

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he ninth plague -- darkness -- comes shrouded in a darkness of its own. What is this plague doing here? It seems out of sequence. Thus far there have been eight plagues, and they have become steadily, inexorably, more serious.

The first two, the Nile turning blood-red and the infestation of frogs, seemed more like omens than anything else. The third and fourth, gnats and wild beasts, caused worry, not crisis. The fifth, the plague that killed livestock, affected animals, not human beings.

The sixth, boils, was again a discomfort, but a serious one, no longer an external issue but a bodily affliction. (Remember that Job lost everything he had, but did not start cursing his fate until his body was covered with sores: Job 2.) The seventh and eighth, hail and locusts, destroyed the Egyptian grain. Now -- with the loss of grain added to the loss of livestock in the fifth plague -- there was no food. Still to come was the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, in retribution for Pharaoh's murder of Israelite children. It would be this that eventually broke Pharaoh's resolve.

So we would expect the ninth plague to be very serious indeed, something that threatened, even if it did not immediately take, human life. Instead we read what seems like an anti-climax: Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand towards the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt -- darkness that can be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand towards the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. (Exodus 10:21-23)

Darkness is a nuisance, but no more. The phrase "darkness that can be felt" suggests what happened: a khamsin, a sandstorm of a kind not unfamiliar in Egypt, which can last for several days, producing sand -- and dust-filled air that obliterates the light of the sun. A khamsin is usually produced by a southern wind that blows into Egypt from the Sahara Desert. The worst sandstorm is usually the first of the season, in March. This fits the dating of the plague which happened shortly before the death of the firstborn, on Pesach.

The ninth plague was doubtless unusual in its

intensity, but it was not an event of a kind wholly unknown to the Egyptians, then or now. Why then does it figure in the plague narrative, immediately prior to its climax? Why did it not happen nearer the beginning, as one of the less severe plagues?

The answer lies in a line from "Dayeinu," the song we sing as part of the Haggadah: "If God had executed judgment against them [the Egyptians] but had not done so against their gods, it would have been sufficient." Twice the Torah itself refers to this dimension of the plagues: "I will pass through Egypt on that night, and I will kill every first-born in Egypt, man and animal. I will perform acts of judgment against all the gods of Egypt: I (alone) am God." (Exodus 12:12)

The Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, struck down by the Lord; and against their gods, the Lord had executed judgment. (Numbers 33:4)

Not all the plagues were directed, in the first instance, against the Egyptians. Some were directed against things they worshipped as gods. That is the case in the first two plagues. The Nile was personified in ancient Egypt as the god Hapi and was worshipped as the source of fertility in an otherwise desert region. Offerings were made to it at times of inundation. The inundations themselves were attributed to one of the major Egyptian deities, Osiris. The plague of frogs would have been associated by the Egyptians with Heket, the goddess who was believed to attend births as a midwife, and who was depicted as a woman with the head of a frog.

The plagues were not only intended to punish Pharaoh and his people for their mistreatment of the Israelites, but also to show them the powerlessness of the gods in which they believed. What is at stake in this confrontation is the difference between myth -- in which the gods are mere powers, to be tamed, propitiated or manipulated -- and biblical monotheism, in which ethics (justice, compassion, human dignity) constitute the meeting point of God and mankind.

The symbolism of these plagues, often lost on us, would have been immediately apparent to the Egyptians. Two things now become clear. The first is why the Egyptian magicians declared, "This is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:15) only after the third plague, lice. The first two plagues would not have surprised them at all. They would have understood them as the work of Egyptian deities who, they believed, were sometimes angry with the people and took their revenge.

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The second is the quite different symbolism the first two plagues were meant to have for the Israelites, and for us. As with the tenth plague, these were no mere miracles intended to demonstrate the power of the God of Israel, as if religion were a gladiatorial arena in which the strongest god wins. Their meaning was moral. They represented the most fundamental of all ethical principles, stated in the Noahide covenant in the words "He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6). This is the rule of retributive justice, measure for measure: As you do, so shall you be done to.

By first ordering the midwives to kill all male Israelite babies, and then, when that failed, by commanding, "Every boy who is born must be cast into the Nile" (Ex. 1:22), Pharaoh had turned what should have been symbols of life (the Nile, which fed Egyptian agriculture, and midwives) into agents of death. The river that turned to blood, and the Heket-like frogs that infested the land, were not afflictions as such, but rather coded communications, as if to say to the Egyptians: reality has an ethical structure. See what it feels like when the gods you turned against the Israelites turn on you. If used for evil ends, the powers of nature will turn against man, so that what he does will be done to him in retribution. There is justice in history.

Hence the tenth plague, to which all the others were a mere prelude. Unlike all the other plagues, its significance was disclosed to Moses even before he set out on his mission, while he was still living with Jethro in Midian: You shall say to Pharaoh: This is what the Lord says. "Israel is My son, My firstborn. I have told you to let My son go, that he may worship Me. If you refuse to let him go, I will kill your own firstborn son." (Ex. 4:22-23)

Whereas the first two plagues were symbolic representations of the Egyptian murder of Israelite children, the tenth plague was the enactment of retributive justice, as if heaven was saying to the Egyptians: You committed, or supported, or passively accepted the murder of innocent children. There is only one way you will ever realise the wrong you did, namely, if you yourself suffer what you did to others.

This too helps explain the difference between

the two words the Torah regularly uses to describe what God did in Egypt: otot u'moftim, "signs and wonders." These two words are not two ways of describing the same thing -- miracles. They describe quite different things. A mofet, a wonder, is indeed a miracle. An ot, a sign, is something else: a symbol (like tefillin or circumcision, both of which are called ot), that is to say, a coded communication, a message.

The significance of the ninth plague is now obvious. The greatest god in the Egyptian pantheon was Ra or Re, the sun god. The name of the Pharaoh often associated with the exodus, Ramses ii, means meses, "son of " (as in the name Moses) Ra, the god of the sun. Egypt -- so its people believed -- was ruled by the sun. Its human ruler, or Pharaoh, was semi-divine, the child of the sun god.

In the beginning of time, according to Egyptian myth, the sun god ruled together with Nun, the primeval waters. Eventually there were many deities. Ra then created human beings from his tears. Seeing, however, that they were deceitful, he sent the goddess Hathor to destroy them; only a few survived.

The plague of darkness was not a mofet but an ot, a sign. The obliteration of the sun signalled that there is a power greater than Ra. Yet what the plague represented was less the power of God over the sun, but the rejection by God of a civilisation that turned one man, Pharaoh, into an absolute ruler (son of the sun god) with the ability to enslave other human beings -- and of a culture that could tolerate the murder of children because that is what Ra himself did.

When God told Moses to say to Pharaoh, "My son, My firstborn, Israel," He was saying: I am the God who cares for His children, not one who kills His children. The ninth plague was a divine act of communication that said: there is not only physical darkness but also moral darkness. The best test of a civilisation is to see how it treats children, its own and others'. In an age of broken families, neglected and impoverished children, and worse -- the use of children as instruments of war -- that is a lesson we still need to learn. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd God said unto Moses: 'Go in unto Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might show these My signs in the midst of them.'" (Exodus 10:1) Why does God declare that He has "hardened Pharaoh's heart" so that the despot will not change his mind and free the Israelites? Doesn't this collide head-on with our notion of free will? Is the Torah telling us that God interrupts the ordinary course of human

events to introduce His will into the hearts of people, sometimes even preventing them from making the right decision? What about the idea that absolutely nothing must stand in the way of repentance, that no one, not even a righteous person, can stand where a penitent stands?

Rabbi Shlomo Goren gives a novel explanation which was apparently inspired by the miraculous events he experienced with the rise of the State of Israel. There are times, he maintains, when God must introduce His will into the hearts of people, but this is limited to monarchs, emperors, and Pharaohs. Rabbi Goren cites a verse from Proverbs: A king's heart is like channeled water in the hand of the Lord: He directs it wherever He wishes. (Proverbs 21:1)

Rabbi Goren suggests that this verse comes to teach that in regard to freedom of choice, we have to distinguish between an individual and the leader of a nation.

Individuals always have free choice. However, since God has a master plan with Israel as the catalyst, the Almighty may sometimes be moved to control the choices of leaders of key nations during critical and fateful historical periods. Such a situation occurred at the very dawn of history with the confrontation between Pharaoh and the Hebrew slaves, and the Almighty had to step in.

Another way of looking at the issue is provided by the Midrash. True, God hardens Pharaoh's heart, as He declared He would, but we must note that the divine intervention only emerges with the sixth plague. Examining the first five plagues, we find that Pharaoh himself is the one who exercises obstinacy. This formulation is repeated again and again. "Pharaoh became obstinate" (the first plague [Ex. 7:22]); "He [Pharaoh] hardened his heart" (the second plague [Ex. 8:11]); "Pharaoh remained obstinate" (the third plague [Ex. 8:15]); "Pharaoh made himself obstinate" (the fourth plague [Ex. 8:28]); and "Pharaoh remained obstinate" (the fifth plague [Ex. 9:8]). Only when we reach the sixth plague do we arrive at a new formulation: "Now it was God who made Pharaoh obstinate" [Ex. 9:12]. The contrast is so sharp and the division so perfect – five on one side and five on the other – that it is clear that the Torah wants to tell us something.

The obstinacy on the part of Pharaoh provides the Midrash with a means for solving the tension between the notion of free will and God's initial declaration regarding "hardening his heart." In the Midrash Raba we read: The Holy One, blessed be He, gives someone a chance to repent, and not only one opportunity but several chances: once, twice, three times. But then, if the person still has not repented, God locks the person's heart altogether, cutting off the possibility of repentance in the future. (Shemot Raba 13:3)

The Midrash goes on to explain that Pharaoh had already been given five opportunities to repent, five opportunities to hear the voice of God demanding that His people shall be released from slavery – each of the plagues a direct "fax" from God – and still refused. God is now effectively saying to Pharaoh: "You stiffened your neck, you hardened your heart, now I am going to add stubbornness to your own inner stubbornness."

I would like to take this basic idea of the Midrash as to how God sometimes cuts off repentance as a punishment for a certain class of sinner, and attempt to understand it in human psychological terms. As the Midrash points out, external influence began only after Pharaoh's own refusal the first five times despite the first five plagues. The result of such obstinacy is that Pharaoh himself became frozen, locked into a conception of how to behave; once that happens, it becomes exceedingly difficult for anyone to change their mind.

We must also remember that Pharaoh was not alone. He was surrounded by advisers, ministers and a corps of publicizers. After a clear policy of continued enslavement despite the suffering endured by the Egyptian populace as a result of the first five plagues, how could Pharaoh suddenly change his policy and still save face? Had he been wrong the other times, had his citizenry suffered needlessly? How could a despot who called himself a god admit that his earlier policy had been a mistaken one? It is almost as if Pharaoh no longer had the real possibility of change; his earlier decisions locked him in.

I would like to suggest a third approach, based on a discussion of repentance near the end of Yoma 86b. The sages alert us to a seeming contradiction in the words of Resh Lakish regarding repentance. The first quote attributed to the master is: Great is repentance because it results in prior premeditated sins being accounted as errors [shgagot].

Then the Talmud points out that Resh Lakish also said: Great is repentance because it results in prior premeditated sins being accounted as merits [zekhuyot].

The apparent contradiction is resolved by the Talmud by pointing out that the first citation – former sins accounted as errors – is the result of repentance based on fear, the latter citation – penitents' former sins accounted as merits – is the result of repentance from love.

It seems to me that had Pharaoh come to the conclusion that it was wrong to enslave the Hebrews based on his own new-found convictions about the true God of the universe who guarantees freedom to all, his repentance would have emanated "from love," and would have been accepted. Since, ironically enough, it would have been his former sinful acts and obstinacy which had led him to such a conclusion, even his prior transgressions could now be seen as merits, according

to Resh Lakish. After all, had it not been for them, he would never have switched positions and arrived at his new awareness and religio-ethical consciousness.

This is clearly not the position in which we find Pharaoh. Were he to release the Jews after the fifth plague, it would have nothing to do with a transformed and ennobled moral sensitivity and everything to do with his having been bludgeoned over the head by the power of the plagues. Such repentance out of fear is hardly true repentance, and cannot be accepted by God to atone for previous sins. Since Pharaoh is not truly repenting in any shape or form, God "hardens his heart" to the suffering of the plagues and allows him to continue to do what he really believes in doing: enslaving the Hebrews, who must wait until the Almighty deems it the proper time for redemption.

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### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

**A**t the beginning of this week's Torah reading Moshe is commanded by God to come to Pharaoh. The commentators of the Bible all deal with the strange verb used in this commandment. What does "bo" mean here -- to come to Pharaoh? Should not a different verb such as approach or visit Pharaoh have been used? Since Hebrew is a very exact language, and as I have often mentioned, the opinion of the great Rabbi Elijah of Vilna is that there are no synonyms in the Torah. So, this word "bo" must carry with it a special significance, a nuanced insight that the Torah wishes to communicate to those who read and study its written word.

Among the many interpretations regarding this use of the word "bo," I find it fascinating that many commentators say that the word does not really mean 'to come,' but means 'to come into.' Moshe is instructed to come into the psyche of Pharaoh, who has been afflicted with many plagues and yet remains stubborn and unyielding regarding freeing the Jewish people from bondage in Egypt. By understanding the psychology of Pharaoh, they will realize that Pharaoh's behavior is illogical, unrealistic and self-destructive.

Pharaoh himself is vaguely aware that this is the case and every so often he offers to compromise with Moshe and grant some sort of temporary relief to the Jews from their bondage. Yet, at the end of the matter, Pharaoh remains obstinate and unwilling not only to free the Jews but unwilling to save himself and his nation from destruction.

By delving deeply into the psyche of Pharaoh, coming into him so to speak, Moshe realizes clearly that Pharaoh is no longer an independent agent given to make free and wise choices. Rather, he is now being controlled directly by heaven and it is heaven that has hardened his heart with hatred of the Jews, so that he can no longer even choose to save himself, as any

rational human being would do.

Apparently, both in wickedness and goodness, when one has crossed the ultimate line, one's powers to exercise wise choices become diminished and even disappear. The rabbis commented that both love and hate cause people to behave irrationally and out of character for self-preservation and personal honor.

When that point is reached, it becomes apparent then that heavenly guidance has entered the picture and governs even the ultimate freedom of choice ordinarily granted to human beings. This is one of the important lessons that Moshe will learn from his encounter with Pharaoh. It helps explain the behavior of tyrants and megalomaniacs who seem determined to burn their house down while still inside. It also helps explain why righteous people are capable of extraordinary acts of goodness and kindness even at the expense of all rational understanding.

By coming into Pharaoh, by understanding him and by realizing how unhinged he really is, Moshe concludes that there is no point in his negotiating with him further. The Lord has hardened his heart and the Lord will be the sole agent for the redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage. ©2019 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

**H**ow could it be that as the Jews left Egypt they despoiled the Egyptians (va-yenatzlu) and took their goods (Exodus 12:36). Based on this sentence, many anti-Semites have claimed that Jews are thieves, stealing from others. The mainstream response to this accusation is that the taking of Egyptian possessions was in fact a small repayment for all the years of Jewish enslavement.

There is yet another approach to the text that has far reaching consequences in contemporary times. Perhaps the Jews did not take from the Egyptians after all. Possibly the Egyptians, upon request of the Jews, willingly gave their property as a way of atoning for their misdeeds.

This approach would read the word va-yenatzlu not as meaning "despoil" but rather "to save" (from the word le-hatzeel). In giving money to the Jews, the Egyptians' soul repented, and in some small way was saved.

To paraphrase Dr. J.H. Hertz and Benno Ya'akov, 20th century commentaries: an amicable parting from Egypt would banish the bitter memories the Jews had of the Egyptians. Jews would come to understand that the oppressors were Pharaoh and other Egyptian leaders as opposed to the entire

Egyptian people. The gifts ensure "a parting of friendship with its consequent clearing of the name, and vindication of the honor of the Egyptian people."

All this has much in common with a burning issue which surfaced in the early 1950's. Should Jews accept reparation money from Germany? David Ben Gurion argued for accepting such money feeling that Germany should at least pay for their horror, for otherwise they would go completely unpunished. Menachem Begin argued the reverse. He held that the payment would be viewed as blood money, an atonement to wash away German sins. In his mind, this was unacceptable as nothing could ever obviate the evil of the Third Reich.

The Book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes 1:9) proclaims that there is nothing new under the sun. The contemporary debate concerning recouping monies and plundered assets from the Germans and Swiss and others for their misdeeds during the Holocaust has its roots in the exodus from Egypt. Was *va-yenatzlu*, mandated as it was by God, a unique event not to be repeated, or, did it set a precedent to be emulated in order to give those connected with evildoers the chance to repent?

While I applaud the courage of those who have dedicated themselves to winning financial restitution for Holocaust survivors, I am deeply concerned. The fact that many people are not even familiar with this episode of the Exodus narrative clearly shows that our ability to remember the essence of the slavery in Egypt has not, in any way, been dampened by our successful recovery of Egyptian property. As we justly pursue the return of funds we must be careful that it does not become any type of obstruction to our ability to preserve the legacy of the Shoah – an event that was not primarily about stolen money, but was about something much more important, stolen souls. ©2019 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

In this week's portion the Almighty gives the first commandment to the Jewish people as a whole -- to decree the beginning of the Jewish month. This is important for setting the date of each Jewish holiday. It is so important that when the Romans were persecuting us at the time of the Hanukah story, they forbade the Jewish court to decree the beginning of the new month. The Torah states, Exodus 12:2:

"This month shall be for you the first of the months (referring to the month of Nisson when Pesach occurs. The new year of the reign of king starts with the month of Nisson. The new year for the creation of mankind starts with the month of Tishrei)."

What lesson for life can we learn from this verse?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein commented that the month of Tishrei is the month of the creation of the world. The month of Nisson is the month of the exodus from Egypt. Both months are lessons in our awareness of the Almighty's power.

The first lesson is that the Almighty is the Creator of the universe. The second lesson is that of *hashgacha pratis*, Divine Providence. The Almighty controls the events of the world and therefore He is the One Who enslaved the Children of Israel and He is the One Who freed them. The Torah is telling us in this verse that the lesson of the Almighty's guiding historical events is even more important than the lesson of the creation of the world.

One can believe that the Almighty created the world and this might not make any difference in a person's behavior and attitudes. However, once a person is aware of the supervision of the Almighty in daily events, he will improve his behavior. Moreover, his trust in the Almighty will free him from worry. The month of Nisson is the first month of the year and by remembering this we remember all that is symbolized by the Exodus. This will have a major effect on what we do and think. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

**RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN**

## The Paschal Lamb

Before the last of the ten plagues, there is a detailed set of instructions given to Moshe and repeated to the B'nei Yisrael concerning the preparations which they would make to be spared the death of their firstborn sons. A basic part of those instructions is the sacrifice of the *Korban Pesach*, the Paschal Lamb, and the placing of the blood of that sacrifice onto the two doorposts and the lintel of their houses. The Torah tells us, "And Moshe called to all the elders of Yisrael and he said to them, draw forth and take for yourselves one of the flock for your families, and slaughter the Paschal lamb offering. You shall take a bundle of hyssop and dip it into the blood that is in the basin and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with some of the blood that is in the basin, and as for you, you shall not go out from the entrance of your house until morning. And Hashem will pass through to smite Egypt, and He will see the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts and Hashem will skip over the entrance and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your homes to smite. And you shall observe this matter as a decree for yourself and for your children forever."

Our Rabbis question the use of the word *vayikra*, and he called, instead of the more common word *vayomer*, and he said. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin

explains that these instructions from Moshe came after he had spoken to the entire B'nei Yisrael, giving them the first mitzvah of the Torah, the acknowledgement and celebration of Rosh Chodesh, the new month. Here, Moshe calls together only the elders, summoning them with a different word. The Ramban explains that this section is an abbreviation of the instructions that Hashem gave to Moshe concerning the Korban Pesach, the Passover sacrifice that was brought in Egypt. The earlier section (the beginning of this chapter) makes clear that the full instructions that Moshe was given were taught to the entire B'nei Yisrael, however here are given in an abbreviated form to only the elders whom he considered the first courts. The instructions also carry additional detail which might explain why this repetition was deemed necessary. Moshe desired that the elders would be the first to sacrifice the Korban Pesach and apply the blood to their houses. This would set an example and encourage others to follow them. The elders would also explain the deeper meanings of these tasks to the people.

The Torah tells us that Moshe used two words for gathering the sheep: *mish'chu* – draw forth and *u'k'chu* – and take. The Ramban suggests that *mish'chu* is used because the animals were far away in the land of Goshen since the Egyptians forbid the Jews to shepherd sheep in Egypt since it was a god to them. Rashi understands it to mean that he who owns his own sheep should draw them to him. A person who does not own any sheep should purchase (take) them from someone in the market. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch suggests a deeper meaning: “Withdraw from all ideas of your past and of your future, and give yourselves up entirely to the idea of becoming that which is expressed by the offering (of sheep) for your families.” The Mosaf Rashi says a similar idea: draw away your hands from the idols you have worshipped in Egypt and take for yourself the sheep of the sacrifice.

The major mitzvah of this section from the Torah is the sprinkling of the blood on the two doorposts and the lintel of every house. The lamb was taken on the tenth of the month, tied to the bedpost for four days, and finally sacrificed at the end of those four days in the afternoon immediately prior to the beginning of what we term the Pesach holiday. The blood from the slaughter was gathered in a basin and continuously stirred until it was applied to the doorposts and the lintel. This was a foreshadowing of the blood being sprinkled on the Altar in the Temple. Rav Sorotzkin gives an interesting and unusual insight concerning the dipping of the hyssop branch into the blood. He suggests that this might be an atonement for dipping Yosef's coat into the blood of an animal to imply that Yosef had been killed by an animal. The Rabbis explain that the hyssop is a lowly branch that is now

used to reach the heights of the doorway. It is reminiscent of Avraham Aveinu who referred to himself as dust and ashes yet rose to the ultimate height of arguing with Hashem to save the people of Sodom. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the application of the blood on the two doorposts and the lintel were done in memory of the Avot: the lintel is a reminder of Avraham. The two doorposts are in memory of Yitzchak and Ya'akov.

Hirsch described this entire set of laws as “dedication and sanctification.” The holiday of Pesach is a time during which we remember this first Pesach in Egypt and the concern and care that Hashem showed to the B'nei Yisrael. Never before had a nation in slavery become freed en masse from another nation. Hashem's care for the B'nei Yisrael demanded dedication and sanctification of and by the Jews who were in Egypt. They withstood the terror of doubt and the fear of persecution to dedicate themselves to Hashem and reach a level of sanctification which they had not experienced the entire time that they were enslaved. We, too, often drift from our closeness with Hashem and our level of sanctification through His laws.

We, too, must dedicate ourselves and sanctify our lives to the Laws of the Torah. We turn to Hashem and ask for guidance and protection. We each must find our lamb to sacrifice and sprinkle its blood on our doorposts and lintel. We must not remain bound in chains to our past shortcomings. We must know that, just as Hashem was able and willing to take the Jews out of Egypt, so Hashem will be able and willing to help us out of the negative behaviors that enslave us and enter the freedom of serving the ideals which He has set before us. May we each be successful in our journey to freedom. ©2019 Rabbi D.S. Levin

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## No See - No Find

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**O**ne is prohibited to see or find Chametz –leaven (Baal Yeraeh ubaal Yimatze) on Passover and one is forbidden as well to eat Chometz. In addition one is required to destroy all the Chametz (Tashbitu) in their possession. Our sages are unclear, however, as to when these prohibitions begin.

All seem to agree that the prohibition to eat and to destroy Chametz begins on Passover eve. However according to the “Raived”, the prohibition to “see or find” is only on Passover itself as it says in the Torah “Seven days grain shall not be found in your house”. However according to Rashi all of these prohibitions begin on the eve of Passover.

There is a difference of opinion as to the minimum amount that one would be culpable for eating Chametz. As in all prohibitions in the Torah, half of an amount (Chatzi Shiur) is prohibited. However this might

only be true in a case where a person is intentionally doing an action and therefore it becomes significant (Achshiveh) however in the case of passive doing (Shev v'al Taaseh), such as the prohibition of "to see or find" chametz, one would not be liable.

An additional reason for the prohibition of "half" (Chatzi Shiur) would be the fact that this amount could conceivably be increased to a full Shiur ( a designated amount). However this would only be applicable to eating within the required amount of time (Achilat pras) . With reference to the prohibition of "to see" this reasoning would not apply. ©2018 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

**RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

## Perceptions

"**S**peak to the entire community of Israel, saying, 'On the tenth of this month, let each one take a lamb for each parental home, a lamb for each household.'" (Shemos 12:3) I was recently told a dvar Torah from Rabbi Moshe Shapiro, zt"l, about the redemption process. It explains why redemption is compared to the planting of a seed, a mysterious process in its own right. We know HOW it works, but not WHY it works that way.

Basically, this is what happens. A seed planted in the ground has a hard covering called a seed coat. As the seed in the ground absorbs water it begins to swell, which ultimately splits the seed coat and then the embryonic plant inside begins to grow, all OUT OF EYESIGHT. Were a person to open the earth prematurely, they would arrest the process.

Eventually the plant extends its roots downward into the earth and unfolds the stem and leaf portion upwards towards the sky. When the plant breaks through the ground, you can still see the seed (and the baby leaves inside) on the little stem. The seed leaves provide food for the growing plant until the new leaves are big enough to do that on their own. Then the seed leaves shrivel up.

Exile and redemption work similarly. So much of what goes into a redemption begins in the exile stage, out of eyesight. Not just this, but so much of what is necessary for an upcoming redemption might look like just the opposite to us. After all, is it called "exile" if you can understand the "bad" while you're going through it, if you can see how it is for the good? It is still called "suffering," but is it called "exile"? What seems to make exile, exile, is the way the good it may lead to is hidden from our eyesight, making the suffering seem meaningless and therefore, more painful.

The Talmud says that three things come when we're not paying attention: a scorpion, a lost object, and Moshiach (Sanhedrin 97a). The Maharal discusses the significance of these three, but based upon the previous idea, Moshiach is understandable even

without the Maharal.

By definition, redemption is a process that only makes sense AFTER the fact. If we think we understand it BEFORE it happens, chances are we're looking in the wrong place, or in the wrong way. More than likely, when Moshiach comes, it will be from a direction we either overlooked or didn't even anticipate.

Perhaps this is why so many predictions made by people "in the know" did not pan out as planned. We'd like to believe that the predictions were correct, but we were just not ready for redemption to occur. It may be more that there were factors that were hidden from those making the predictions, affecting their outcome.

Maybe that is also why Ya'akov Avinu was denied the opportunity to tell his sons, the 12 Tribes, how redemption would unfold. It may not only be that they were not fully worthy to know such secret information in advance. It could have been that redemption, by definition, is the result of a mysterious process of exile. It's just the way it is when it comes to exile and redemption.

Thus we see Moshe Rabbeinu having a difficult time with the exile-to-redemption process as well. After demanding that Pharaoh release the Jewish people from bondage, and watching their slavery increase instead, Moshe complained bitterly to God. But, instead of empathizing with Moshe for such difficult circumstances, He reprimanded him instead, and denied Moshe the opportunity to later lead the Jewish people into Eretz Yisroel.

Thus another name for Seder Zerayim, the part of the Talmud that deals with the laws of agriculture, is "Sefer Emunah," the "Book of Faith." After planting the seed, the only thing left to add to make it grow is emunah -- faith in God, for the rain, and for a sprout that grows healthily. All we can do is to stare at the ground and look for the signs that all is well as we anxiously wait for the fruits of labor -- literally.

But once it DOES sprout, then there is what to get excited about. There are things WE can do to assist the fledgling plant grow into a mature stalk. And there are preparations to be made so that when harvest time finally comes around, we are ready.

The same thing is true of redemption as well. Once it begins to "sprout," as it did according to the Zohar in 5500, there is reason to get excited. The Vilna Gaon did, and instructed his students regarding what to do to make it flourish. Granted, it can still be a fair bit of time until the time for "harvesting" arrives, but there are plenty of things we CAN and SHOULD do to expedite the process.

That is because just waiting for a plant to grow can be risky. Just because a plant has managed to break through the ground and show itself to the world does not mean that it no longer requires nurturing. It usually does, and to not provide what it needs can end

up allowing a crop to fail, even after it showed such promise.

The same thing is true about redemption. Obviously God can do whatever He wants in whatever way He wishes to do it. He chooses to allow us to play a role in the redemption process, and makes it occur in a way that we can. And to such an extent, that if we DON'T participate as we should, redemption can have extra glitches, or be postponed indefinitely.

This is why God has Moshe Rabbeinu tell the Jewish people about the Korban Pesach, and about putting the blood on the doorposts the night of the tenth plague. They may seem only like rituals to us, but they were part of nurturing the redemption through its final growth process, until the actual redemption occurred.

Not everyone at that time did what they should have. Consequently, only one-fifth of the Jewish population -- only ONE-FIFTH -- were able to reap the bounty of redemption when it finally came. The other FOUR-FIFTHS died in the Plague of Darkness because, when it comes to a redemption that MUST occur and cannot be postponed, then it is the unworthy who are pushed off beforehand.

And as Rava said, "It will be likewise at the time the Final Redemption as well" (Sanhedrin 111a). Redemption has sprouted. It's time to nurture it. ©2019 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## Total Control

"Come to Pharaoh," says the Almighty at the beginning of this week's portion. "For I will harden his heart and the hearts of his servants in order to put my wonders in his midst."

The concept of a hardened heart, influenced by Divine intervention, is grappled with by countless commentators and myriad meforshim. After all, how do we reconcile a Divinely hardened heart with free-will?

Some explain that Divinity only influenced Pharaoh's physical resilience, as Hashem did not want to score a definitive knockout in the early rounds. Others discuss how Divine intervention can actually hinder the opportunity of penitence. All in all, the natural order was changed, and the imposition on Pharaoh's free-will rarely occurs to the rest of humanity.

What troubles me, however, is the juxtaposition of Hashem's request that Moshe once again beseech Pharaoh, followed by the words, "because I will harden his heart."

Aren't those two separate thoughts? Shouldn't the command be "go to Pharaoh because I want him to free My people"? From the word flow it seems that Hashem's hardening of Pharaoh's heart was a reason for Moshe to go to Pharaoh. Was it?

A friend of mine told me the following story. Years ago, he visited an amusement park. Among the attractions was a haunted house. It was pitch black

inside, save for dim lights that illuminated all types of lurking monsters strategically placed to scare the defiant constituency that dared to enter the domain.

Reading the warnings for park patrons who were either under 12 years old, below a certain height, or suffering high blood pressure or heart disease, my friend hurried his family past the attraction. He only glanced at the almost infinite list of other caveats and exculpatory proclamations from the management. He surely did not want his kids to challenge him to the altar of the outrageous.

Then he noticed the line that was forming. The only life form it contained was tattooed motorcyclists, each more than six feet tall and broadly built.

In spite of the ominous warnings that were posted, they stood anxiously in line waiting to prove their masculinity to themselves and the groups that hurried by the frightening attraction.

But nestled among the miscreants of machismo, he noticed a young boy, no more than seven-years-old, standing on line. He was laughing and giggling as if he were about to ride a carousel.

My friend could not contain himself. Surely, he could not let a young child like that show him up.

"Sonny," he called to the boy. "Can't you read? This is a really scary ride. And besides, you're not even ten!" The boy just laughed. "Why should I be scared?"

"Why should you be scared?" my friend asked incredulously. "This is the scariest ride in the park! It is pitch black in there! You can't see a thing -- except for the monsters!"

The boy's smile never faded. In fact it broadened. Then he revealed the source of his courage. "You see the man over there?" He pointed to a middle-age fellow who sat in front of a switch-filled control box. "Well that's my dad! If I just give one scream," exclaimed the child, "all he does is flip one switch and all the lights go on, and the monsters turn into plastic dummies!"

Rav Yecheil Meir Lifschutz of Gustinin explains that Hashem began the final stages of the redemption commanding Moshe, "Go to Pharaoh." Hashem's next words were said as the reason to disregard any of Pharaoh's yelling, shouting, and cavorting. They are totally meaningless, "Because I will harden his heart. I am the one in control. I am the one who hardens hearts and causes tyrants to drive you from their palaces." With one flip of a heavenly switch they will chase after you in the darkest night and beg you to do the will of he Creator." So "Go to Pharaoh," says the Almighty "because I am the one who hardens his heart!"

When faced with challenges, we can approach them with a sense of certainty if we know that there is a higher destiny that steers our fate. We can even walk into the den of a Pharaoh with the confidence of one who knows that it is the Master of Creation who is pulling the switch. ©2019 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

