

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

The American writer Bruce Feiler recently published a best-selling book entitled *The Secrets of Happy Families*. It's an engaging work that uses research largely drawn from fields like team building, problem solving and conflict resolution, showing how management techniques can be used at home also to help make families cohesive units that make space for personal growth.

At the end, however, he makes a very striking and unexpected point: "The single most important thing you can do for your family may be the simplest of all: develop a strong family narrative." He quotes a study from Emory University that the more children know about their family's story, "the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem, the more successfully they believe their family functions." (Pg. 274. Feiler does not cite the source, but see: Bohanek, Jennifer G., Kelly A. Marin, Robyn Fivush, and Marshall P. Duke. "Family Narrative Interaction and Children's Sense of Self." *Family Process* 45.1 (2006): 39-54.)

A family narrative connects children to something larger than themselves. It helps them make sense of how they fit into the world that existed before they were born. It gives them the starting-point of an identity. That in turn becomes the basis of confidence. It enables children to say: This is who I am. This is the story of which I am a part. These are the people who came before me and whose descendant I am. These are the roots of which I am the stem reaching upward toward the sun.

Nowhere was this point made more dramatically than by Moses in this week's parsha. The tenth plague is about to strike. Moses knows that this will be the last. Pharaoh will not merely let the people go. He will urge them to leave. So, on God's command, he prepares the people for freedom. But he does so in a way that is unique. He does not talk about liberty. He does not speak about breaking the chains of bondage. He does not even mention the arduous journey that lies ahead. Nor does he enlist their enthusiasm by giving them a glimpse of the destination, the Promised Land that God swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the land of milk and honey.

He talks about children. Three times in the

course of the parsha he turns to the theme: And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' you shall say... (Exodus 12:26-27)

And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt' (Exodus 13:8)

And when, in time to come, your child asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him... (Exodus 13:14)

This is wonderfully counterintuitive. He doesn't speak about tomorrow but about the distant future. He does not celebrate the moment of liberation. Instead he wants to ensure that it will form part of the people's memory until the end of time. He wants each generation to pass on the story to the next. He wants Jewish parents to become educators, and Jewish children to be guardians of the past for the sake of the future. Inspired by God, Moses taught the Israelites the lesson arrived at via a different route by the Chinese: If you plan for a year, plant rice. If you plan for a decade, plant a tree. If you plan for a century, educate a child.

Jews became famous throughout the ages for putting education first. Where others built castles and palaces, Jews built schools and houses of study. From this flowed all the familiar achievements in which we take collective pride: the fact that Jews knew their texts even in ages of mass illiteracy; the record of Jewish scholarship and intellect; the astonishing over-representation of Jews among the shapers of the modern mind; the Jewish reputation, sometimes admired, sometimes feared, sometimes caricatured, for mental agility, argument, debate, and the ability to see all sides of a disagreement.

But Moses' point wasn't simply this. God never commanded us: Thou shall win a Nobel Prize. What he wanted us to teach our children was a story. He wanted us to help our children understand who they are, where they came from, what happened to their ancestors to make them the distinctive people they became and what moments in their history shaped their lives and dreams. He wanted us to give our children an identity by turning history into memory, and memory itself into a sense of responsibility. Jews were not summoned to be a nation of intellectuals. They were called on to be actors in a drama of redemption, a people invited by God to bring blessings into the world by the way they lived and sanctified life.

For some time now, along with many others in

the West, we have sometimes neglected this deeply spiritual element of education. That is what makes Lisa Miller's recent book *The Spiritual Child*, an important reminder of a forgotten truth. Professor Miller teaches psychology and education at Columbia University and co-edits the journal *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*. Her book is not about Judaism or even religion as such, but specifically about the importance of parents encouraging the spirituality of the child.

Children are naturally spiritual. They are fascinated by the vastness of the universe and our place in it. They have the same sense of wonder that we find in some of the greatest of the psalms. They love stories, songs and rituals. They like the shape and structure they give to time, and relationships, and the moral life. To be sure, sceptics and atheists have often derided religion as a child's view of reality, but that only serves to strengthen the corollary, that a child's view of reality is instinctively, intuitively religious. Deprive a child of that by ridiculing faith, abandoning ritual, and focusing instead on academic achievement and other forms of success, and you starve him or her of some of the most important elements of emotional and psychological well-being.

As Professor Miller shows, the research evidence is compelling. Children who grow up in homes where spirituality is part of the atmosphere at home are less likely to succumb to depression, substance abuse, aggression and high-risk behaviours including physical risk-taking and "a sexuality devoid of emotional intimacy". Spirituality plays a part in a child's resilience, physical and mental health and healing. It is a key dimension of adolescence and its intense search for identity and purpose. The teenage years often take the form of a spiritual quest. And when there is a cross-generational bond through which children and parents come to share a sense of connection to something larger, an enormous inner strength is born. Indeed the parent-child relationship, especially in Judaism, mirrors the relationship between God and us.

That is why Moses so often emphasises the role of the question in the process of education: "When your child asks you, saying..." -- a feature ritualised at the Seder table in the form of the Mah nishtanah. Judaism is a questioning and argumentative faith, in which even the greatest ask questions of God, and in which the rabbis of the Mishnah and Midrash constantly disagree. Rigid doctrinal faith that discourages questions, calling instead for blind obedience and submission, is psychologically damaging and fails to prepare a child for the complexity of real life. What is more, the Torah is careful, in the first paragraph of the Shema, to say, "You shall love the Lord your God..." before saying, "You shall teach these things diligently to your children." Parenthood works when your children see that you love what you want them to learn.

The long walk to freedom, suggests this week's parsha, is not just a matter of history and politics, let alone miracles. It has to do with the relationship between parents and children. It is about telling the story and passing it on across the generations. It is about a sense of God's presence in our lives. It is about making space for transcendence, wonder, gratitude, humility, empathy, love, forgiveness and compassion, ornamented by ritual, song and prayer. These help to give a child confidence, trust and hope, along with a sense of identity, belonging and at-home-ness in the universe.

You cannot build a healthy society out of emotionally unhealthy families and angry and conflicted children. Faith begins in families. Hope is born in the home. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd it came to pass that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, to the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the cattle." (Exodus 12:29) Why is the killing of the firstborn the final and most significant plague? True, it brought death into every household, rattling Egypt at its foundations, but certainly the plagues of hail, or fire in blocks of ice falling from the sky, or total, crippling darkness for three days and nights, were not inconsequential demonstrations of God's power. Any of these plagues could have dealt a knockout punch to the most cold-hearted of dictators. What, then, is it about the killing of the firstborn that proved most effective?

I suggest that it is because it destroyed a certain institution of ancient culture that God found objectionable: primogeniture, the primacy and veneration of the firstborn. Turning to the earliest pages of Genesis, we find the theme of the firstborn early in the Torah, when sibling rivalry between Cain and Abel is translated into the rejection and acceptance of their respective sacrifices to God: the hypocritical gift of the firstborn Cain is rejected, while the more sincere offering of the younger Abel is accepted.

Part of Cain's vexation is due to the fact that he sees his firstborn status as having been overlooked – and indeed it was, since sincerity of devotion is ultimately more important than order of birth.

Thus, Abraham's eldest son, Ishmael, must step aside for the younger Isaac because the former is a metzahek (Genesis 21:9) – a scorner and an adulterer – which renders him unfit for the birthright.

Of Isaac's two sons, Esau must give way to Jacob, since the former scorned the birthright, first by

selling it for a mess of pottage, and then by taking Hittite wives.

Jacob also has a firstborn, Reuben, but having “moved” his father’s bed – either an attempt to determine with whom his father would sleep after the death of Rachel, or a euphemism for illicit relations with his father’s concubine – he is deemed unfit. In his place, leadership passes to Judah and Joseph.

With the birth of the Jewish People in the book of Exodus, a revolutionary concept emerges on the world stage: the prevailing rule of the firstborn rapidly comes to an end. Indeed, the essence of the Egyptian-Hebrew confrontation boils down to the idea that if you’re born an Egyptian, you have the right to enslave, and if you’re born a Hebrew, you become a slave.

Slavery was not exclusive to Egypt. The Greeks and the Romans believed that anyone born into a race other than theirs was barbaric, and that they had the moral right to enslave all barbarians.

Indeed, less than 150 years ago, a bloody war was fought in the United States because nearly half the country chose secession rather than adhering to the law that condemned slavery as illegal. And less than 100 years ago, the free world was threatened by a nation that believed in the Aryan right to dominate and exterminate.

From the moment it began its ascent in the world, Judaism message has been that an individual’s merits are more important than an individual’s genealogy. Therefore, the killing of the firstborn of the Egyptians not only strikes terror in the heart of every household member, it also tolls the death knell for the revered institution of the firstborn.

Many generations later, following the destruction of the Second Commonwealth, and in the absence of a priesthood and monarchy, the Rabbinic Sages emerged as the leaders of the Jewish People. These scholars taught – and demonstrated – the principle of meritocracy: one becomes a leader through study and devotion, not as a result of “yichus” (ancestry). A prime example of this can be found in the teaching: “A mamzer [person born of adultery or incest] who is a Torah scholar takes precedence over an ignorant High Priest” (Mishna, Horayot 3:8).

The Talmud expands this concept: “You shall therefore observe My statutes, and My ordinances, which if a human [adam] does, he shall live by them...” (Leviticus 18:5). Rabbi Meir says that the Torah’s choice of the word “human” [adam] means that a non-Jew who observes the Torah and mitzvot is as great as the High Priest (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 59a).

This revolutionary – and fundamentally democratic – message is one of Judaism’s great lessons for humanity. This concept, so central to the idea of the Exodus, can and should empower all people, Jews and non-Jews alike, to throw off their shackles of genealogy and birth order, and attempt to

attain true freedom. Ultimately, only those who dream the impossible will ever achieve the incredible. ©2023 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

As the drama of the Exodus from Egypt draws nearer its climax in this week’s Torah reading, one cannot help but be struck by the stubbornness of Pharaoh in the face of all of the plagues visited upon him and his nation. His advisers had long before told him that all was lost and that he should cut his losses quickly by freeing the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. This seemingly wise and rational counsel was rejected by Pharaoh out of hand.

Pharaoh sees himself as a godlike figure, omniscient, supremely brilliant and all knowing. He is trapped in a propaganda web of his own making – he can never admit to being wrong or to having made an error of judgment or policy. In the course of human history this has often been the fatal error made by dictators who were always supremely confident in their arrogance and who never acknowledged their mistakes.

Just recall the mass murderers and dictators of our past century – Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Arafat, etc. None of them ever admitted to error and all of them led their people to disaster and untold suffering. This was the arrogance of power overwhelming rational thought and nullifying good strategic planning. There is also an arrogance of intellect. The intellectuals amongst us, who always know what is best for everyone else, are never reticent about rendering opinions on all issues and policies. Again, the fact that they have been wrong – dead wrong – so many times in the past causes them no inhibition in advancing their current viewpoints.

The Torah seems to attribute Pharaoh’s continuing folly of unreasonable stubbornness, to God, so to speak, ‘hardening his heart.’ This implies that somehow Pharaoh’s freedom of choice was diminished and he could not have capitulated to the demands of Moshe even if he had wished to do so. This philosophic and theological difficulty has been dealt with by the great commentators of Israel over the ages, with varying theories offered and advanced.

It seems from many of their opinions that at a certain point in human decision-making, a tipping point is achieved when the leader can no longer admit to error and remain the leader. ‘Hardening’ the leader’s heart means there is an unwillingness to give up one’s position of power. Very few leaders in the history of humanity have willingly surrendered power.

Simply rising to a position of leadership, let alone absolute and dictatorial power, almost automatically ‘hardens one’s heart’ and limits one’s choices and policy options. The Torah blesses a

generation that is privileged to have a leader that is capable of admitting sin and error and can offer a public sacrifice in the Temple in atonement.

The greatness of King David lies not only in his heroic spiritual and physical accomplishments as king of Israel but in his ability to admit to personal failings and errors of judgment. Pharaoh is incapable of such self-scrutiny and realistic humility. His lust for power has 'hardened his heart' beyond the power of recall. He has doomed himself as have so many of his ilk over the centuries. ©2023 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

How 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 verse, 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 (Sanhedrin 91a).

But a different approach to the text 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 (Lekach Tov). This approach would read the word va'yenatzlu not as meaning "despoil" but "to save" (from the word l'hatzil). In giving money to the Jews, the Egyptians' souls repented and, in some small way, were saved.

To paraphrase Benno Jacob (as quoted in Dr. J. H. Hertz's commentary on the Torah), an amicable parting from Egypt would banish the Jews' bitter memories 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 and goodwill 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 that surfaced in the early 1950s. Should Jews accept reparation money from Germany? Some argued for accepting such money, feeling that Germany should at least pay monetarily for their villainy.

Others argued the reverse. Payment would be viewed as blood money, an atonement to wash away German sins – and, of course, nothing could ever obviate the evil of the Third Reich.

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 never to be repeated, or did it set a precedent to be emulated later in history? ©2023 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And now, bear my sin just this time, and pray to Hashem your G-d..." (Shmos 10:17) When the locusts came, Pharaoh was at his wits' end. He once again asked Moshe to intercede for him and put an end to the plague. When he said, "Bear my sin," meaning, "let it slide, don't punish me, etc." the commentaries explain he was really speaking to Hashem, because it wasn't up to Moshe to hold Pharaoh accountable or forgive him. That was up to Hashem, against whom Pharaoh was sinning. (This is a good lesson to remember when we look at others. It's not up to us to judge and punish them or to forgive them. That's Hashem's domain.)

He then spoke to Moshe, asking him to daven to Hashem for him that the plague stop. In fact, he also included Aharon in his request, which was a mark of respect for him, though Moshe was the one who was davening to stop the plagues.

What is interesting is that even at this point, when Pharaoh was aware that he needed Hashem to pardon him, he asked Moshe to intercede and pray to "his G-d," for it to end. Ironically, the message that Hashem was also Pharaoh's G-d was lost on him.

It may be that Pharaoh was unaware that Hashem would listen to what he had to say, but more likely, Pharaoh didn't want to admit that Hashem would be willing to listen to him. Often when there is a breakdown in a relationship, the side at fault will blame the other for being disconnected or distant, even when they were the ones to cause the rift.

Pharaoh understood that he had to beg Hashem's pardon, but he nevertheless engaged Moshe to be the middleman for this. He would not speak directly to Hashem. If he had, history would likely have changed. Indeed, according to those who say that the king of Ninveh, who took Yonah's words of warning to heart and encouraged his people to repent, was the same Pharaoh who went through the Ten Plagues, we see that this city was saved by Pharaoh's turning to Hashem himself.

Each of us has a relationship with Hashem, and He should be the first place we turn for help. Rabbis, teachers, mystics, they are all wonderful, but they are only intermediaries. They, like Moshe, can only ask Hashem to help, but in reality, He prefers to hear from

us directly, with prayers from the heart.

Let us not make the same mistake as Pharaoh, who refused to turn to Hashem and admit his frailty. Let us focus on the love Hashem has for each of us and try to reciprocate it. While we can't expect to stick to our poor behavior or beliefs and get a positive response from Hashem (though it is possible), they do not have to serve as obstacles to our opening the conversation with Him. No matter what we do, He is our G-d and wants to hear from us.

During the Holocaust, many felt that G-d had forsaken His people. But those closest to Him knew the truth. Included in this group were the holy martyrs of Telshe, Lithuania, Hashem Yinkom Damam, guided by the great R' Avraham Yitzchok Bloch z"l HYD. When the Nazis came to Telshe, R' Avraham Yitzchok was not fazed by their threats and continued to nurture his flock with words of strength and encouragement.

When the entire male Jewish population of Telshe was murdered in cold blood on the 20th of Tamuz, R' Avraham Yitzchok was accosted by a Nazi who hit him about the head with a hammer and taunted, "Where is your G-d, now, Herr Rabbiner?"

The Telzer Rov looked his attacker in the eye and calmly replied, "He is not only my G-d, He is also your G-d; and the world will yet see this." ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

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Chametz on Pesach

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The laws relating to *chametz* on Pesach include the prohibition of eating *chametz*, the obligation to get rid of *chametz*, and the prohibition of owning *chametz*.

However, it is not clear if these laws all go into effect at the same time. The prohibition of eating *chametz* and the obligation to get rid of it both begin a number of hours before the holiday starts. However, the Ra'avad is of the opinion that the prohibition of owning *chametz* applies only during the actual holiday, based on the verse, "No leaven shall be found in your houses for seven days" (*Shemot* 12:19). Rashi, in contrast, maintains that this prohibition too begins in the afternoon, at the same time as the other prohibitions.

There is also a difference of opinion as to the minimum amount (*shiur*) of *chametz* a person would have to possess in order to transgress the prohibition of ownership. The *shiur* in this case would seem to be an olive (*kezayit*). However, there is a general principle that even less than a *shiur* (*chatzi shiur*) is biblically prohibited (although the transgressor does not receive lashes). Some maintain that *chatzi shiur* is forbidden only when someone is doing something with the food (such as eating it), which makes it clear that this amount is significant to him (*achshevei*). However, if no action is involved (*shev ve-al ta'aseh*), as is the case

with the prohibition of owning *chametz*, this principle might not apply. If so, owning a small amount of *chametz* (less than a *kezayit*) would be permitted on the biblical level.

Why should less than a *shiur* be prohibited? Shouldn't the criterion, almost by definition, be the full *shiur*? One of the reasons for this stringency is the fear that someone will start by eating only part of a *shiur*, but will keep nibbling until, within a relatively short amount of time, he ends up eating an entire *shiur*. All that he ate combines together (*mitzta'ef*), and he is considered to have violated the prohibition from when he began eating. However, when we are dealing with a prohibition of ownership, even if someone ultimately acquires a full *shiur*, he will transgress only from the point of full acquisition onward, but not retroactively. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Meaning of Matzah

Parashat Bo marks the end of slavery for the Jews in Egypt. After the final plague, the Torah tells us: "And Par'oh arose at night, he and all his servants and all Egypt, and there was a great outcry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not a corpse. He called to Moshe and Aharon at night and said, 'Rise up, go out from among my people, even you, even the children of Yisrael; go and serve Hashem as you spoke! Take even your flock, even your cattle, as you have spoken, and go – and bless me as well.' Egypt urged the people to hurry to send them out of the land, for they said, 'All of us are dead!' The people picked up its dough when it had not yet become leavened, their leftovers bound in their garments upon their shoulders. The Children of Yisrael did according to the word of Moshe; they requested from the Egyptians silver vessels, gold vessels, and garments. Hashem granted the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians and they lent them – so they emptied Egypt." After the Torah depicts their first journey, we read, "They baked the dough that they took out of Egypt into cakes of Matzah, for it did not become leavened, for they were driven out of Egypt for they could not delay, and also they had not made provisions for themselves."

Before our discussion can begin, we must first understand the prohibition against having *chametz* (leaven) on Pesach. Matzah is made of basic ingredients (flour and water), and it does not rise. *Chametz* is defined as leavening, anytime that flour and water are mixed together to make dough, yet the dough is not completed baking within an eighteen-minute limit, a time that the Rabbis determined would cause it to rise automatically even without leavening. All Matzah (that is kosher for use on Pesach) must adhere to this eighteen-minute limit.

In the Pesach Haggadah, the second passage is quoted as the reason for eating Matzah during the

Pesach Seder. According to Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon, this reason presents several problems: "(a) The mitzvah to eat matzah preceded the Exodus from Egypt, (b) Matzah is mentioned in the Torah as a symbol of freedom and not as fleeing from slavery, (c) Matzah was used in the Bet HaMikdash as the ideal bread – how is this consistent with its representation of unrisen, 'unfinished' dough (?). The Mishnah writes that one eats matzah 'because our forefathers were redeemed.'"

If we examine our passage, it appears that we eat matzah only because we were pressured into leaving Egypt, yet the B'nei Yisrael were commanded to eat the Korban Pesach together with matzah on the night that they were freed. Here we see a difference between what is called Pesach Mitzrayim, the first Pesach that took place in Egypt, and Pesach Dorot, the commandments concerning the prohibition of chametz during Pesach for all future generations. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch quotes the Gemara Pesachim (28b), which states that the prohibition of chametz for seven days did not apply in Egypt. There, on that first Pesach, chametz was forbidden only on the first night, from the time of slaughtering the Paschal Lamb until after eating it with matzah. The commandment in the Torah concerning the full seven days uses the term *zichron*, a remembrance, namely commemorating the events of the first Pesach.

According to the Maharal as quoted by Rav Rimon, the mitzvah of matzah is expressed in negative rather than positive terms, namely, it is dough that has not risen and is something which is baked that is not chametz. Matzah is referred to as *lechem oni*, the bread of affliction, or *lechem ani*, the poor man's bread. When the B'nei Yisrael were hurried out of Egypt, they did not even have time to bake the dough which they then carried on their shoulders. Certainly, they did not bake the dough within the eighteen-minute timeframe which should have caused the dough to become chametz. Knowing all these facts, it appears strange that Hashem miraculously would prevent the dough from rising as it remained non-chametz. Some Rabbis wished to say that the B'nei Yisrael hurried to bake the dough once they left Egypt, but it still seems impossible that they all could have baked all the dough into matzah within the proper timeframe.

Rabbi Berel Wein quotes H. E. Jacob, who posits that Egyptians were the first people to bake leavened bread and that it rose to such importance that it became actual currency and even rose to the level of a deity. The break with Egypt and her gods required that the B'nei Yisrael avoid chametz bread. This is given as one of the reasons that Hashem did not allow the dough on their backs to rise. Matzah was on the other side of the spectrum, a bread of simple ingredients and of minimum financial importance. Rav Rimon explains that "matzah symbolizes our pure and wholesome internal identity, which one cannot define or

characterize. Matzah teaches us about modesty and humility – without any external and inflated facets, an expression of simplicity and naivete, without any technology, sophistication, or human distortion. That is why matzah is able to be the perfect bread, the one offered in the Bet HaMikdash."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin has another answer for why the B'nei Yisrael were forced to flee from Egypt even before they could bake their dough into bread. The Torah uses the term "*lehitmahmei'ah*, to tarry," in one other place, the story of Lot fleeing Sodom, "*vayitmamah*, and he tarried." Lot had to flee Sodom or he and his family would be destroyed completely. The same was true of the B'nei Yisrael in Egypt. They were constantly losing their distinct peoplehood, daily being influenced to adopt the names, dress, and culture of the Egyptians. Had the B'nei Yisrael not left at that precise moment, it would have been too late to maintain their distinct personalities as Jews. This was because the B'nei Yisrael had not yet received the Torah. The Torah and its Laws are what enables the B'nei Yisrael to have their own ways, their own culture, and their own direction in life. Once the B'nei Yisrael received the Torah and accepted its ways, they were able to maintain that culture and that individuality in spite of being exiled around the globe for more than two thousand years.

Perhaps this is why our matzah has been so important. This simple "bread" made from simple ingredients, this "poor man's bread," this "bread of affliction," would also be the exalted breads of the Bet HaMikdash. This "bread" enabled us to maintain our identity, reminded us of our Holy offerings in our Holy Temple, and kept us from becoming a part of the negative, impure world. Though our "bread" did not rise, it enabled us to rise above our oppression and focus on the good that Hashem has given the world. May we think of all these meanings of matzah at our Pesach Seders. ©2023 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Since free will is the fundamental element of the human being that places him in a realm apart from the rest of Creation, the question of how Hashem could "harden the heart" of Par'oh (e.g. Shemos 9:12) is an obvious one.

The Rambam's approach, echoing Resh Lakish in the Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 13:3), is that the king's own freely chosen initial actions robbed him of his free will, like, one might say, a drug addict's choice to use heroin might affect his ability to choose to shun it thereafter. The hardening of Par'oh's heart only began after several plagues.

The Ramban's and Sforno's approach is that, on the contrary, the heart-hardening actually gave Par'oh free will. It was but a counterbalance to the will-

sapping fear of the plagues. The divine steeling of his resolve was thus a corrective measure, allowing him to exercise his free-willed decision to refuse Moshe and Aharon's demand.

Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin offers an original approach. What the Torah's statement that Hashem hardened Par'oh's heart means, says Rav Zevin, that he gave Par'oh an enhanced ability to be stubborn. Like every middah, talent and ability, obstinacy can be channeled toward good or bad (See Rav Ashi's statement in Shabbos 156a about one born under the influence of Ma'adim: "[He will be] either a bloodletter, or a thief, or a shochet or a mohel.")

Klal Yisrael, after all, is obstinate, too, an am kshei oref. Obstinacy's import lies in what one does with it.

So Par'oh's use of his Hashem-given special stubbornness against Moshe and Aharon and Klal Yisrael was... his choice. ©2023 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Many commentaries ask why, as our Parashah begins, Hashem says to Moshe, "Come to Pharaoh...", rather than "Go to Pharaoh." R' Shaul Alter shlita (rabbi of Kehilas Pnei Menachem in Yerushalayim; formerly the "Gerrer Rosh Yeshiva") explains: The Gemara (Mo'ed Kattan 16a) asks: How do we know that a defendant who ignores the first summons of the Bet Din should be sent a second summons? The Gemara answers that this is learned from the verse (Yirmiyah 46:17--in this week's Haftarah), "They called out there, 'Pharaoh, the blustery king of Egypt, has let the appointed time go by'." R' Alter explains: Pharaoh ignored repeated warnings, and Hashem could have brought the full brunt of the Plagues down on Pharaoh immediately, but He showed patience. Similarly, a Bet Din should show patience.

R' Alter continues: A Chassid once told R' Yisrael Friedman z"l (1797-1850; the Rizhiner Rebbe) that he (the Chassid) had committed the same grievous sin so many times that he worried that his repentance would not be accepted. The Rizhiner responded: In the Yom Kippur prayers, we refer to Hashem as a "Salchan" and "Machlan"--one who forgives and cleanses repeatedly. We do not use the form "Solei'ach" and "Mochel," which would indicate one who forgives occasionally or by chance (see Bava Metzia 33a). Though we commit the same sins year after year, Hashem forgives repeatedly.

In this light, concludes R' Alter, we can suggest the following reason why the verse says, "Come to Pharaoh." It means: Come and adopt as your own this trait of patience that I, Hashem, demonstrate toward Pharaoh. (Ivra D'dasha)



"Hashem said to Moshe, 'Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn [literally, "heavy"] so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst.'" (10:1)

R' Eliyahu Lopian z"l (1876-1970; Rosh Yeshiva in London and Mashgiach Ruchani at the Yeshivat Knesset Chizkiyahu in Israel; a leading elder of the Mussar movement) writes: The Yetzer Ha'ra has a trick that most people stumble over at some point--i.e., if you ask a person, "Why don't you correct this behavior or that trait?" the Yetzer Ha'ra encourages him to answer, "You are right! I know this is a terrible behavior or trait. But, that's my nature and I cannot change it."

You should know, declares R' Lopian, that any claim that one "cannot" change borders on heresy! This is evident from Midrash Rabbah, which says that, at first glance, our verse lends support to "heretics" who say that Pharaoh could not change because his heart was hardened.

Why are they wrong? Doesn't the Torah say that Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart and took away his free will? "No!" explains the Sage Reish Lakish in the Midrash. Hashem did not take away Pharaoh's ability to repent; He made Pharaoh's heart "heavy," meaning that he made repentance more challenging. Reish Lakish says: Hashem "locked the door" of Teshuvah in Pharaoh's face. But, explains R' Lopian, a locked door does not need to be an obstacle! Granted, a locked door is harder to open than an unlocked door, but it can be opened if one makes the effort to find the key. Or, one can break down the door. Likewise, even when change is difficult, even when one's heart is "heavy," there still are ways to change. It may require greater effort, or it may take doing a special Mitzvah in whose merit one will receive Divine assistance, but it is possible. (Lev Eliyahu)

R' Mordechai Leifer z"l (1824-1894; Nadvorna Rebbe) asks: How is, "for I have made his heart stubborn," a reason for Moshe to go to Pharaoh? To the contrary, that would seem to be a reason not to go to Pharaoh!

He explains: Pharaoh considered himself to be a god (see Rashi to 7:15), and Hashem wished to tell him that, not only is he

not a god, he is but a pawn in Hashem's hands. Therefore, He said to Moshe, "Come to Pharaoh," and tell him that "I, G-d, have made his heart stubborn." Tell him that he has no say in the matter and is merely My pawn. (Divrei Mordechai)

