5a] remark that there are three gifts that G-d gave the Jewish people that can be acquired only through commitment and suffering: "Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come." And we understand very well that neither Torah nor the Land of Israel can be easily acquired.

Pirkei Avot 2:10 specifically teaches, "Prepare yourself to study Torah, for it is not an inheritance for you." All achievement in Torah depends on an individual's own efforts. A student of Torah must be willing to suffer privation.

Similarly, the Land of Israel cannot be acquired without sacrifice and suffering. One of the tests in the life of Abraham—and the source of the Jewish claim to Jerusalem—is the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah. The message conveyed by the Torah is that we can only acquire our Holy Land if we are willing to place the lives of our children on the line. Every parent in Israel who sends his/her child to the army understands this message very well. A heritage comes hard, not easily, and our national heritage is Torah and Israel.

The second distinction between the terms is not how the gift is acquired, but rather how it may be dispersed. Even the largest amount of money inherited (yerusha) can be squandered or legitimately lost. In contrast, a morasha must be given over intact to the next generation. Morasha literally means "to hand over to someone else." Silver is an inheritance, and can be used in whatever way the heir desires; silver Shabbat candlesticks are a heritage, meant to be passed down from parent to child and used from generation to generation.

Finally, in the case of an inheritance, one must have the object of yerusha in one's possession. This need not be the case with regard to a morasha. Jewish parents bequeathed the ideals of Torah and the Land of Israel to their children for countless generations, even while living in exile far from the Promised Land, and even when poverty and oppression made it near

impossible for them to become Torah scholars. Values can be passed down regardless of one's physical or material station in life.

For this reason, an inheritance, regardless of its size, pales in comparison to a heritage. We all want to be able to bequeath a yerusha to our children and grandchildren, and we should do what we can to make that possible. Nevertheless, the most important legacy that we can leave them is a morasha, the eternal heritage, of Torah and the Land of Israel. ©2017 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

As the narrative of the redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage unfolds, I am continually struck by the apparently gradual process that is described for us in the Torah. What does all of the detail associated with each of the plagues visited upon Egypt come to teach us? And would not one great plague alone have sufficed? After all, in the past century we witnessed how two bombs, alone, forced the powerful and fanatical Japanese Empire to surrender unconditionally. So, what is the message of the ten plagues and the elapse of time from the onset of the mission of Moshe to its final successful conclusion?

These issues are raised and discussed by all of the great rabbinic commentators over the ages. As is usual in Jewish biblical commentary, there is no one definitive answer, for the Torah itself is said to have seventy different "faces." Yet, there is much ground for a general understanding of the matter in their writings and opinions.

The main thrust of rabbinic opinion is that all of this was necessary to give the Egyptians an opportunity to repent and save themselves and, just as importantly, to give the Jews an opportunity to begin to think of themselves as a free and independent people and no longer as slaves and pagans. It takes time and a series of many events to turn around the mentality and preconceived ideas of human beings.

The Egyptians had to somehow become accustomed to the fact that they had no right to rule over others and be cruel to their fellow human beings. The Jews had to become accustomed to the responsibilities of freedom and an independent life and to realize that they were destined to be a special people dedicated to the service of G-d and humankind.

These things cannot happen suddenly and if they do, then they are not of a long-lasting nature. Judaism is not built upon sudden epiphanies but rather upon the long, grinding routine. Only after ten plagues have visited Egypt, the Egyptians and the Jews as well begin to understand what G-d wants from them.

We see from many incidents recorded for us throughout the Bible that one-shot miracles, no matter

how impressive and meaningful they are at the moment they occur, do not really change the mindset of people in the long run. The miracle performed through Elijah, when all of Israel proclaimed that Hashem is the G-d of the universe, was not of a long-lasting nature and/or influence.

The people soon sank back into the swamp of idolatry and immorality. Regularity, consistency and repeated instruction and education are necessary to make miracles truly influential and long-lasting. If the Jews had been delivered from Egyptian bondage by one great miracle, they would have had a much harder time grasping the unique role that G-d intended them to play in world history.

They would have been much more reticent to accept that role at Sinai had it not been for the fact that they witnessed so many miracles. Those miracles were repeated regularly and explained to them by Moshe in the light of the godly Torah, which they now willingly accepted. ©2017 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

On most occasions when the Torah states that G-d issues a command, the details of the directive are spelled out. Our portion offers an exception to the rule. The text reads, "and the Lord spoke to Moshe (Moses) and Aaron and gave them a charge unto the children of Israel." (Exodus 6:13). But the specific command is not spelled out.

The reality is that the power of certain situations go beyond words. When the emotion is so high, words simply do not suffice. For example, in the Hagaddah we proclaim that had G-d taken us to Sinai, but not given us the Torah—dayenu, it would have been enough. Is this true? What value is there in coming to Sinai if the Torah is not given? But perhaps it can be suggested that the experience of coming to Sinai, the revelation moment, even without words, has intense power. The rendezvous with G-d would have been enough. Following this idea, it can be suggested that the mere experience of being commanded was enough – nothing more had to be said.

One wonders, however, why here specifically were no words required? After all G-d commands Moshe and Aaron many times—and the specific mandate follows? But perhaps the command was indeed fully spelled out. Note that after the Torah says, "and He commanded them (va-yetzavem)," the Torah adds the two letter word, "el" which literally means, "to." Here, Moshe and Aaron were commanded "to" the Jewish people; in other words they were to become involved with the Jewish people in a way that they

would connect with them no matter what.

Sifrei makes this very point by declaring "G-d said to Moshe and Aaron, I want you to know that the Israelites are a stubborn and troublesome lot; but you must accept this mission on the understanding that they will curse you and stone you." Ibn Ezra follows this idea by stating that Moshe and Aaron were commanded to be patient with Israel and not be angry with them, even if the nation refused to believe in their leadership.

This idea also makes contextual sense. It follows immediately after the Jewish people had bitterly complained to Moshe and Aaron that their efforts to free the people had only made things worse. (Exodus 5:21)

This approach rings true today. Debate has emerged on how to deal with Jews who have strayed. In Israel for example, there are those who throw stones at Jews who do not keep the Sabbath. Our analysis points us in a different direction—rock throwing is counter-productive. Patience and love are the way.

A chassid once approached his rebbe. "My child is desecrating the Sabbath. What shall I do?" "Love him" replied the rebbe. "But he is desecrating the Sabbath publicly," retorted the chassid. The rebbe looked up with a smile and responded, "Then, love him even more."

Hence, G-d's command to Moshe and Aaron—"to the children of Israel." "El" teaches that the gateway to the soul is not through stones or harsh words, but rather through love. ©2017 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

The Torah states: "And the Almighty spoke to Moshe and Aharon and He commanded them about the Children of Israel." (Ex. 6:13)

Rashi, the French commentator (who lived from 1040-1104) clarifies that the Almighty commanded Moshe and Aharon to lead them gently and with patience. The Shaloh, a later commentator, writes that this is a lesson for any person in a position of leadership. Whenever you are in a position of authority, be very careful not to get angry at the people you are dealing with. Watch out that you do not scream and shout. The reward for a leader who has this patience is very great.

There are two possible attitudes for a person in a position of leadership. The first is personal power -- the person seeks leadership for his own ego. The leader demands that people listen to him because of his selfish vanity. Such a leader will become angry when people do not follow his orders: "How dare they disobey me!" His entire focus is on his own success. The only reason he cares about other people is

because that is how he will be successful. The people he deals with are not his goal, but just a means to an end. The end being his own self-aggrandizement and power. Such a leader will get angry easily.

The Torah ideal of leadership is to help as many people as possible. The focus is to benefit people and to be of service to others. When they are suffering, the leader realizes that they are likely to be moody and complaining. The more difficult they are to deal with, the greater the need for patience and tolerance. That was the Almighty's command to the first leaders of the Jewish people. This is the model for all future leaders. Regardless of whether you have authority over a large group or a small group such as a class or your own children, this lesson applies to you. Every difficult encounter is a tool for growing in the trait of patience. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2017 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Proof in the Putting

This week, the Torah tells us how the Egyptian exile entered its waning moments as the dawn of redemption begins. Moshe and Aharon threatened Pharaoh with strong repercussions if Hashem's will was not fulfilled and the Jews were not redeemed from Egypt. But before they took action, Moshe and Aharon proved they were messengers from Hashem by displaying their ability to control and even change nature. The first miraculous spectacle occurred on a governmental level, in Pharaoh's palace. After those demonstration did not impress the ruler, only then did the nation feel the brunt of Hashem's punishment they were stricken with the plague of blood.

Moshe and Aharon did not enter the palace of the tyrant unaware of his arrogance. They had met him before and were mockingly rebuffed. But this time they were equipped to prove their powers and authority. They were forewarned that their adversary would doubt their authority, and he would ask them to produce celestial credentials with a sign that they were truly Divinely ordained.

Hashem tells them, "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Provide a wonder for yourselves,' you shall say to Aharon, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh -- it will become a snake!' " (Exodus 7:9).

The Noam Elimelech, Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk, questions the wording. What would Pharaoh mean with the words "Provide a wonder for yourselves"? He asks. The wondrous act was not for Moshe and Aharon, rather it was for Pharaoh! Shouldn't the posuk read "provide a wonder for me"? With these words did Pharaoh, the master showman whose world renowned chicanery held Moshe at bay for a year, teach us something about the nature of miraculous occurrences that prove a point to a skeptic?

P.T. Barnum was a master showman who astounded hordes of foolish curiosity seekers with displays of the bizarre and the seemingly impossible.

One of his amazing displays had a lamb grazing peacefully in a display cage, while two fierce lions strolled nonchalantly only a few feet away. He obviously felt that the exhibit would attract hundreds who would marvel at his pretended prescient fulfillment, albeit partial, of the prophet Yishayahu's (11:6) description of the Messianic era. "And the wolf shall lie with the lamb, and the leopard will down with the kid, and the lion shall walk with the lamb dwell peacefully."

One of Barnum's friends, who was amazed at the sight of this post Messianic mimicry, asked in wonder, "how long do you think you will be able to maintain this exhibit?"

Barnum shrugged his shoulders, smirked, and replied sardonically, "as long as my diminishing supply of lambs holds out!"

Reb Elimelech of Lizensk explains the words with which Hashem warned Moshe and Aharon, "It will be when Pharaoh will ask, 'give for yourselves a sign.'"

Pharaoh the charlatan would know the difference between a true sign and a spectacular hoax. The difference is how the performer perceives it. Pharaoh's conniving magicians performed sorcery that they themselves knew to be filled with lies. As performers, they were not impressed.

Pharaoh would ask for a sign, not only that would impress him, but would impress Moshe and Aharon as well.

The greatest accomplishment in life, and the greatest way to influence others in a meaningful and lasting way, is to be as impressed and excited about one's own actions as are others.

A parent or teacher who discusses Torah with true enthusiasm, impressed by the Heavenly genius contained within, will surely impact a child in a more meaningful way than a parent who exudes an "I heard this one already" attitude toward his audience. Pharaoh understood that, and Hashem told his Divine messengers that Pharaoh, who knew very well how to lie, would ask for the real sign -- one that generated the same excitement for the messengers as well as the recipients. It was not only a sign for himself, but for Moshe and Aharon as well.

The Proof is not always in the way something is received. Sometimes the proof is in the putting! © 2000 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

What is a point of confusion for many who question the Divinity of Torah is the basis of most of Sod. Kabbalah is vast, and yet so much of it discusses the various Names of G-d, specifically the level of Divine revelation associated with each

Name.

It is clear from history that there are times when G-d makes His Presence obvious, and other times when He makes it seem as if He has withdrawn from the affairs of man altogether. This is something the Torah warns about and calls "hester panim," the hiding of G-d's face: "G-d told Moshe, 'After you lie with your fathers, this people will act immorally and pursue the gods of the strangers of the land they are going to. They will abandon Me and nullify My covenant which I have made with them. I will become very angry at them on that day, and I will abandon them and -- haster astir Panai -- hide My face from them.'" (Devarim 31:16-18)

Nevertheless, the responsibility of man is not reduced during such periods of hester panim, but increased: "The foundation of wisdom and root of Kabbalah... is to know and make known that Hovayah-Elokeinu, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Ya'akov; the G-d of Israel; alone, with His good will, made everything exist and created all created beings. [He] has formed and continuously forms all that has form, has done and continuously performs all actions, giving existence to everything at all times... He oversees everything at all times and directs everything continuously. He alone does this, and there is never anything else but Him." (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

Thus even during times of hester panim everything is the direct result of the will of G-d, even if it ceases to be obvious to man. It also remains for our good even when the opposite seems more likely. The intensity of Divine revelation can fluctuate but neither G-d nor His Providence changes, and it is our responsibility to recognize this and to proclaim it to the world.

The Names of G-d are an important part of this process. Each Name means something unique and refers to a distinct level of Divine revelation. The main Name of G-d, however, the "tree" from which all other Names "branch out" is spelled Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh, and is referred to as the Tetragrammaton.

During Temple times the Name was pronounced as it is written because the proper level of holiness to say the Name was maintained. With the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent exile, this no longer remained the case and consequently: "His Name is written 'Hovayah' but it is pronounced 'Adon'ai.'" (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

"Hovayah" is spelled Heh-Vav-Yud-Heh, which are the same letters as the Tetragrammaton Name, except that they are out of sequence and therefore permissible to pronounce even today. In prayer, though, the Name "Adon'ai," which means "my Master," is the pronounced substitution since it has less holiness.

The main meaning of the Name Hovayah is

that His Presence is enduring... that His Being is always in the present, and never in the past or in the future. (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

The Name Hovayah alludes to three words: hayah, hoveh, and yihyeh, which mean "was, is, and will be." Therefore, it is the Name of G-d that refers to His infiniteness. For man, the Present is but a threshold over which the future passes on the way to becoming the Past. For G-d there is only the Present: "With respect to His Essence, may His Name be blessed, in truth it is always only in the Present, and that is the main teaching of the Name Hovayah, may He be blessed." (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

There is another lesson to which the Name Hovayah alludes, something that was easier to recall while it was still possible to pronounce the Name: "All of existence is from Him and is always dependent upon Him. He bears all of it in all its fullness." (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

The Name "Elokim" means "Judge," and it is holy when used in reference to G-d, but profane when used in reference to angels and human judges. Man was made "b'tzelem Elokim," in the image of G-d, because he is like G-d when he uses his intellectual capacity to discern truth and exercise justice.

Elokim is also the Name used to refer to G-d's Providence when it is hidden, which gives the impression that nature is the force behind Creation. Hence, the Name Elokim also refers to G-d as the "Ba'al HaKochos," the Force behind all forces within Creation, and even the Hebrew word for "nature" -- hateva -- has the same gematria as Elokim.

The difference between the levels of Divine revelation of the two Names is alluded to at very important turning point in history, the Akeidah: "Go to the land of Moriah. Bring him up there as an offering, upon one of the mountains which I will show you." (Bereishis 22:2)

On the third day of his journey Avraham "lifted up his eyes" and saw a Divine sign that indicated he had reached his intended destination and the location of the Akeidah. Har HaMoriah, the Midrash says, was encompassed by fire from Heaven to earth, and the Clouds of Glory hovered above it. It was a supernatural vision.

The Midrash also says that at that time Avraham was uncertain who should accompany him up the mountain. Aside from Yitzchak, Avraham had brought Yishmael, his son from Hagar, and Eliezer his trusted servant, with him.

He decided, therefore, that only those who could see the miraculous vision were fitting to complete the journey with him. When it was clear that neither Yishmael nor Eliezer could see the miracle, Avraham told them to remain behind, saying: "You stay here -- Peh-Heh -- with the donkey, while I and the lad will walk until there -- Chof-Heh, prostrate ourselves and then

return to you." (Bereishis 22:5)

The gematria of Peh-Heh is: 80 + 5 (+ 1), or 86, the same numerical value of the letters of Elokim. The gematria of Chof-Heh, however, is: 20 + 5 (+1), which is equal to 26, the gematria of Hovayah. On a simple level, therefore, Avraham had merely given instructions to Yishmael and Eliezer to remain with the donkey. On a deeper level, as themidrash explains, he was sending them a spiritual message as well, telling them: "Since you see nothing and the donkey sees nothing, you belong together with the donkey. Wait here together with the donkey until we return." (Bereishis Rabbah 56:2)

Far be it from Avraham Avinu to simply denigrate his own son Yishmael, whom he loved dearly, and his servant Eliezer, whom he trusted implicitly. Instead, he was qualifying his decision to leave them behind at that point, at what ended up being a historical crossroad with the Jewish people going in one direction, and the rest of the world going in another one.

Thus at the end of Yom Kippur, the day on which the Jewish people are said to reach the level of angels and to share their vision of G-d somewhat, we declare passionately: "Hovayah is Elokim"

As the Divine Presence withdraws to higher levels of reality and therefore greater levels of hiddenness, we declare and remind ourselves that even if we can't see Hovayah so clearly in everyday life, it is always Him, working through Elokim, Who maintains Creation. Elokim is really Hovayah in disguise, as we declare twice daily in the Shema: "Hear O Israel, Hovayah is Elokeinu, Hovayah is One." (Devarim 6:4)

The Name of G-d, "Adon'ai," is also a Name that is holy in reference to G-d and profane when used for man, means that: "He is the Master of everything. He supervises everything, and guides it all, distinguishing and judging all actions, determining all that is necessary for all that exists in order to sustain and guide each element at all times." (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

Thus, the Name "Adon'ai," like the Name "Elokim," we pronounce correctly. And like the Name Elokim, Adon'ai reminds us that G-d is the Ba'al HaKochos, the Master of All Forces. The difference is that Adon'ai corresponds to the lowest revelation of G-d within Creation, where the face of G-d is the most hidden and is hardest to fulfill: "You have been shown in order to know that Hovayah, He is Elokim; there is none else besides Him." (Devarim 4:35)

The entire point of Torah is to facilitate the realization of this seminal concept. The entire point of history has been to actualize it in everyday life, and thus the Final Redemption is defined in terms of it: "Hovayah will be King over the entire land, and on that day Hovayah will be One and His Name [will be] One."

(Zechariah 14:9)

This will be in Yemos HaMoshiach, when the reality of Chof-Heh will be apparent not just to the descendants of Avraham Avinu, but to the entire world. At that time the words of the Shema will be more than just a declaration. They will be an obvious statement of fact to everyone. © 2014 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

The Parshiyos we are currently studying serve as Moshe Rabbeinu's introduction to Klal Yisrael. The narratives covered in these weekly Torah readings illuminate for us the attributes the Jewish people seek in choosing their leaders.

In describing the events of Moshe's early life, the Torah seems to be trying to make the case that Moshe is fit for his future position of leadership in the Jewish nation. Yet scant few "bullets" in Moshe's resume shed light on his qualifications for the job. Remember, when Moshe appeared before Pharaoh at the start of his mission of redemption, he was 80 years old! What kind of resume did he build during those first 80 years that would qualify him for becoming the chosen person to lead the Jewish people?

Rav Simcha Zissel (the 'Alter') from Kelm spends many chapters of his sefer discussing this idea. The Alter makes an elaborate case that we really only see one thing about Moshe Rabbeinu that qualified him for the job. There is one theme and quality, which begins in Parshas Shmos and continues in Parshas Vaera, which shows us why Moshe Rabbeinu was worthy of being chosen for this position. This quality is being "nos'ei b'ol im chaveiro" -- the capacity that Moshe Rabbeinu had to feel the pain of his fellow Jew.

Rav Simcha Zissel documents this for us: We read in last week's parsha "...and he went out to his brethren and he saw their suffering..." [Shmos 2:11]. Moshe Rabbeinu was a prince. He was almost like a grandson of Pharaoh. He could have remained in the lap of luxury and done nothing. However, our Rabbis say, commenting on the above quoted pasuk, "He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over them. He said 'I wish I could be in your place.'"

Moshe saw the Egyptian beating up the Jew. Moshe saved the Jew from the hand of the Egyptian. Is that not a case of "nos'ei b'ol im chaveiro"? Again, the next day, when it was not a case of an Egyptian against a Jew but of Jew against Jew, what does Moshe Rabbeinu do? He does the same thing: Nos'ei b'ol im chaveiro. It costs him his entire secure position in the palace of Pharaoh. He becomes a fugitive of justice and must run away for his life from Egypt.

Then when Moshe went to Midyan, and he might have already 'learned his lesson' to keep himself out of other people's fights, he sees that the daughters of Midyan are being harassed and again he sticks up

for the underdog and jumps in to save them.

Moshe bears the burden of his fellow man's suffering. This and this alone is the primary quality that Moshe possessed, which qualified him for the job of Jewish leadership. His resume contained the fact that he was a "nos'ei b'ol im chaveiro".

Rav Yonosan Eibeshutz, in his sefer Tiferes Yonosan, uses this idea to explain why Pharaoh excused the entire Tribe of Levi from the Egyptian bondage. According to our Rabbis, the Tribe of Levi was not enslaved the entire time of our sojourn in Egypt. Rav Eibeshutz offers an interesting theory why Pharaoh did this. He says that Pharaoh saw through his astrologers that the eventual savior of the Jewish people would be a descendant of the Tribe of Levi. Pharaoh figured, and shrewdly so, that a person who was never enslaved in the first place would not be the leader of a rebellion. How can a person who was not a victim of oppression turn around and take the oppressed class out of slavery? He never felt the pain so he would not risk his status quo to attempt to lead a revolt to overthrow the current situation.

It was a brilliant plan. Pharaoh was willing to give up the labor of the Tribe of Levi as a means of stifling the ability of any Levite to aspire to become the savior of his people! Even the Jewish people themselves were skeptical of Moshe's ability to lead them out of slavery, due to his lack of familiarity with their situation. "...And they did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of wind and hard work." [Shmos 6:9]

Pharaoh underestimated the Tribe of Levi. He failed to realize that the Tribe of Levi in general and Moshe Rabbeinu in particular had an unbelievable ability to empathize with their fellow man. In spite of the fact that they were not the victims of the slavery, they had this capacity of putting themselves in someone else's shoes as if they themselves were the victim.

The Shalo"h HaKadosh points out an anomaly in the Torah's pasukim [Shmos 6:14-19]: When the Torah introduces us to and tells us the genealogy of Moshe Rabbeinu, it begins with the Tribe of Reuven and lists the sons of Reuven. It then goes lists the sons of Shimon. There is similar syntax in both cases: "The sons of Reuven..." "And the sons of Shimeon..." We would expect to next find a parallel listing of Moshe Rabbeinu's tribe, beginning with the words "And the sons of Levi..." Instead, the Torah says, "And these ARE THE NAMES OF THE SONS OF LEVI..."

The Shalo"h says an amazing idea. Levi prophetically realized that his sons and grandsons were not going to be victims of the enslavement in Egypt. He did not want them to forget about their cousins who were slaves. Therefore, he took pains to name each of his sons with a name somehow connoting the enslavement in Egypt. Kehas (meaning dark) connotes the fact that "they blackened their teeth with the

suffering of the enslavement." Merari (coming from the word Mar) connotes that they made their lives bitter. Gershon (coming from the word Ger) connotes being temporary sojourners in this land of our exile. Levi anticipated what was coming and he took pains to imbue in his children the sense of kinship and empathy with other members of the family. Levi wanted to ensure that his descendants would not be able to sleep well at night -- even if they were not enslaved -- as long as another member of the family was in pain.

Moshe Rabbeinu in particular possessed this attribute. He was the prime example of this capacity to be nos'ei b'ol im chaveiro.

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that Moshe Rabbeinu's statement at the end of last week's parsha "My L-rd, why have You harmed this people, why have you sent me?" [Shmos 5:22] was a worse sin than what he did at Mei Meriva (when he hit the rock). Imagine the audacity to lecture the Almighty, as it were! The Medrash, in fact, states that at this very moment, the Attribute of Justice wanted to smite Moshe. However, G-d responded, "Leave him alone, he speaks this way only out of a sense of honor for the Jewish people."

Rav Matisyahu Solomon explains the Medrash: "Why did the Almighty say 'Let him be'? It was because it was not Moshe Rabbeinu talking. It was Klal Yisrael talking." Moshe Rabbeinu was so fused with the needs and suffering of the Jewish people, it was as if the Jewish people were talking through the voice box of Moshe. This expression of "Why have You harmed this people?" is what the people felt. Moshe Rabbeinu, as it were, was like a puppet who mouthed the words the people were feeling. For such speech, the Almighty said, one cannot be held accountable. The people could not be held accountable for such speech because "a person is not held accountable for what he says in his moment of anguish."

This then was the resume of Moshe Rabbeinu. He qualified for Jewish leadership because he had the preeminent quality required of a Jewish leader -- the ability to empathize with the suffering of the Jewish people. ©2015 Rabbi Y. Frand and torah.org

