

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

**A**t first, Moses' mission seemed to be successful. He had feared that the people would not believe in him, but God had given him signs to perform, and his brother Aaron to speak on his behalf. Moses "performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped." (Ex. 4:30-31)

But then things start to go wrong, and continue going wrong. Moses' first appearance before Pharaoh is disastrous. Pharaoh refuses to recognise God and he rejects Moses' request to let the people travel into the wilderness. Then he makes life worse for the Israelites. They must still make the same quota of bricks, but now they must also gather their own straw. The people turn against Moses and Aaron: "May the Lord look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us." (Ex. 5:21)

Moses and Aaron return to Pharaoh to renew their request. They perform a miraculous act -- they turn a staff into a snake -- but Pharaoh is unimpressed. His own magicians can do likewise. Next they bring the first of the 10 Plagues, but again Pharaoh is unmoved. He will not let the Israelites go. And so it goes on, nine times. Moses does everything in his power to make Pharaoh relent and finds that nothing makes a difference. The Israelites are still slaves.

We sense the pressure Moses is under. After his first setback at the end of last week's parsha, he had turned to God and bitterly asked: "Why, Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Is this why You sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and You have not rescued Your people at all." (Ex. 5:22-23)

In this week's parsha of Vaera, even when God reassures him that he will eventually succeed, he replies, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?"

(Ex. 6:12).

There is an enduring message here. Leadership, even of the very highest order, is often marked by failure. The first Impressionists had to arrange their own art exhibition because their work was rejected by the established Paris salons. The first performance of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* caused a riot, with the audience booing throughout. Van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime despite the fact that his brother, Theo, was an art dealer.

So it is with leaders. Lincoln faced countless setbacks during the Civil War. He was a deeply divisive figure, hated by many in his lifetime. Gandhi failed in his dream of uniting Muslims and Hindus together in a single nation. Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison, accused of treason and regarded as a violent agitator. Winston Churchill was regarded as a spent force in politics by the 1930s, and even after his heroic leadership during the Second World War he was voted out of office at the first General Election once the war was over. Only in retrospect do heroes seem heroic and the many setbacks they faced reveal themselves as stepping-stones on the road to victory.

In our discussion of parshat Vayetse, we saw that in every field -- high or low, sacred or secular -- leaders are tested not by their successes but by their failures. It can sometimes be easy to succeed. The conditions may be favourable. The economic, political or personal climate is good. When there is an economic boom, most businesses flourish. In the first months after a general election, the successful leader carries with him or her the charisma of victory. In the first year, most marriages are happy. It takes no special skill to succeed in good times.

But then the climate changes. Eventually it always does. That is when many businesses, and politicians, and marriages fail. There are times when even the greatest people stumble. At such moments, character is tested. The great human beings are not those who never fail. They are those who survive failure, who keep on going, who refuse to be defeated, who never give up or give in. They keep trying. They learn from every mistake. They treat failure as a learning experience. And from every refusal to be defeated, they become stronger, wiser and more determined. That is the story of Moses' life in both parshat Shemot and parshat Vaera.

Jim Collins, one of the great writers on

leadership, puts it well: "The signature of the truly great versus the merely successful is not the absence of difficulty, but the ability to come back from setbacks, even cataclysmic catastrophes, stronger than before...The path out of darkness begins with those exasperatingly persistent individuals who are constitutionally incapable of capitulation. It's one thing to suffer a staggering defeat...and entirely another to give up on the values and aspirations that make the protracted struggle worthwhile. Failure is not so much a physical state as a state of mind; success is falling down, and getting up one more time, without end." (How the Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give In (New York, Harper Collins, 2009), 123.)

Rabbi Yitzhak Hutner once wrote a powerful letter to a disciple who had become discouraged by his repeated failure to master Talmudic learning: "A failing many of us suffer is that when we focus on the high attainments of great people, we discuss how they are complete in this or that area, while omitting mention of the inner struggles that had previously raged within them. A listener would get the impression that these individuals sprang from the hand of their creator in a state of perfection... The result of this feeling is that when an ambitious young man of spirit and enthusiasm meets obstacles, falls and slumps, he imagines himself as unworthy of being "planted in the house of God" (Ps. 92:13)... Know, however, my dear friend, that your soul is rooted not in the tranquillity of the good inclination, but in the battle of the good inclination...The English expression, "Lose a battle and win the war," applies. Certainly you have stumbled and will stumble again, and in many battles you will fall lame. I promise you, though, that after those losing campaigns you will emerge from the war with laurels of victory on your head...The wisest of men said, "A righteous man falls seven times, but rises again." (Proverbs 24:16) Fools believe the intent of the verse is to teach us that the righteous man falls seven times and, despite this, he rises. But the knowledgeable are aware that the essence of the righteous man's rising again is because of his seven falls." (Sefer Pachad Yitzchak: Iggerot u-Ketavim (Gur Aryeh, 1981), no. 128, 217-18)

Rabbi Hutner's point is that greatness cannot be achieved without failure. There are heights you cannot climb without first having fallen.

For many years, I kept on my desk a quote from Calvin Coolidge, sent by a friend who knew how easy it is to be discouraged. It said: "Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent."

I would only add, "And seyata diShmaya, the help of Heaven." God never loses faith in us, even if we

sometimes lose faith in ourselves.

The supreme role model is Moses who, despite all the setbacks chronicled in last week's parsha and this week's, eventually became the man of whom it was said that he was "a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his energy unabated." (Deut. 34:7)

Defeats, delays and disappointments hurt. They hurt even for Moses. So if there are times when we, too, feel discouraged and demoralised, it is important to remember that even the greatest people failed. What made them great is that they kept going. The road to success passes through many valleys of failure. There is no other way. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

"**B**ut the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh" (Exodus 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 God 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 God 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 God 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 God is volitional—He cannot, by definition, choose evil, as God 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 God 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 God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, preventing him from hearkening to God, Moses and the Hebrews, preventing him from repentance? Our Biblical text iterates and reiterates God'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 God hold Pharaoh responsible for a heinous and ongoing crime when it was He, God, who prevented Pharaoh from repenting?

Seforno, in a most creative interpretation, does not believe that God 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 God 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; God 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 God" (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, God's opening words are: "I am the Lord YHVH; I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai, powerful God 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 (God) will bring about redemption—freedom for the Israelites and ultimately freedom and redemption for all humanity. It is in the future tense because God acts in history ("I will be who I will be") and it is open-ended, because the God 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 God (the Tetragrammaton) as referring to the God of love and compassion (Hebrew-midat ha'rahamim, Ex: 34:6, Rashi ad loc.). And therefore the God 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 God wanted to teach Pharaoh, totalitarian ruler of the most powerful nation at that time. God, 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 God 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 God whose universal laws of freedom must govern the world if there is to remain a world. ©2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**T**he Mishne in Avot questions why the world was created, so to speak, by ten statements and utterances from Heaven. It explains that this shows the importance of life on this planet, and of the infinite universe itself, that it was lovingly created, when one statement alone would have been sufficient. The repetition of the statements of creation were a sign of affection between the Creator and the created, and it illustrates the complexity and eternal importance of the human condition in the infinite universe in which we live.

I think the same type of message is communicated to us in the Torah reading of this week. We are told of plague after plague that was visited upon the Egyptians, to force them to free the people of Israel from bondage and slavery. Why so many plagues? The Lord could certainly have accomplished the same result with one plague, especially the last and final plague of the death of the Egyptian firstborn. Why go through the exercise of the first nine plagues, that apparently were unsuccessful in achieving the desired goal of Jewish freedom, when one major blow apparently would have been sufficient to achieve the emancipation of the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage?

One can easily say in response to this question that it was the cumulative effect of all the plagues that brought about the decision by Pharaoh and the Egyptians to free the Jewish slaves. Nevertheless, from a literal reading of the Torah text itself there is little proof that we are speaking about a cumulative effect, but rather the one, main blow – death of the firstborn Egyptians – that brought about Jewish freedom and the Exodus from Egypt.

A hard-won victory is more meaningful than an

easy instantaneous triumph of success. A process that requires patience, with the ability to absorb disappointments and frustrations, all on the road to ultimate success, is something that is enormously valuable and lasting. It is not only the Egyptians that have to experience the process of the ten plagues visited upon them, but it is also the Jewish slaves that must experience the frustration and disappointment that each plague brought with it.

It is obvious from the Torah that Moshe expected a quick victory, and, that he had a feeling of resentment and had complaints that things apparently became worse and not better when he embarked on his mission to free the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. The Lord reminds him of the behavior of the founders of the Jewish people Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who exhibited patience and fortitude, in their ultimate triumph in creating the Jewish people. This had a lasting and eternal quality to it. Easy victories are usually squandered away.

The universe that was created with ten utterances has much more meaning than one created with one statement. An Exodus and emancipation achieved by a process of plagues, of ups and downs of emotion and faith, of challenges and tenacity, remains an eternal guide for all generations of the Jewish people. ©2021 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**

**I**n this week's portion, God tells Moshe to tell the children of Israel that he will soon take them out of Egypt. In the words of the Torah "I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from their bondage and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm...and I will take you to me for a people. (Exodus 6:6,7)

Here, the Torah mentions four words related to the Exodus from Egypt. I will bring you out (ve'hotzeiti), I will deliver you (ve'hitzalti), I will redeem you (ve'ga'alti), and I will take you (ve'lakhti). In fact, the four cups of wine used at the seder table are meant to symbolize these four words of redemption. (Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 10:1) Wine is the symbol of joy and hence reflects these words which describe the joyous exodus from Egypt.

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv) notes that the Hebrew term for words often used by the rabbis is *leshonot*, which literally means languages. The terms in this portion, therefore, denote the language of redemption rather than the words of redemption. Each term relates to a stage in the redemption process. The stages indicate that redemption is a process that is gradual.

And so, when the Jews in Egypt were beaten, oppressed, persecuted and even murdered, they were desperate for salvation. They may have felt that the only solution is one that would quickly bring about a fast release from bondage.

God, therefore, tells Moshe, that the process of leaving Egypt would not be quick. Indeed, even after the Exodus we spent 40 years wandering in the desert and many more years passed before the First Temple was built.

Throughout Jewish history, when faced with brutal oppression, Jews believed that the only hope was an immediate coming of the Messiah. Note that after the destruction of the Second Temple the great Rabbi Akiva thought that Bar Kochba was the Messiah. (Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'anit 4:6) Similarly, the belief that Shabtai Tzvi was the messiah came about in the 17th century as the decrees of the notorious Jew killer Bogdan Chmilniki took hold. And during the Holocaust, Jews prayed, sang and hoped for the immediate arrival of the Messiah. Our parsha teaches us otherwise. Redemption comes slowly.

The rabbis point out that just as the light (ohr) of day ascends slowly, so, too, the redemption process may be slow. They even describe the process of redemption as "a poor person riding on a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9) A donkey moves slowly, sometimes forward, something bucking and lurching – but ultimately it reaches its destination.

The four languages of redemption teach us that no matter the obstacles, never to give up hope, for slowly redemption will be upon us. ©2021 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 DAVID LEVIN**

### **Moshe, the Real Spokesman**

**I**n last week's parasha, we saw that among the arguments that Moshe made to Hashem against sending him as the leader of the people was the phrase, "but I am of uncircumcised lips". When Hashem told him that Aharon would speak for him, he said, "please send whomever you may send." Moshe wished that Hashem would send his older brother as the leader, and that he would only need to speak to the people, not Par'oh. Only in our parasha this week do we comprehend why it was Moshe who was to speak to the people and Par'oh instead of Aharon.

Hashem continued His discussion and command of Moshe and Aharon, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, 'Come speak to Par'oh the King of Egypt that he should send out the B'nei Yisrael from his land.' And Moshe spoke before Hashem saying,

'behold the B'nei Yisrael did not listen to me and how will Par'oh listen to me and I have uncircumcised lips.'" This is the same response from Moshe that we have seen in the past, only now it comes after having already experienced rejection from the B'nei Yisrael. Hashem answers Moshe with an emphatic pasuk. "And Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon and He commanded them (vay'tzaveim) regarding the B'nei Yisrael and regarding Par'oh the King of Egypt to take the Jews out of the land of Egypt." (Sh'mot, 6:10-13)

Following a brief genealogical digression, the Torah returns to give more details of the conversation which took place here. The Torah begins with a recap of the previous discussion, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, 'speak to Par'oh the King of Egypt all that I speak to you.' And Moshe said before Hashem, 'behold I am of uncircumcised lips and how will Par'oh listen to me?' And Hashem said to Moshe, 'See I have placed you as a god to Par'oh and Aharon your brother will be your prophet.'" (Shemot 6: 29-30)

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch deals with some of the problems expressed in this apparent repetition. As mentioned, Moshe has already used the argument of uncircumcised lips which was rejected by Hashem. Why then would he again try to persuade Hashem using the same rejected argument? Hirsch points out that the two p'sukim use the words "(Moshe spoke) before Hashem" rather than "to Hashem." "This expression does not occur elsewhere in the Torah except in these two verses where this fact is repeated. Moses says this not to Hashem but to himself, so that, speaking in a human way, Hashem heard it. It was the perfectly natural feeling and the perfectly natural doubt that involuntarily escaped him." The second set of p'sukim is an elaboration of the first set. It is not a new complaint from Moshe but a reiteration of that same complaint. Hirsch informs us that the use of the word "and he spoke" marks an end to Moshe's arguments. "You have no longer to consider whether you are fit or not, you have only to obey."

The Ramban feels that when Moshe first made that complaint, he thought that he would only speak to the B'nei Yisrael and that Aharon would speak to Par'oh. Later when he realized that Hashem wished him to speak to Par'oh he was satisfied in that he thought that Hashem meant that Aharon was an equal partner with him. The final time he complains when he realizes that Hashem intends for him to be the speaker and Aharon would be his subordinate.

Our Rabbis are fascinated with the word "vay'tzaveim, and He commanded them." Our pasuk tells us "vay'tzaveim, and He commanded them regarding B'nei Yisrael and regarding Par'oh." It is clear that Hashem wanted Moshe and Aharon to speak to Par'oh and to command him to free the Jews. What is not clear is what Hashem was commanding Moshe and Aharon concerning the B'nei Yisrael. Rashi tells us

that Hashem was concerned that they lead the B'nei Yisrael in a calm and patient manner. Hashem understood that they were stubborn and were not accustomed to accepting commands. Leading them would be an enormous challenge. The people would be a challenge to Aharon also, who was a man of Peace, seeking compromise and brotherly love. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that when Moshe and Aharon were rebuffed by the people after Par'oh had punished them, they were fearful that the people could not be led. The B'nei Yisrael had cursed them and called upon Hashem to judge them for causing them to suffer. Hashem explained to Moshe and Aharon that a leader may need to withstand curses and even stoning, yet he must lead with gentleness and calm.

The Or HaChaim understands that the B'nei Yisrael were commanded to go free just as Par'oh was commanded to free them. The B'nei Yisrael had been in slavery too long and had become accustomed to the ways of the Egyptians. Moshe was asking them to risk their own lives by going into the desert without provisions. Rashi explains that only one-fifth of the Jews in Egypt could make that commitment. It always bothered me that this punishment for not having enough faith in Hashem was without warning and particularly harsh. However, the language used by the Or HaChaim indicates that the command given by Moshe to the B'nei Yisrael was as their King. In this scenario, then, Moshe had the power to take the B'nei Yisrael out of Egypt even against their will. Anyone not listening to his command was not listening to the command of a King, the punishment for which is death.

And now it is clear why Moshe, not Aharon, had to speak to Par'oh and the B'nei Yisrael. He alone was Hashem's representative, and as such he was a King. The people needed to understand this. Just as they needed to obey his command, we must obey Hashem's. Our tasks in life must be accomplished, but our methods must be restricted by Hashem's commands. We may be tempted to step outside of those restrictions to accomplish our goals, but our goals can never be truly reached without a total acceptance of Hashem's commands and the restrictions they place on us. We must obey the commandments because they are our only real possibility of accomplishing our goals with the blessing of Hashem. May we each strive to fulfill our tasks while accepting the Kingship of Hashem. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

### **Migdal Ohr**

"Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, and commanded them to the Children of Israel, and to Pharaoh, King of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt." (Shmos 6:13) In issuing the command to Moshe and Aharon to take the Jews from Egypt, there were several stipulations.

Rashi, here, tells us that they were commanded to treat the Jewish People gently. He quotes from the Midrash, but only a fraction of what it really says.

In Shmos Rabbah, Hashem prepares Moshe for what he can expect from his new charges, the Jews. "They can be rude; they can be rebellious. They will curse you and throw stones at you. Be prepared for that, and still lead them with understanding and compassion. And as for Pharaoh, treat him with respect and the reverence due someone in his position. Though I will bring him to judgment, honor him when you speak to him."

Moshe did so, and when he told Pharaoh that he would come running and begging to let the Jews leave, he was circumspect and didn't say it outright. He allowed Pharaoh to maintain his honor and dignity even though he was a wicked man.

This Midrash enlightens us to the true nature of leadership, and of power. When one has a task to do, he doesn't have a right to step on anyone else or belittle them in order to achieve his goal. He cannot get upset at those who stand in his way, because it was under those conditions that he accepted the job, and it is part and parcel of the assignment.

Hashem gives us Torah to learn and mitzvos to follow. He gives us each our personal mission and the tools and skills to complete it. It may take effort and hard work, but it is doable. And Hashem gave us something else, too. He gave us obstacles, roadblocks, and distractions. He won't necessarily, and rarely ever in fact, make it easy. But that's all a part of the task at hand.

Hashem told Moshe, "You will be doing good for these people yet they will denigrate you. You will see a man unworthy of honor, yet honor him you shall." The way we think things should work is almost never the way Hashem knows they should. We don't each get the warning that Moshe did, but the rule applies to us and we learn from him.

In life, we will have our roles to play and our missions to accomplish. But we should be forewarned that when things come up that we weren't expecting, we must know they were part of the plan all along. They are what makes the mission more precious by making it more challenging. Moshe and Aharon went into the job accepting these terms and they succeeded. We can succeed as well, if we, too, are willing to roll with the punches.

*The Satmar Rav was speaking to a man who was very successful in business. He asked the man about his spiritual endeavors, and whether he had set times to learn. The man replied that his business took up all of his time and he was not able to learn Torah.*

*"When I retire, though, then I'm going to make sedarim and learning Torah a priority."*

*The Rebbe gently shook his head. "The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:4) says, "don't say, 'when I have the*

*free time, I'll learn.' For maybe you will not have free time."*

*"This doesn't just mean you may never have an opportunity to learn, though it is a distinct and serious possibility," continued the Satmar Rebbe.*

*"Rather, it also means that maybe what Hashem wants from you is precisely that - to learn when you DON'T have free time. He wants you to learn when it's hard, for then the mission is much more difficult, and therefore much more meaningful." ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### The Four Cups of Wine

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**T**he obligation to drink four cups of wine at the Seder is rabbinic. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, these four cups correspond to the four phrases related to freedom which appear in Parshat Va'era (*Shemot* 6:6-7): "I will take you out (*ve-hotzeiti*)," "I will save you" (*ve-hitzalti*), "I will redeem you" (*ve-ga'alti*), and "I will take you" (*ve-lakachti*). However, there is a fifth phrase as well in the next verse: "I will bring you" (*ve-heveiti*). In fact, some people drink a fifth glass of wine at the seder when they recite *Hallel HaGadol* (The Great Hallel – *Tehillim* Chapter 136). Some even feel that this is not simply a custom, but rather the ideal way to fulfill the mitzva, as Rabbi Tarfon states (*Pesachim* 118a), "We recite *Hallel HaGadol* while holding the fifth cup (prior to drinking it)."

Another interpretation of the four cups is that they correspond to the four kingdoms which subjugated the Jews, namely Babylon, Persia/Medea, Greece, and Rome. In the future, G-d will punish these enemies, and they will be forced to drink from "the cup of staggering." (See *Yeshayahu* 51:22-23.) In this scheme, the fifth cup symbolizes the ultimate salvation of the Jewish people.

The disagreement as to the symbolism of the four cups may help us understand the different opinions about the status of the fifth cup. If the four cups symbolize the downfall of Israel's oppressors, then the cup of salvation is not similar to them. This may explain why many see the fifth cup as optional. However, if the four cups correspond to the different phrases of redemption, the fifth phrase easily fits the scheme, and thus adding a fifth cup can easily be seen as the ideal way to fulfill the mitzva.

In practice, our custom is not to drink a fifth cup of wine. Some even forbid it on account of the prohibition of adding *mitzvot* to the Torah (*bal tosif*). How then do they explain the statement of Rabbi Tarfon quoted earlier? They maintain that he was referring only to someone sick or very delicate. Such a person is permitted to drink a fifth cup of wine. He would then recite *Hallel HaGadol* prior to drinking this additional cup. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

## YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

**Virtual Beit Medrash**

SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

BASED ON A SICHOT OF HARAV BARUCH GIGI ZT"l

*Adapted by Aviad Brestal; Translated by David Strauss*

**O**ur parasha opens with the following verses: "And God spoke to Moshe, and said to him: 'I am the Lord; and I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov, as God Almighty, but by My name the Lord I made Me not known to them. And I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings, wherein they sojourned.'" (Shemot 6:2-4)

These verses appear against the background of Moshe's grievance at the end of the previous parasha: "Why have You dealt ill with this people? Why is it that You sent me?... neither have You delivered Your people at all" (Shemot 5:22-23). But these verses are not simply a response to Moshe's complaint; in these verses, there is a new revelation of God in this world. Thus far, He revealed Himself to the patriarchs as "God Almighty" (El Shadai), whereas now He reveals Himself as the Lord (the Tetragrammaton).

The Ramban explains the difference between these names: "What the verse means is that God appeared to the patriarchs by this name (El Shadai), which suggests His subduing of the celestial order. Even when He performed great miracles on their behalf, they were not accomplished through the suspension of the natural order. Thus, in famine they were preserved from death, and in combat from the sword. The patriarchs were blessed with wealth, honor, and all variety of goodness, after the manner of all of the Torah's promises of blessings or curses... God therefore indicates to Moshe that 'I appeared to the patriarchs with My strong hand by which I overpower the stars and assist My chosen ones (El Shadai), but I did not make myself known to them by the Tetragrammaton, by which all existence was brought into being. I did not create new realities for them by upsetting the laws of nature. Therefore, tell the people of Israel that I am the Lord (the Tetragrammaton), and indicate to them this great name a further time, for by it I will perform wonders for them so that they may know that I am the Lord who does all.'" (Ramban, Shemot 6:2)

As is well known, the Ramban maintains that all occurrences are miracles, though most of them are hidden miracles. He explains that the name "Shadai" expresses God's hidden miraculous conducting of the world, as opposed to the Tetragrammaton, which expresses His overt miraculous involvement with it.

All the promises that God made to the patriarchs were missions assigned to them. The patriarchs understood that these were processes in which they had to take part in order to realize them.

Therefore, they did not complain to God when they had to work hard for them. Chazal say as follows: "And I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov, as God Almighty, but by My name the Lord I made Me not known to them.' The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: O, for those who are gone and cannot be replaced. How many times did I reveal Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov as God Almighty, but I did not tell them that My name is the Lord, as I have told you, and they did not criticize My ways. I said to Avraham: 'Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it [for to you will I give it]' (Bereishit 13:17). He looked for a place to bury Sara, but did not find one, until he bought [a plot] for a great deal of money, for four hundred silver shekels, and yet he did not criticize My ways. I said to Yitzchak: 'Sojourn in this land... for to you, and to your seed, I will give all these lands' (Bereishit 26:3). He looked for water to drink, but did not find any, as it is stated: 'And the herdsmen of Gerar strove with Yitzchak's herdsmen [saying: The water is ours]' (Bereishit 26:20), and yet he did not criticize My ways. I said to Yaakov: 'The land upon which you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed' (Bereishit 28:13). He looked to pitch his tent, but did not find a place until he bought one for a hundred kasita, and yet he did not criticize My ways. They did not ask what is My name, as you have asked me. You, when I first sent you, asked: 'What is Your name,' and in the end you said: 'For since I came to Pharaoh [to speak in Your name, he has dealt ill with this people]' (Shemot 5:23). About them it is stated: 'And I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan' (Shemot 6:4). He bore them for that which He said to them that He would give them the land, and they did not criticize His ways.'" (Shemot Rabba, Parashat Vaera 6)

God expects man to be involved and to endeavor to attain even those things that were promised to him. When God reveals Himself by way of the Tetragrammaton, which expresses the suspension of the natural order and the performance of overt miracles, this does not mean that we are dealing with a momentary and one-time event. The gap between El Shadai and the Tetragrammaton relates to the degree to which God's miracles are evident to all, but in both cases, we are dealing with processes in which humans are involved and operate. As a rule, God does not bestow heavenly gifts without man playing some role. He expects human effort and striving.

The person who lives within a reality that is conducted by way of long and tortuous processes must be part of those processes, because it is through them that God manages His world.

Even the Torah was given by way of the Ten Commandments, not through a single command. The world itself was created by way of ten Divine utterances, not through one utterance. Ten Divine

utterances express something. I do not know whether the six days of creation were six units of twenty-four hours or whether we are dealing with a hidden meaning that is represented by six days of creation. What is clear, however, is that the six days of creation express a process. God could have created the world with a single utterance; nevertheless: "With ten utterances was the world created. And what is this [Scriptural] information [meant] to tell, for surely it could have been created with one utterance? But it is that penalty might be exacted from the wicked who destroy the world that was created with ten utterances, and to give a goodly reward to the righteous who maintain the world that was created with ten utterances." (Avot 5:1)

Thus, just as God's promises to the patriarchs did not relieve them of the need to toil and act, so too in the case of God's promise to Israel to bring them out of Egypt, and despite the revelation in the name of the Tetragrammaton, which promises overt miracles, there is room for earthly preparation and action on the part of Israel's leaders, such as Moshe and Aharon. This accounts for the genealogical list at the beginning of our parasha, which reaches Moshe and Aharon and mentions them as those who would stand at the forefront of the mission. The Torah emphasizes this in order to teach us that the redemption requires human involvement. So too, in relation to the people of Israel, this demand will be heard all along the way -- on the eve of the plague of the smiting of the firstborns, at the Paschal sacrifice, and also when the people of Israel will stand at the Yam Suf: "Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward."

Human effort is the cornerstone of man's standing before God. God does not feed a person unless he first takes a small step towards Him.

Contrary to what we have said, today there are those who maintain that one should remain passive and wait for God's salvation, on both the communal level and the individual level.

On the communal level, we refer, for example, to attitudes about Zionism, in the past and in the present, and hope for salvation. It should be emphasized that even according to Rashi, who says the third Temple will descend from heaven all built, it is clear that we have work to do beforehand. We must bring salvation, with many and varied efforts, in various areas: by seeking out Jerusalem and the Temple, by seeking out justice and righteousness, goodness and fairness, to prepare our hearts and souls for its arrival. We cannot just wait for salvation to come without effort and endeavor.

The same is true on the personal level. In the wake of the information and technology revolution, people are looking for shortcuts in every field. Regarding one's capacity to learn and to deal with many challenges, which in the past required many physical and intellectual efforts, there are those who

seek to achieve everything without investment. It should be remembered that there are two matters in which there is no room for shortcuts: the acquisition of Torah knowledge and the service of God. Chazal emphasize: "If a man says: I have labored and found, you may believe him" (Megilla 6b). In everything relating to the worship of God, there is no finding without toiling. One must toil in Torah and strive in one's worship in order to develop a deep and rich world of God's service.

This week, we celebrated a Hachnasat Sefer Torah in memory of my father-in-law, and it is appropriate to say a few words about him in connection with these ideas. At the age of thirteen, he and his family were expelled from their home in northern Italy and were forced to go to Hungary, where they lived for a few years before the Nazis entered the country, at which point they were taken to forced labor camps. When they later tried to immigrate to what was then called Palestine, they were expelled to Cyprus. Later, my father-in-law fought in Israel's War of Independence. Despite all of these troubles, he served God and studied Torah during all those years, with no complaints toward God, with full faith, with constant service of study, prayer, charity, and benevolence, with simplicity and perseverance, with love and fear. While he was in the camps with his father, no meat entered his mouth. Despite the severe hunger from which they suffered, the father and son covered for each other in order to allow daily study of Mishna and Chumash with Rashi from small sets of Mishnayot and Chumashim that they carried with them wherever they went. He persevered in daily Torah study all his life, early in the morning and several hours every night.

The duty of human striving applies in all spheres of action that are required of man. Man must make his efforts, while recognizing all the good that he has received and submitting to the will of God in all situations of life. Human responsibility lies at the foundation of creation. This is true first on the individual level, regarding which man was commanded immediately after the world came into being: "Which God created to do" (Bereishit 2:3). The same was later demanded of the people of Israel as a nation: "You shall serve God on this mountain" (Shemot 3:12). (*This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit on Shabbat Parashat Vaera 5778 [2018].*)

