

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

**A**fter 9/11, when the horror and trauma had subsided, Americans found themselves asking what had happened and why. Was it a disaster? A tragedy? A crime? An act of war? It did not seem to fit the pre-existing paradigms. And why had it happened? The question most often asked about Al Qaeda was, "Why do they hate us?"

In the wake of those events an American thinker Lee Harris wrote two books, *Civilization and its Enemies* and *The Suicide of Reason* that were among the most thought-provoking responses of the decade. The reason for the questions and the failure to find answers, said Harris, was that we in the West had forgotten the concept of an enemy. Liberal democratic politics and market economics create a certain kind of society, a specific way of thinking and a characteristic type of personality. At their heart is the concept of the rational actor, the person who judges acts by their consequences and chooses the maximal option. Such a person believes that for every problem there is a solution, for every conflict a resolution. The way to achieve it is to sit down, negotiate, and do on balance what is best for all.

In such a world there are no enemies, merely conflicts of interest. An enemy, says Harris, is simply "a friend we haven't done enough for yet." In the real world, however, not everyone is a liberal democrat. An enemy is "someone who is willing to die in order to kill you. And while it is true that the enemy always hates us for a reason, it is his reason, not ours." He sees a different world from ours, and in that world we are the enemy. Why do they hate us? Answers Harris: "They hate us because we are their enemy." (Ibid., xii-xiii)

Whatever the rights and wrongs of Harris's specifics, the general point is true and profound. We can become mind-blind, thinking that the way we -- our society, our culture, our civilisation -- see things is the only way, or at least that it is the way everyone would choose if given the chance. Only a complete failure to understand the history of ideas can explain this error, and it is a dangerous one. When Montezuma, ruler of the Aztecs, met Cortes, leader of the Spanish expedition in 1520, he assumed that he was meeting a civilised man from a civilised nation. That mistake cost him his life, and within a year there was no Aztec

civilisation anymore. Not everyone sees the world the way we do, and, as Richard Weaver once said: "The trouble with humanity is that it forgets to read the minutes of the last meeting." (Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, p. 176)

This explains the significance of the unusual command at the end of this week's parsha. The Israelites had escaped the seemingly inexorable danger of the chariots of the Egyptian army, the military high-tech of its day. Miraculously the sea divided, the Israelites crossed, the Egyptians, their chariot wheels caught in the mud, were unable either to advance or retreat and were caught by the returning tide.

The Israelites sang a song and finally seemed to be free, when something untoward and unexpected happened. They were attacked by a new enemy, the Amalekites, a nomadic group living in the desert. Moses instructed Joshua to lead the people in battle. They fought and won. But the Torah makes it clear that this was no ordinary battle: Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.' Moses built an altar and called it The Lord is my Banner. He said, 'The hand is on the Lord's throne. The Lord will be at war with Amalek for all generations.' (Ex. 17:14-16)

This is a very strange statement, and it stands in marked contrast to the way the Torah speaks about the Egyptians. The Amalekites attacked Israel during the lifetime of Moses just once. The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites over an extended period, oppressing and enslaving them and starting a slow genocide by killing every male Israelite child. The whole thrust of the narrative would suggest that if any nation would become the symbol of evil, it would be Egypt.

But the opposite turns out to be true. In Deuteronomy the Torah states, "Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land" (Deut. 23:8). Shortly thereafter, Moses repeats the command about the Amalekites, adding a significant detail: Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God... You shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget! (Deut. 25:17-19)

We are commanded not to hate Egypt, but

never to forget Amalek. Why the difference? The simplest answer is to recall the Rabbis' statement in *The Ethics of the Fathers* (5:16): "If love depends on a specific cause, when the cause ends, so does the love. If love does not depend on a specific cause, then it never ends." The same applies to hate. When hate depends on a specific cause, it ends once the cause disappears. Causeless, baseless hate lasts forever.

The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites because, in Pharaoh's words, "The Israelites are becoming too numerous and strong for us" (Ex. 1:9). Their hate, in other words, came from fear. It was not irrational. The Egyptians had been attacked and conquered before by a foreign group known as the Hyksos, and the memory of that period was still acute and painful. The Amalekites, however, were not being threatened by the Israelites. They attacked a people who were "weary and worn out," specifically those who were "lagging behind." In short: The Egyptians feared the Israelites because they were strong. The Amalekites attacked the Israelites because they were weak.

In today's terminology, the Egyptians were rational actors, the Amalekites were not. With rational actors there can be negotiated peace. People engaged in conflict eventually realise that they are not only destroying their enemies: they are destroying themselves. That is what Pharaoh's advisers said to him after seven plagues: "Do you not yet realise that Egypt is ruined?" (Ex. 10:7). There comes a point at which rational actors understand that the pursuit of self-interest has become self-destructive, and they learn to co-operate.

It is not so, however, with non-rational actors. Emil Fackenheim, one of the great post-Holocaust theologians, noted that towards the end of the Second World War the Germans diverted trains carrying supplies to their own army, in order to transport Jews to the extermination camps. So driven were they by hatred that they were prepared to put their own victory at risk in order to carry out the systematic murder of the Jews of Europe. This was, he said, evil for evil's sake. (Emil L. Fackenheim and Michael L. Morgan, *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader*, p. 126)

The Amalekites function in Jewish memory as "the enemy" in Lee Harris' sense. Jewish law, however, specifies two completely different forms of action in relation to the Amalekites. First is the physical command to wage war against them. That is what Samuel told Saul to do, a command he failed fully to fulfil. Does this command still apply today?

The unequivocal answer given by Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch is 'No'. (Shu"t Melumdei Milchama, pp. 22-25) Maimonides ruled that the command to destroy the Amalekites only applied if they refused to make peace and accept the seven Noahide laws. He further stated that the command was no

longer applicable since Sennacherib, the Assyrian, had transported and resettled the nations he conquered so that it was no longer possible to identify the ethnicity of any of the original nations against whom the Israelites were commanded to fight. He also said, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, that the command only applied to people of specific biological descent. It is not to be applied in general to enemies or haters of the Jewish people. So the command to wage war against the Amalekites no longer applies.

However, there is a quite different command, to "remember" and "not forget" Amalek, which we fulfil annually by the reading the passage containing the Amalekites command as it appears in Deuteronomy on the Shabbat before Purim, Shabbat Zachor (the connection with Purim is that Haman the "Agagite" is assumed to be a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites). Here Amalek has become a symbol rather than a reality.

By dividing the response in this way, Judaism marks a clear distinction between an ancient enemy who no longer exists, and the evil that enemy embodied, which can break out again at any time in any place. It is easy at times of peace to forget the evil that lies just beneath the surface of the human heart. Never was this truer than in the past three centuries. The birth of Enlightenment, toleration, emancipation, liberalism and human rights persuaded many, Jews among them, that collective evil was as extinct as the Amalekites. Evil was then, not now. That age eventually begat nationalism, fascism, communism, two World Wars, some of the brutal tyrannies ever known, and the worst crime of man against man.

Today, the great danger is terror. Here the words of Princeton political philosopher Michael Walzer are particularly apt: "Wherever we see terrorism, we should look for tyranny and oppression... The terrorists aim to rule, and murder is their method. They have their own internal police, death squads, disappearances. They begin by killing or intimidating those comrades who stand in their way, and they proceed to do the same, if they can, among the people they claim to represent. If terrorists are successful, they rule tyrannically, and their people bear, without consent, the costs of the terrorists' rule." (*Arguing About War*, p. 64-65)

Evil never dies and -- like liberty -- it demands constant vigilance. We are commanded to remember, not for the sake of the past but for the sake of the future, and not for revenge but the opposite: a world free of revenge and other forms of violence.

Lee Harris began *Civilization and its Enemies* with the words, "The subject of this book is forgetfulness," (p. xi) and ends with a question: "Can the West overcome the forgetfulness that is the nemesis of every successful civilisation?" (*Ibid.*, p. 218) That is why are commanded to remember and never

forget Amalek, not because the historic people still exists, but because a society of rational actors can sometimes believe that the world is full of rational actors with whom one can negotiate peace. It is not always so.

Rarely was a biblical message so relevant to the future of the West and of freedom itself. Peace is possible, implies Moses, even with an Egypt that enslaved and tried to destroy us. But peace is not possible with those who attack people they see as weak and who deny their own people the freedom for which they claim to be fighting. Freedom depends on our ability to remember and, whenever necessary, confront "the eternal gang of ruthless men," (Ibid., p. 216) the face of Amalek throughout history. Sometimes there may be no alternative but to fight evil and defeat it. This may be the only path to peace. *Covenant and Conversation 5775 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd when Israel saw the great hand that God had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared God; they had faith in God and in His servant, Moses" (Exodus 14:31) Why does the heart of the Haggadah almost completely omit mention of Moses, limiting him to one "cameo" appearance? Moreover, even that brief reference – a verse from this week's portion, Beshalach, dealing with the splitting of the Reed Sea – seems to mention Moses in an incidental manner: "And when Israel saw the great hand that God had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared God; they had faith in God and in His servant, Moses" (ibid. 14:31). Certainly the leader of the Exodus should have merited more prominent billing in the Haggadah. After all, he was God's "point man" in implementing the Exodus from Egypt!

That said, if the lone mention of Moses is in a verse about the splitting of the Reed Sea, we must uncover its significance. Birth is intimately associated with water: the fetus is surrounded by amniotic fluid, the mother's water breaking is a sign of imminent birth, and a person who converts to Judaism—whom the Talmud analogizes to a newborn—must completely immerse him/herself in a mikveh of water.

If the birth of the Jewish People occurred at the time of God's Covenant Between the Pieces with Abraham [Gen. 15], then our rebirth took place at the splitting of the Reed Sea. Paralleling our national birth and rebirth is the birth and rebirth of Moses. Carefully studying his emergence onto the stage of history, we find parallels to the miracle and message of the splitting of the Reed Sea inspiring apparent.

The birth of Moses is described early in the

Book of Exodus: born to parents from the tribe of Levi, he is hidden for the first three months of his life. When keeping him hidden from Egyptian authorities is no longer sustainable, he is placed in an ark smeared with clay and pitch, with the ark set afloat "in the reeds" (basuf) of the Nile River (Exodus 2:1-3).

The rebirth of Moses begins when Pharaoh's daughter goes down to bathe in the Nile. As her maidens walk along the river, the princess sees Moses' basket among the reeds. She sends her maidservant, takes the Hebrew baby, has compassion for him, and allows Miriam, who had been carefully following the events, to find a Hebrew wet-nurse for him (ibid., v. 5-9).

Pharaoh's daughter does not give birth to Moses, but she does save his life, in the process endangering her own life by defying her father's decree to cast all Hebrew baby boys into the Nile. History confirms that totalitarian despots never hesitate to execute their closest family members who dare rebel against them. Pharaoh's daughter thus emerges as a courageous heroine!

This fortunate rebirth culminates with the giving of a name: "And the lad grew, and [the wet-nurse, Yocheved; his biological mother] took him to Pharaoh's daughter; he became the son [of Pharaoh's daughter], and she named him Moshe, saying, 'It is because I drew him out (meshi'tihu) from the water'" (ibid., v. 10).

The most commonly accepted interpretation of the name "Moshe" is that he was drawn forth from the river, in the passive form. But if so, Hebrew grammar would dictate that his name be Mashui, referring to he who was drawn forth. Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (a.k.a. the Netziv) offers a sharp insight, noting a very different way of understanding these Biblical words: moshe is an Egyptian word that means "son", as can be seen in the family name of Pharaohs, "Ramses": "Ra" was the Egyptian sun god and in Egyptian, "Mses" means "son".

Therefore, Pharaoh's daughter names the baby "Moshe", meaning "son". And it is not without cause that she has the right to call him her son. After all, having drawn him forth from the Nile River on pain of death, she has earned this right. Every biological mother puts her life on the line with every birth; and Pharaoh's daughter endangered her life by going against her father's decree and saving this Hebrew baby.

While his insight is compelling, it leaves us without a verbal connection between the Egyptian name "Moshe" and the Hebrew word, meshi'tihu, "I drew him out". To solve this dilemma, the Torah employs a double-entendre: Moshe the son (in Egyptian), reborn in the midst of reeds, will decisively draw forth (moshe, in Hebrew) his people, the Israelites, at the Reed Sea, facilitating their rebirth.

This is why Moses' lone appearance in the Haggadah occurs at the splitting of the Reed Sea. Far

from merely citing a verse that happens to include Moses' name, the Haggadah is alluding to that most profound parallel of the leader and his people both experiencing rebirth, Moses by Pharaoh's daughter (in the reeds of the Nile), and the Jewish People by God at the Reed Sea.

And perhaps even more significant is what Moses and the Jewish People did with these additional opportunities of rebirth. From the shores of the Reed Sea, they journeyed to Sinai and received the Torah, becoming messengers of truly revolutionary teachings to the world, such as the moral obligations of universal freedom and human dignity that are as important today as they have ever been. ©2022 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## **Wein Online**

**I**f a person lights even a small candle in a dark room, the resultant light is instantaneously recognizable.

Even the flickering of the smallest of candle shines brightly in an enclosed space that is dark. However, if one is to light even a large candle in a room filled with brilliant sunlight or an excess of artificial illumination, the light of that candle is hardly noticeable.

One can say the same idea regarding miracles. If one views a world full of ever-present miracles, then one individual miracle, no matter how powerful and supernatural it may be, will, at best, cause only a minor, temporary impression. The very definition of miracles is that these are events that do not often occur and are not predictable or subject to rational, scientific analysis.

However, when there is a plethora of miraculous events, miracles themselves, no matter how wondrous they may be, begin to lose their impact and power. A miracle that happens regularly is no longer a miracle at all, but, rather, is part of what people view as being the natural course of events in the world. Miracles that are repeated often eventually become stale and regular and lose their miraculous status.

Witness today's great wonders of nature, of medicine, of technology, and of all other fields that border on the miraculous. When the first rocket with a human inside was launched, it was considered miraculous. Today, it is a weekly event and nothing special for the spectator. The more an experience becomes regular and expected, the less any special quality is attached to it.

When there is a multiplicity of miracles occurring all at the same time, like the candle lit in a room with floodlights, its brightness is hardly noticeable. The individual miracle has lost its power of influence and is already discounted by human beings.

All of this is a preface to understanding the Jewish people after they experienced the Ten Plagues that delivered them from Egypt. The splitting of the sea that delivered them from the sword of the Pharaoh and

his army was followed by the miraculous sweetening of the bitter waters in Marah and then the heavenly bread that was given to them for their sustenance. In that floodlit world of miracles, the flame of an individual miracle and its influence waned greatly.

This helps us understand the behavior of the Jewish people throughout their forty-year sojourn in the desert of Sinai. Everything was so miraculous that nothing was special any longer. What resulted was that the evil instinct of rebellion, arrogance and carnal desires continued to surface over and over throughout the Torah.

In our time, the rejuvenation of the Jewish people, the mass study of Torah, the creation and continued growth of the State of Israel in the land of Israel, are all events that border upon the miraculous and supernatural. Yet they, too, are not treated in that manner, for the recognition of miracles is difficult for human beings to maintain and preserve.

For forty years in the desert, the Lord attempted to protect the Jewish people through heavenly intervention, but they did not understand or appreciate what was happening. They only complained. Our Rabbis teach: "One who is experiencing a miracle does not recognize the miracle that is happening at that moment." And so, it is. ©2022 *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**

**F**inding the Jewish People surrounded on all sides, Moses beseeches God for help. God responds, "Ma titz'ak elai?" (Why do you cry out to Me? Exodus 14:15).

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik distinguishes between titz'ak and tiz'ak. Titz'ak, from the verb litz'ok, is an expression of angst. Here the suffering person cries out in pain without offering any plan to alleviate his plight. Hence, God, according to Rashi, turns to Moses and says, This is not the time to only call out [tiz'ak] for help, but to act. "Tell the Jewish People to go forward" (Exodus 14:15).

The term that translates the plea into a concrete plan is a different verb, the verb liz'ok. Here the person crying out is prepared to respond to the challenge with a commitment to act on behalf of the oppressed. For example, when Mordechai and the Jews faced annihilation in Persia at the hands of Haman, the Megillah uses the term va'yiz'ak (and [Mordechai] cried out; Esther 4:1). But it is a cry with intent to act. Mordechai leaves home and goes to the midst of the city, directing Esther and ultimately the Jews to stand up and fight the decree.

It is often the case, however, that people are

unable to translate cries of pain into action because they give up, they lose hope. Here it is important to note that litz'ok is also similar to the term litzchok, to laugh. In the Hebrew language, the guttural letters ayin and chet often interchange, rendering litz'ok and litzchok the same. What this similarity teaches is that no matter how bleak the situation, no matter how dark the circumstances, no matter how profound the tears, laughter is not far away. One should never give up.

The second of our three patriarchs is called Yitzchak (Isaac), which literally means "will laugh." He was given this name because his parents, Sarah and Abraham, laughed when told that, at their advanced age, a child would be born to them. The commentators ask why was he called Isaac – meaning "to laugh" in the future tense? He should have been called Tzachak, "he laughed." It can be suggested that Isaac is in the future tense because his name refers not only to him and that moment but to the totality of Jewish history. Just as Isaac was born against all odds, and through his birth, the covenant with Abraham and Sarah continued, so would his descendants face innumerable and seemingly insurmountable challenges but in the end would prevail.

The message is that litz'ok (to only cry) leads to liz'ok (to cry with the intent to act) if one does not despair. In other words, litzchok is the conduit through which litz'ok can be translated into liz'ok. In the words of the Chassidic master Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, no matter the challenge, no matter the odds, lighten up, *Zeit sich nisht meya'esh*, never give up, never despair. ©2022 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**

## **Accepting Hashem**

**T**he Gemara tells us that several mitzvot preceded Har Sinai, and each was clarified through the Oral Law at Har Sinai. We are told in Sh'mot Rabah, the Midrash on Sh'mot, that when Moshe led the Jews away from the Red Sea, they traveled for three days and did not find water. They came to an oasis but were disappointed because the water was bitter. Hashem directed Moshe to a bitter tree which, when mixed with the bitter water, produced sweet water. "And he cried out to Hashem and Hashem showed him a tree; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There He established for the nation a decree and an ordinance and there He tested it." The second part of the sentence is incomprehensible without clarification. The people had been idle (except for traveling) for three days and had not been given the opportunity to study and become closer to Hashem. They had not as yet received any laws except for those that had applied in Egypt. Now Hashem gave them a series of laws to

study even though they were not as yet commanded to practice them. These laws included a chok, a decree, namely the Red Heifer, which was a means of purifying a person, and the laws of Shabbat, which are called mishpat. It is important to emphasize that these laws were not yet commanded but were for study.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the B'nei Yisrael did not take any supplies into the desert except for the dough that they brought out that night. At this time, however, the remains of that dough had been consumed and the people cried out again to Moshe for food. "The B'nei Yisrael complained against Moshe and Aharon in the wilderness. And the B'nei Yisrael said to them, if only we had died by the hand of Hashem in the land of Egypt, as we sat by the flesh pots when we ate bread to satiety, for you have taken us out to this wilderness to kill this entire congregation by famine." The Or HaChaim explains that had an individual Jew or family decided that they did not wish to leave Egypt with Moshe, they would have died during the first three days of the plague of Choshech, Darkness.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the term "lechem, bread" is used to mean all kinds of food. Hashem promised the people that they would receive bread from the Heavens, every morning: "And the people will go out and they will gather each day's portion on its day so that I can test them if they will follow in My Torah or not. And it shall be that on the sixth day when they prepare what they bring, it will be double what they gather every day." The manna which they brought home each day was only the total amount of what their individual family would eat that day. The Torah tells us that if they brought home too much or too little, they would find only the exact amount that their family would consume that day. Each morning the extra bread that was not consumed would spoil. When this changed on the sixth day the people were perplexed.

The people appeared to be surprised by the fact that a double portion fell on the sixth day. The ibn Ezra explains that they were not entirely confused because Moshe had instructed them beforehand that each should take a double portion that day. The Or HaChaim implies that Moshe did not convey to the people in advance that they should take a double portion or that an exceptional amount of the manna would fall on the sixth day. Moshe purposefully withheld this information, and the people gathered their normal amount. Moshe depended on the actions of Hashem: that Hashem would correct and readjust their over-gathering as well as their under-gathering each day. Moshe used this knowledge as a teaching tool. Moshe did not tell them in advance to gather a double portion, instead he waited until they discovered that Hashem had corrected the normal amount and they saw that it was doubled in size. That is what caused

them to question, and Moshe was then able to explain the concept of not working on Shabbat. The people would need to prepare all of the manna on the sixth day, and it would stay fresh through the next day (unlike the normal manna which would spoil by the next morning).

HaRav Sorotzkin explains that both the manna and the days at Marah were designed specifically by Hashem to teach the Shabbat. The laws that the people learned about Shabbat at Marah were laws which emphasized the concept of rest. The B'nei Yisrael studied the Creation of the world in which Hashem rested on the seventh day, making Shabbat a day of rest for the world. It was important to accept and acknowledge the debt that Man owed to Hashem for the Creation, and to comprehend that Hashem was in charge of the world. The laws of Shabbat, which the B'nei Yisrael learned, involved the concept of preparation. This meant that no gathering or cooking could be done on Shabbat and would require preparation before Shabbat. Both of these concepts were necessary as a foundation upon which the Ten Commandments could stand. This was absolutely crucial to the acceptance of the Torah. If one could not acknowledge the Holiness of Shabbat with the delivery of the manna each day, how would one be able to accept the holiness of Shabbat when it would be given in the Ten Commandments?

In many ways, the path taken by those who return to the laws of the Torah often follows this same pattern of acceptance. When one returns to Torah, he may not be capable of accepting all of the laws at once. Many begin by first accepting the general concept of resting on the Shabbat. This is a proper beginning and should be welcomed. As one continues along this path, experiencing the beauty of each mitzvah, one soon discovers that he is well along the path to complete observance of the Torah. Even those who are observant Jews must accept and acknowledge our servitude to Hashem. It is only then that we can accept the complete set of laws as our guide for proper living. Perhaps that is why the Torah speaks of chok umishpat. For many of us, we approach many laws as a chok, a law that has no explanation but is observed because of the command of Hashem. The more we acknowledge the importance of Hashem in our lives and the debt which we thankfully owe to Him, the more the concept of a chok becomes a mishpat, a law which is clearly understood as to the benefits that it provides for society. May we each grow to appreciate Hashem's beautiful gift of His laws, which gives meaning to each of our lives. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

**RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL**

## To Lead in Need

**T**he newly formed Jewish nation was literally stuck between a rock and a hard (to navigate) place.

The sea loomed before them while the Egyptian army was approaching from behind. They cried out in despair. Moshe too turned to HaShem to pray for salvation.

HaShem, however, rebukes Moshe by saying: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מִה-תִּצְעַק אֵלַי דְּבַר אֶל-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִסְעוּ Moshe, why are you crying out to Me? Speak to Bnei Yisrael and they should proceed..

Rashi quotes the Mechilta: מה תצעק אלי. למדנו שהיה משה עומד ומתפלל, אמר לו הקב"ה, לא עתה להאריך שיהיה משה עומד ומתפלל, אמר לו הקב"ה, לא עתה להאריך (There is no mention that he prayed to God concerning this), Why are you crying out to me? this teaches us that Moshe stood in prayer. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "It is no time now to pray at length, when the Jewish people are placed in trouble".

HaShem is telling Moshe that the only speaking that he should be doing is encouraging the people. Much deeper, however, is the lesson for Moshe and all future leaders-when your people are vulnerable and in need of comfort, don't turn your back to pray to Me. Do an "about face" and tend to them!

A true leader understands that in a time of crisis, the members of their flock are looking for guidance, reassurance and comfort. Such support is more crucial even than prayer.

I was privileged to spend some years learning in Yeshivas Beth Moshe in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The yeshiva enjoys a well deserved reputation of instilling a love of Torah and Yiddishkeit in its students. There is an atmosphere of warmth and concern that emanates from the administration and trickles down through the dedicated rebbeim to the student body, both present and past.

Shortly after my entering the yeshiva, it was discovered that the schedule of vaccinations that I had received in my youth was not compliant with the Health department of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In order for me to remain enrolled, I would have to receive ALL of the missing vaccines at the local health department.

After informing me of this, the Rosh Hayeshiva, Rav Chaim Bressler, told me that if I preferred, I could return to Baltimore and forgo the many jabs that I would need to comply. I told Rav Chaim that I would "bite the bullet" and do what was needed to remain in the yeshiva.

Rav Bressler replied, "I thought that you would say that so I already arranged an appointment for you this morning. It shouldn't take more than hour". I asked him for the address so that I could call a taxi or take the bus. His answer, "don't worry, I will take you. Meet me out front at 10:45".

Rav Chaim drove me to the Department of Health office. I thanked him and told him that I would return to the yeshiva by taxi after the appointment. Rav Bressler wouldn't hear of it. He parked the car and

accompanied me into the clinic. While waiting to be called, we sat and spoke for about half an hour. I went in, reviewed the information, and received all (yes, ALL) of the missing shots. I figured that by this time, Rav Chaim, a very busy man at the start of the semester, would have returned to the yeshiva and I would find my own way back.

To my great surprise, Rav Chaim was still sitting in the waiting room, sefer in hand. He greeted me with his trademark smile and asked me how I was feeling after the "assault". We walked together to his car and returned to the yeshiva.

I thanked him again remarking that he really didn't need to spend so much of his precious time to drive and wait for me.

Rav Chaim said "I thought about how you must have felt, being far from home, in a new yeshiva and now facing a government clerk who will administer a bunch of shots. Yes, there is much to do in the yeshiva but at this time I felt that you needed someone to be there for and with you. And, as a bonus, we got to know each other better while waiting".

Although this story took place almost 4 decades back, the devotion and concern of Rav Chaim Bressler for one of his students warms me until this very day. While I left the yeshiva many years ago and live 6000 miles away from Scranton, every time that I speak to Rav Chaim by phone or have the privilege to see him, I am still that teenager, sitting anxiously with his Rosh Yeshiva, receiving assurance while waiting his turn for the shots.

Sometimes it's the "little things" that make the biggest impact.

Rav Chaim Bressler, despite his many responsibilities and a demanding schedule, understood that in a time of need, a true leader places his student's needs above and beyond anything else.

Thank you rebbe. ©2022 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at [Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org](http://Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org)

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### Preparation

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**N**umerous laws are derived from the verse: "On the sixth day they shall prepare what they bring in...." (*Shemot* 16:5). First, we derive from it that one should prepare properly on Friday for Shabbat, so that everything will be ready by the time Shabbat starts.

Second, we derive the rule of *muktzah*: if an item was not prepared or set aside for Shabbat use in advance, it may not be used or moved on Shabbat.

Third, our Sages derive from the verse that one may prepare on a weekday for Shabbat, but may not prepare on Shabbat for a weekday. For this reason, many people do not wash dishes or pots following Shabbat lunch, because they know they will not need to

use them again until after Shabbat. Some people do not fold their *tallit* after *shul*, as they consider it preparing for a weekday since they will not be wearing a *tallit* again until Sunday.

Based on the requirement to prepare during the week for Shabbat, our Sages derive that if Yom Tov is on Friday, it is prohibited to prepare on Yom Tov for Shabbat. The only way this preparation becomes permitted is if a person sets aside food for an *eruv tavshilin* before Yom Tov. By doing so, he is beginning preparations for Shabbat on the day preceding Yom Tov.

Up to this point, we have addressed preparation undertaken by people. However, why do we need the verse cited above to tell us about such preparation? We have another verse which makes the same point: "Tomorrow is a day of rest . . . so bake what you want to bake now" (*Shemot* 16:23).

Therefore, the Gemara posits that our verse is speaking about something that was "prepared by heaven," such as an egg that was laid on Shabbat. (This is one of the main subjects of the beginning of *Tractate Beitza*). Such an egg may not be used on Shabbat or the Yom Tov that follows it on Sunday. Similarly, if Yom Tov is on Friday, an egg laid on Yom Tov may not be used for Yom Tov or the Shabbat following it. Since these eggs did not exist before Shabbat or Yom Tov, they could not have been prepared or set aside beforehand. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

## RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

### Migdal Ohr

**"A**nd Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him for he had sworn upon the Children of Israel saying, "When G-d remembers you from this [exile], you shall take my bones up with you." (*Shmos* 13:19) Rashi here quotes the Mechilta that Yosef made his brothers and his children swear to make their children and subsequent generations swear, that when they were redeemed, they would take Yosef's bones up to Canaan with them.

It asks why Yosef didn't make them swear to bring his bones up to Canaan immediately after his death, as Yaakov did with Yosef. It answers that Yosef said, "I was a king and was able to do what my father requested. Pharaoh will not let my children do this for me." Therefore, he made them swear that when they would be redeemed and able to, they would bring his bones out of Egypt.

We see a very unique and important lesson in Chinuch, educating our children in the ways of Hashem. Yosef recognized that his children were different than he. They had different challenges and different opportunities. He didn't expect them to achieve the things he did nor live up to a standard they would not be able to, even if that is what he wished for them.

Instead, he clearly identified and conveyed his desires, aspirations, and values, and left it to his children to do what they could, when they could. He didn't place undue pressure on them because he understood that it was not fair to them and would not lead to realizing his aims. On the contrary, it might have led to the hopelessness and despair of failure.

Therefore, what Yosef did was reassure them that though they might not be able to bring his bones to the land of his birth, at some point, they or their children WOULD be able to accomplish this task. He reminded them that their limitations in the present would not last forever, and urged them to greatness whenever the opportunity would present itself.

This oath was ultimately fulfilled by none other than Moshe Rabbeinu, who took it upon himself to personally be involved with Yosef's remains. Like Yosef, Moshe Rabbeinu adjured each Jew to rise to his own level of excellence and achieve what he was able to, knowing also that part of his greatness would be the greatness he inspired and facilitated in others.

This is how we teach the next generation; by highlighting their strengths and encouraging them to strive for excellence, in whatever form it manifests for them.

*Every year on Tu B'Shvat, the table of the Admor, R' Yitzchak Isaac of Ziditchov, z"l, would be surrounded by many chassidim and guests, and the Rebbe would distribute fruits to everyone present. One year, more visitors arrived than usual, and even the huge amount of fruit which had been prepared was not enough to be distributed to everyone there.*

*The Rebbe looked up and discerned what had happened. He then said, "Is it fruits that you want? Come close and I'll tell you where you can find them. 'These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world, but whose principal remains intact for him in Olam Haba... and Talmud Torah is equal to all of them.' Go and occupy yourselves with Torah, and you will each find abundant, sweet fruits without any crowding, besides for the principal which will remain for you in Olam Haba!"* ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

### **RABBI ARI WEISS**

## **The Proverbial Point**

**T**his shabbat, besides being Shabbat Shirah, is also Tu B'shevat, the Jewish new year for trees [ed note - Tu B'shevat is on Monday this year]. The importance of trees in Jewish life is expressed in many areas, not the least of which is in this week's parsha, B'Shalach. In it we read how Moshe used a tree to sweeten the waters at Marah, and how the Jews found seventy date palms waiting for them in the oasis of Elim.

Interestingly, the Talmud makes the statement that one who is studying Torah and stops to admire a

tree, is worthy of death (although not literally punishable by death). Additionally, we read that no trees were allowed to be planted or cultivated anywhere on the Temple mount in Jerusalem. From these sources, one might question the perspective the sages had regarding trees and their importance, but in truth these statements relate the depth of their understanding regarding the specialness of trees.

Throughout the Torah and Talmud, trees have profound mystical symbolism. The Torah itself is referred to as the "Etz Chaim" - the tree of life. The righteous are likened to the date palm and the mighty cedar, while the book of Shir HaShirim is replete with metaphoric representations of the nation of Israel as trees. Indeed, the connection that a tree has with the ground, while constantly reaching skyward with its limbs is symbolic of the human condition: grounded in the physical, yet striving for the spiritual. In trees we see not only a model of our own spiritual growth, but in fact a representation of our connectedness to our history and G-d Himself.

The meaning, therefore, of the previously mentioned sources, is not, G-d forbid, that our sages didn't appreciate the importance and necessity of the trees. Rather, they understood that our appreciation of plant life needs to be utilized as a method of connecting with the Divine, not as an end in itself. One who loses that connection between G-d's creations and G-d Himself, Heaven forbid, is referred to as a "kotzetz B'nityot" - one who severs a tree from that which sustains it. In a similar way, the idolatrous religion of Asheira, involving the worship of trees, evolved when people began to disassociate the trees with G-d, and worshipped the trees as an end in itself. Therefore, on the temple mount, the location of the ultimate connection with G-d, it is not appropriate for there to be representations and symbols. Why notice a tree as a symbol of the connection with the Divine, when you can partake in the real thing? The same is true with Torah study; one who is connecting with G-d through Torah, but then stops to focus instead on a metaphor of that connection, is missing the proverbial point.

So this Shabbat, on Tu B'Shevat, please take the time to appreciate the beautiful and vital role trees play in our world, but then be sure to thank Hashem for creating them. Indulge in the delicious and nutritious fruits and vegetables with which we've been blessed, but be sure to begin and end with the appropriate blessings, giving praise and thanks to the Creator who saw fit to grace us with His abundance. Use the wonderful creations of this world as stepping stones to bring us even closer to our loving and caring G-d, and our appreciation of those creations will be that much more profound. ©2013 Rabbi A. Weiss

