

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Elazar the son of Aharon took for himself from the daughters of Putiel to be [his] wife” (Shemos 6:25). Who was this daughter of Putiel? Rashi explains that she was “from the descendants of Yisro, who ‘fattened’ calves [to be offered] as idol worship, and from the descendants of Yosef who, facing temptation, ‘fought’ with his evil inclination.”

While the name “Putiel” implies both, the implication is one of praise for Yosef, but of derision for Yisro origins as an idol worshiper. By the time Moshe first met Yisro, however, he had already abandoned his idol worship, which is why his daughters were treated so poorly by the other shepherds (see Rashi on 2:16-17). Since one is not permitted to remind a Ba'al Teshuva (a sinner who has since repented) of his earlier sins (see Rambam's Laws of Repentance 7:8), how can Yisro be referred to by a name that indicates his past discretions?

A first glance at the lineage of Elazar's wife (Pinchas' mother) raises several logistical questions as well. How did Elazar get to Midyan (where Yisro lived, and had been a leader) to meet her in the first place? Was there contact between Moshe and his family all along? Had Moshe told her that he had nephews in Goshen, and so she went down to Egypt and met Elazar there? How could she have been from both Yosef and Yisro? If Yisro had married into Yosef's family, then Moshe could also trace his lineage back to the former Viceroy, a detail that would not be insignificant for someone who had been raised by Paro's daughter, in the royal palace, and was eventually put in charge of Paro's “house” (see Rashi on 2:18).

The Talmud (Bava Basra 109b) contrasts Moshe's grandson (Yehonasan, who was wicked) with Aharon's grandson (Pinchas), and attributes the difference to whom each married. This difference would be negated if Elazar (Pinchas' father) also married one of Yisro's daughters, so the Talmud (expounding on the

“Putiel” inference) explains that Elazar's wife came from Yisro on one side and Yosef on the other. She was not Yisro's daughter (and so Moshe and Elazar were not brothers-in-law), but was either Yisro's (and Yosef's) granddaughter (see Tosfos and Ritva, and Maharsha) or (at least) great-granddaughter (Rashbam).

Yisro had been an advisor to Paro (Shemos Rabba 1:9), and fled Egypt rather than advising Paro how to destroy the emerging Jewish nation. If he was an advisor, and had to “flee” Egypt (rather than just “returning” to his hometown in Midyan), he most likely had a residence in the capital city. Who else lived in the capital city? Yosef's family (which is why, according to the Pa'anayach Raza, Paro couldn't just make decrees against the Jews, but had to consult with his advisors—as they would resist decrees against Yosef's family, to whom they were close). It is therefore reasonable to assume that there was contact between Yisro and Yosef's family, especially since Yisro seems to have been an intellectual thinker/searcher (which led him to try all forms of worship before realizing that monotheism was correct; see Rashi on 18:11). Just as his penchant for philosophical and theological discussion may have led Moshe to want to stay with him (see 2:21), it would also have attracted the royal family of Yosef, who were interested in sharing their monotheistic beliefs with others.

It is therefore likely that while Yisro was still living in Egypt's capital city, one of his children (or grandchildren) married someone from Yosef's family. Contact with this branch of the family was lost when he fled Egypt, but having come from both Yosef and Yisro, it is appropriate that the offspring from this union were known as “descendants of Putiel.”

At the time of this marriage, Yisro may not have severed all of his ties with his idol worship, despite the searching that led to those theological discussions with Yosef's family. In those (i.e. Jewish) circles, he would have been known as “the idol worshiper,” since he was still guilty of it. The nickname “Putiel” would therefore have been given not after he repented, to signify that he was once an idol worshiper, but while he was still sinning, indicating that he still was an idol worshiper. Consequently, the problem of referring to previous sins was not an issue, as Yisro had not yet become a Ba'al Teshuva.

The family of those that came from both Yosef and Yisro became known as “Putiel,” and Elazar

**Wishing a refuah shelaimah to
Aryeh Shalom ben D'vorah Elka
from
Ron & Barbara Zukin & family
Margate, NJ**

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA NEWSLETTER
DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB.
SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR MORE
INFORMATION**

EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG

**COPIES OF TORAS AISH ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE
FOLLOWING ADDRESS ON THE WEB (WWW) :**

HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is solely the work of the AishDas Society, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

married one of the daughters of this family. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

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

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

Sifrei makes this very point by declaring "God said to Moshe and Aaron, I want you to know that the

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

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

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

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

Hence, God's command to Moshe and Aaron—"to the children of Israel." "El" teaches that the gateway to the soul is not through stones or harsh words, but rather through love. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's parsha we read of a mutual disappointment. God, so to speak is disappointed in Moshe's reaction to the events at Pharaoh's palace. Moshe complains, "Since You sent me on this mission the situation has worsened and You have not saved Your people!" God, in a manner of speaking, is disappointed with Moshe's complaint. He remembers, as you might say, the loyalty of our Patriarchs - Avraham, Yitzchak and Yakov - who never doubted or questioned the legitimacy of His promises and commitments. There is an apparent standoff here - a crisis of confidence and faith. Even when the Jews are finally redeemed from Egypt and receive the Torah at Sinai, Moshe is still not satisfied with his relationship with the Lord. He asks again, "Let me know Your ways." How do You run the world? Why the Holocaust? Why the tidal waves? Why indeed? In this, Moshe echoes the challenge that our father Avraham put forth to God - "Shall the Judge of the entire universe not act justly?" Why can we not know Your reasoning and decipher Your code for guiding this world? Where is Your fairness and balance? How is your goodness seen to be manifested in our lives and world? Moshe is not alone in asking these questions. They are the subject of the entire biblical book of Iyov. These questions are the ones that dominate all Jewish philosophy throughout the

ages. They are certainly the questions that haunt post-Holocaust Jewry today.

God provides an answer to Moshe. The answer is that the finite cannot ever understand the infinite - "living humans can never see Me!" Though this may seem to be an unsatisfying response to the questions posed above, it is in reality merely a restatement of the human condition. Humans are mortal and God is eternal. As great as human intellect is, it is still essentially limited. God is omniscient and omnipotent. Human beings are not. This is the answer that the Patriarchs arrived at on their own in achieving a sense of their true relationship with God. Moshe persisted beyond the point where the Patriarchs retreated in submission to an unknowable God. But he too would have to eventually withdraw from the fray. About Moshe it is written, "He was just short of God Himself." But at the end of the day, Moshe remains a human - the greatest of all humans, but nevertheless human. And the line between humans and our Creator cannot be crossed. God's ways are awesome and frightening, comforting and endearing. But whatever we perceive them to be, they are beyond our ability to fathom and explain. "For your thoughts are not My thoughts and your ways are not My ways," as God tells the prophet Yeshayahu. And so it is in this vein that Jews have understood the Godly relationship with all of humanity. The Talmud tells us that the prophet Chavakuk summed up all of Judaism with one phrase: "And the righteous shall live by faith." And so it is with us as well.

© 2005 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/jewishhistory.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

What is the secret of Jewish eternity? If medical opinion is beginning to maintain that one of the most important variables in achieving longevity is an optimistic outlook on life, one of the most unique and important messages that Judaism gave to the world is the optimistic notion of world redemption. Our Western culture is formed by the Greco-Roman civilization and by what is generally known as the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Greeks saw the world and life in a cyclical pattern of endless repetition without purpose or end-game; "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow beats on this petty pace to the last syllable of recorded time"... "life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Judaism, on the other hand, taught the prophetic notion of eventual human perfection at a time when "nation will not lift up sword against nation and humanity will not learn war any more". I would maintain that what has kept us going despite exile, persecution and pogrom is this fundamental belief that what we do counts and that

eventually we will succeed in perfecting the world in the Kingship of G-d.

This revolutionary concept is built around the name of G-d revealed at the beginning of this week's Torah portion: "And G-d spoke to Moses, and He said to him I am the Lord (Y-HVH)" (Exodus 6:1). The Bible goes on to say that our patriarchs knew of the name "Almighty G-d" (E-I Shad-dai) but this generation of Moses will be privileged to know the new name of G-d, the Lord Y-HVH. And it is specifically within the context of this new revelation of Name that G-d confirms the establishment of the Covenant, the entry of Israel the people into Israel the land, and the exodus from slavery and oppression to freedom and redemption.

What does this new revealed name have to do with redemption? In last week's Torah reading we read of the dialogue between G-d and Moses which is the beginning of the explanation. The Almighty reveals Himself to Moses in a burning bush. And bestows upon him the mission of taking the Jews out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10). Moses asks for G-d's name which is another way of asking for a working definition of G-d which he could communicate to the Israelites. "And G-d said to Moses, 'Ehyeh asher ehyeh'" which is best translated, "I will be what I will be". What kind of name is this? It seems to be vague, not at all defined, and very much open ended. Moreover, the verb form around which this phrase is built is identical to the verb form of the newly revealed name of G-d, both of them coming from the verb to be (HYH).

In order to complete the elements of our puzzle, we must invoke the first commandment which G-d will give the newly formed Jewish people "This renewal of the moon shall be for you the beginning of the months..." (Exodus 12:1). The Israelites are commanded to search the darkened sky for the new moon, the light which emerges each month from the blackened heavens devoid of light. The sacred Zohar, in explaining the importance of the moon and our celebration (even with Hallel) of its renewal each month, declares, "The Jewish nation is compared to the moon. Just as the moon wanes and seems to have completely disappeared into darkness only to be renewed and reborn, so will the Jewish people often appear to have been overwhelmed by the forces of darkness and evil only to reemerge as a nation reborn in a march towards redemption. So did the Babylonian Talmud emerge from the destruction of the Second Temple and the reborn State of Israel emerge from the tragedy of the Holocaust. From this perspective, the message of the moon is a message of ultimate optimism. The Almighty G-d Himself guarantees not only survival but salvation. The paradigm for the cycle of exile and redemption is our experience in and out of Egypt.

But let us pay special attention to the words of this first commandment: "This renewal of the month shall be for you the beginning of the months...". The Hebrew word 'for you' seems superfluous. Its meaning,

however, as explained by the Sages of the Talmud make it central and pivotal to the world as the Bible sees it. Our G-d is not only the G-d of creation, E-I Shad-dai, the G-d who set limits on each element as he created the heavens and the earth, the sands and the seas, mineral, vegetable, animal and human life;

He is also the G-d of history, who has a built-in plan for the world which includes its ultimate betterment and even perfection. If creation is an act of One, events in history must at least be the result of partnership between the Divine and human beings, G-d and His chosen people. Hence in the marking of the renewal of the month, which is really the marking of historical time, the Lord clearly tells His people that time is in their hands to do with what they will. If indeed how many months we may have depends on many factors aside from ourselves, what we do with the time at our disposal depends mostly on us "this renewal of the month is for you the beginning of the months".

Hence, when G-d asks Moses to be His agent, the first Divine Name He reveals to him will be "I will be what I will be"; since I am the G-d of history, and I am asking you to be My partner in history, My ultimate design for the world will depend not only on Me but also on you. Yes, it will be within the context of the promises of redemption made to the patriarchs (Exodus 3:15). But when that will happen depends on you as well as on Me. No wonder this name of G-d is indecisive.

And this is the meaning of the newly revealed Name which G-d gives to the generation of the Exodus: Y-HVH, literally He will bring about. This name reflects optimism—the redemption is after all guaranteed by G-d, the light will definitely some day emerge from the darkness—but exactly when cannot be revealed. That depends upon us. And although the uncertainty contains an element of frustration and even despair—as evidenced in the question that we Jews so often ask each other "So what will be?"—it also contains the seed of satisfaction. After all, if G-d didn't think that we were capable, He would never have made us His partner in the first place! © 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah teaches us a profound lesson in arrogance and self dependency. Hashem instructed the prophet Yechezkel to deliver a crushing blow to Pharaoh and his Egyptian empire and predict its total destruction. Hashem said, "Behold I am sending the sword after you that will decimate man and animal. Egypt will lay desolate and ruined....in response to your saying, 'The river is mine and I developed it.'" (29: 8,9) Hashem held Pharaoh and Egypt fully accountable for their arrogant approach to prosperity crediting their sustenance solely to their technology.

The background for this is that Egypt relies upon the Nile River for her basic existence. Rainfall in

Egypt is so scarce and infrequent that she must maintain an elaborate irrigation system for her basic agricultural needs. Over the years, Egyptians grew accustomed to their highly effective system and viewed themselves self sufficient. They viewed the Nile River as their sole provider and regarded its developer, Pharaoh their deity. He was, in truth, responsible for the system's efficiency and was therefore considered by all, their source of goodness. Pharaoh gladly accepted his title and lured his foolish nation into recognizing him as their deity. Hashem responded to this arrogance and informed Pharaoh that Egypt's days were numbered. Her mighty empire would soon fall and her country would lay desolate for forty years.

Pharaoh's absurd status as Egypt's deity finds is parallel in the ancient Pharaoh of this week's parsha. Hashem repeatedly chose a special meeting place for Moshe and Pharaoh and instructed Moshe, "Go to Pharaoh in the morning; behold he is going out to the water." (Shmos 7: 15) Moshe Rabbeinu was sent to meet Pharaoh far from his palace—at the foot of the Nile River. Rashi (ad loc.) explains that Hashem chose this auspicious site in response to Pharaoh's arrogant claim to the masses. He proclaimed himself as a deity without common bodily needs. In order to preserve this myth, he secretly traveled early each morning to the Nile River to relieve himself there. Hashem therefore chose this perfect moment to send Moshe to remind Pharaoh of his mortality and disclose his secret identity.

In truth, the parallel lines between the Pharaohs extends much further. In our haftorah Yechezkel states in Hashem's name, "Behold I am turning against you and your river...Neither man nor animal shall pass through the land for forty years." (29: 10,11) The Sages place special significance on the number forty predicted here. They note the Biblical discussions between Yosef and Pharaoh wherein seven years of famine are mentioned six times. They explain that these refer to forty-two years of ordained famine for Egypt. (see Breishis Rabba 89:9) Tosfos explain that ultimately only seven years were decreed upon ancient Egypt. Yosef intervened on behalf of his household and asked Hashem to limit the famine to seven years. Hashem answered Yosef's request and Yosef subsequently limited Pharaoh's dream to seven years of famine. (see Baalei Tosfos to Breishis 41:27) Chazal add that, in reality, only two years of famine transpired. Soon after our patriarch Yaakov Avinu arrived in Egypt he blessed Pharaoh with prosperity and brought the famine to an immediate halt. (see Rashi Breishis 47:19)

Accordingly, forty years of famine remained to be seen. Those were reserved for a later period in history when Egypt would deserve Hashem's harsh response. In Yechezkel's days, the time finally arrived and the remaining forty years were decreed upon Egypt.

Chazal's powerful insight suggests that Egypt was presently suffering for her ancient fault committed one thousand years before. Apparently, this decree of

Egyptian desolation was Heavenly ordained many centuries earlier for a similar fault of hers. It follows logically that the earlier Pharaoh must have possessed a similar approach to prosperity to that of the later Pharaoh. Indeed, this was the case and we discover a similar scenario in the earlier Egyptian empire. The Midrash notes a discrepancy in Pharaoh's dream when expressing it to Yosef. In Pharaoh's true dream, the Torah reveals him standing above the Nile River. Yet when informing Yosef of his dream Pharaoh conveniently referred to himself standing next to the river. Chazal explain that Pharaoh took full credit for creating and developing his Nile River. In his dream he beheld himself standing above the Nile reflecting his position that, "the river was his and he developed it." He was, however, embarrassed to reveal this arrogance to Yosef and he carefully altered the truth. (Tanchuma Voaira 8)

We now see a direct corollary between the Pharaohs, both claiming to be the sole source of their prosperity. Hashem initially responded to this abhorrent arrogance and decreed forty-two years of Egyptian desolation. This decree would undoubtedly clarify to Pharaoh who controls prosperity and upon whom everyone must rely. The Nile River was soon to be of no use and Egypt would be forced to recognize Hashem as their ultimate provider. Pharaoh quickly learned his lesson. Mysteriously, once Yaakov came to Egypt and blessed Pharaoh the famine ended. This miracle convinced the ancient Pharaoh that Hashem controlled the world. Once Pharaoh learned his lesson the forty remaining years of famine were suspended. In the interim Egypt developed a hostile attitude towards Hashem and His people. On the heels of Egypt's recent lesson Hashem completed the process and destroyed the entire Egyptian Empire. It would take many years for Egypt to raise her head in pride and take credit, once again, for her accomplishments.

Now, nearly one thousand years later Egypt returned to her arrogant ways. After her massive devastating blows she finally rebuilt her empire. Pharaoh, in his height of success, began viewing his Nile River as Egypt's sole source of prosperity. He, like the earlier Pharaoh, maintained that he created the Nile and developed it. Hashem refused to tolerate this arrogance and when the first signs of this absurdity resurfaced Hashem responded harshly. The time had finally arrived for Egypt to experience her long awaited forty years of desolation. Through this, Hashem displayed to Mitzraim and the world over that He controlled the world and provided their prosperity.

The above lesson reminds us never to forget our limited role in our personal success. We must never forget that Hashem is our true provider and He develops and secures our efforts with their ultimate success. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & www.torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Moshe and Aharon were directly involved in most of the plagues that were brought on Egypt. In the first three (blood, frogs, and lice), Aharon stretched out his staff to start the plague (Shemot 7:19, 8:1, 8:12). In the third set of three plagues (hail, locusts, and darkness), Moshe stretched out his hand (9:22, 10:12, 10:21). Both Moshe and Aharon played an active role in the plague of boils: "And G-d said to Moshe and Aharon, take fistfuls of soot and let Moshe throw it towards the sky in front of Pharaoh. And it will become dust throughout the land of Egypt, and it will develop into blisters on man and beast." [9:8-9]. However, three plagues were an exception to this trend, and for them the Almighty acted without any help from Moshe and Aharon. With respect to wild animals, it is written, "And G-d did this, and a serious attack of animals came on the house of Pharaoh and the houses of his slaves, and on all of the land of Egypt" [8:20]. In the plague of the death of the cattle, it is written, "And G-d did this thing on the next day, and all of the cattle of Egypt died" [9:6]. And in the plague of the firstborn, it is written, "And it happened at midnight, that G-d struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt" [12:29]. Why were these three plagues different from the others?

The answer is that in these three plagues, there is a special emphasis on the fact that Bnei Yisrael were treated very differently than the Egyptians. Before the plague of wild animals we are told, "And that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people live, so that no animals will appear there, so that you shall know that I am G-d within the land" [8:18]. The understanding that G-d appears in the world and judges between the evil and righteous people is achieved through seeing that Bnei Yisrael are singled out for good treatment. The same is true of the plague of an epidemic: "Behold, G-d's hand will appear among your cattle... And G-d will differentiate between the cattle of Bnei Yisrael and the cattle of Egypt, and not one of Bnei Yisrael's cattle will die... And G-d did this thing the next day, and all of the cattle of Egypt died, but among the cattle of Bnei Yisrael not one died." [9:3-6]. The same is true of the beginning of the plague of the firstborn, where it is written: "And every firstborn in the land of Egypt will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sits on his throne... and all the firstborn of the cattle. And there was a great cry in all the land of Egypt... But for all of Bnei Yisrael not even a dog will move its tongue, against a man or an animal, so that you shall know that G-d differentiates between Egypt and between Yisrael." [11:5-7]. While it is noted in passing that other plagues (hail, darkness) did not cause harm to Bnei Yisrael, it is only with these three plagues that the differentiation is emphasized before the

plague happens. Note too that the term "wonder" (hafla'ah) appears only with respect to these plagues.

The plagues in Egypt teach us various lessons, and one of them is the personal supervision that G-d provides for His nation. It is therefore reasonable that when the message to be emphasized is the special treatment given to Bnei Yisrael it is especially important that the plague be initiated by G-d Himself. If Moshe or Aharon had struck, it might have been assumed that they purposefully acted to bring about a plague against Egypt. The fact that G-d alone struck Egypt, with an emphasis of the fact that Bnei Yisrael were not harmed, shows with even greater clarity the important message, "I am G-d within the land" [8:18].

"He Who Appoints Kings and Royalty is His"

by Rafi Ostroff, Head of Annual Programming, Worldwide Bnei Akiva

"And G-d said to Moshe... Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes out to the water, and stand opposite him on the bank of the Nile" [Shemot 7:14-15].

Everybody is familiar with the Midrash quoted by Rashi (which I like very much), explaining the seemingly extra words, "when he goes out to the water." The phrase is repeated a second time (8:16), leading the Midrash to understand that it is important. "Out to the water—to relieve himself, since he had declared himself a god who does not have bodily functions. Therefore, he rose early and went to the Nile, in order to relieve himself."

Many times, I have found myself imagining how embarrassing the situation must have been from Pharaoh's point of view. Here Moshe revealed himself openly ("Go to Pharaoh") and caught the king at a disadvantage in this early stage of the spiritual and physical battle between the king and the G-d of Yisrael. In a practical sense, at this early stage, before the ten plagues, Pharaoh might have begun to understand that his struggle with G-d was doomed to defeat.

Pharaoh was not the only historical leader in the world who thought that he was a god. In this week's Torah portion, the Midrash lists four others who had the same idea. "Pharaoh was one of four men who made themselves into a deity and caused themselves harm. They are: Chiram, Nevuchadnetzer, Pharaoh, and Yoash, King of Yehuda." We are familiar with other people who declared that they were gods, such as Nimrod (according to Midrash Hagadol), Haman, various Roman and Japanese Emperors, and others.

Human beings who consider themselves to have infinite greatness, becoming a god, present the greatest danger to the fate of humanity. Often, one who reaches such a stage and considers himself a god permits himself to take the lives of others for no reason at all.

But now, through the millennia of history, a small nation rises up with a message for all the megalomaniacs: You are nothing more than real

people, who have to relieve themselves just like everybody else! You are not gods, we can bear witness that there is only one Deity in the entire world. Perhaps this is the reason that such people, with their superiority complexes, do not like us very much, since they see us as a barrier that stands in the way of their complete domination of the world. The nation of Yisrael reminds them that there is another One who truly is in possession of the world. This is the only way to understand the hate for Jews and their constant pursuit, by Haman and by such nations as Greece and Rome, by Hitler, and many others. If there is a G-d above, then there are morals and a conscience, there are commands and eternal mitzvot. If there is indeed a G-d—then He and only He "appoints kings, and royalty belongs to Him."

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

As our parashah opens, G-d tells Moshe, "I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov as 'Kel Shakkai,' and My Name 'Hashem' I did not reveal to them." R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of Einayim La'mishpat) explains G-d's message as follows: "Kel Shakkai," referring, as it does, to G-d's precise measurement of creation, alludes to the Attribute of Strict Justice, which demands strict measure-for-measure accounting. This is the highest form of Divine Providence; indeed, in the beginning, G-d's "design" called for the entire world to be subject to Strict Justice. He knew, however, that the world could not exist under that Attribute, so He paired it with the Attribute of Mercy [see Rashi to Bereishit 1:1]. Nevertheless, G-d did act pursuant to Strict Justice with the patriarchs, for they were on a sufficiently lofty level.

(R' Arieli explains in passing that the difference between G-d's "design" and His implementation is alluded to by the verse (Tehilim 145:17): "Hashem is righteous in all His ways, and magnanimous in all His deeds." G-d's true "ways" are based on righteousness, i.e., differentiating between right and wrong— Strict Justice. However, His deeds are magnanimous, i.e., tempered with Mercy.)

R' Arieli continues: The level of Providence that was applied to the patriarchs is reached by serving G-d with love, as it is written (Yeshayah 48:8), "The seed of Avraham, My beloved." No person ever reached this level except they. For their sons, in contrast, Providence is tempered with Mercy, manifested by the fact that the Exodus occurred before its time, i.e., before the 400 years passed.

In fact, Yaakov asked that his descendants merit to deserve Hashem's favor even when subjected to Strict Justice—"May 'Kel Shakkai' show you mercy" [Bereishit 43:14]. Then, the redemption from Egypt would have been the complete and final redemption. Instead, however, the difficulty of the subjugation

required that Hashem apply Mercy that was undeserved and end the exile early. (Midrash Ariel)

"Moreover, I have heard the groan of Bnei Yisrael whom Egypt enslaves, and I have remembered My covenant." (6:5)

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l (Chida; died 1806) writes: Hashem told Avraham (Bereishit 15:13), "Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own, they will cause them to be enslaved, and they will oppress them for four hundred years. But also the nation for which they shall slave I shall judge, and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth." Hashem told Avraham that He would punish the nation that would enslave Bnei Yisrael. Why didn't Hashem also say that He would punish the nation that would oppress Bnei Yisrael? Likewise, why does our verse refer only to slavery and not to oppression?

Chida explains: The Egyptians did not deserve to be punished to the extent that they were only fulfilling Hashem's decree. Therefore they were not punished for oppressing Bnei Yisrael. However, the decree of slavery was lifted from Bnei Yisrael as a result of Yosef's slavery. [As the trailblazer for the Avraham's descendants in Egypt, Yosef could fulfill the decree on behalf of all of them.] Thus, the Egyptians did deserve to be punished for enslaving the Jewish People. That is why our verse says that Hashem heard the groans specifically of Bnei Yisrael who Egypt enslaved. (Nachal Kedumim)

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

What is meant by "Provide a wonder for yourselves"? Wasn't the wonder provided for Pharaoh? R' Shalom Rokeach z"l (the first Belzer Rebbe) explains:

For himself, Pharaoh did not care to see a sign from Hashem, as Mishlei (18:2) states, "The fool does not desire understanding." We read similarly in Yishayah (17:11-12) that Hashem invited the wicked king Achaz to challenge and test Him, and Achaz responded, "I will not ask [for a sign] and I will not test Hashem."

Rather, Pharaoh's intention was to impugn the emunah / faith of Moshe and Aharon. "Surely you have doubts and would like to see a sign," he implied.

R' Rokeach continues: [Obviously Moshe and Aharon had no doubt as to the truth of their mission.] However, the typical Jew does sometimes experience doubts in matters of faith. Why did Hashem create us this way?

The answer is that such experiences are meant to be growth opportunities, for a person who has doubts will either research the answers to his questions in our holy literature or he will go to a tzaddik to find answers.

Deep down, every Jew wants to know the truth. In contrast, the wicked (such as Pharaoh) are terrified of the truth. This is why Pharaoh was not content to deny the veracity of Moshe and Aharon's message. Instead, he had to goad them as if they did not believe either. (Midbar Kodesh)

"Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them regarding Bnei Yisrael and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take Bnei Yisrael out of the land of Egypt." (6:13)

Rashi comments: "He commanded them regarding Bnei Yisrael"—to deal with them in a gentle manner and to be patient with them. "Regarding Pharaoh, the king of Egypt"—that they should show respect to him in all they spoke.

R' Avraham Yitzchak Bloch z"l hy"d (Rosh Yeshiva in Telz, Lithuania; killed in the Holocaust) asks: Why did Moshe and Aharon need to receive a special command to deal with Bnei Yisrael in a gentle manner? Moshe and Aharon were, after all, exceedingly humble and undoubtedly treated every person respectfully.

R' Bloch explains: There are two concepts that come into play when one is seeking the truth. One is "emet la'amitah" / "absolute truth." The second is simply "emet" / "truth." Unlike emet la'amitah, ordinary emet is not pure in the sense that one who wishes to impart emet may alter his presentation to account for his listeners' backgrounds and preconceived notions. But such a presentation is not without risks, for it may lend credence to the very notions that it seeks to refute. Indeed, the mere fact that one would trouble to defend Torah beliefs against heretical ideas gives credibility to those very heretical ideas.

Returning to our verse: Why would Hashem command Moshe and Aharon to show honor to the evil Pharaoh? Absolute truth would dictate that Pharaoh did not deserve honor, but relative truth required that he be honored. Honoring kings, whether or not they personally deserve honor, is necessary to preserve world order. Therefore, such honor is the "truth." Rashi himself notes this when he explains why Yaakov sat up in Yosef's presence. He writes (Bereishit 48:2): Yaakov said, "Although he is my son, he is a king, and I will do honor to him." From this, Rashi continues, we may infer that we must show honor to a person of royal rank. Similarly, he concludes, Moshe showed honor to the king.

What is Rashi teaching? That although Yosef was Yaakov's son, and emet la'amitah dictated that Yaakov not honor him, nevertheless, Yosef was a king and Yaakov did honor him in order to preserve world order. Similarly, Moshe showed honor to Pharaoh.

For the same reason, Moshe and Aharon had to be told to treat Bnei Yisrael gently. As individuals, Moshe and Aharon certainly would have been gentle, but as teachers of Torah, emet la'amitah might require that they be unforgiving. No! said Hashem. Use simple emet! Be gentle!

R' Bloch continues: The above thoughts have serious ramifications when it comes to dealing with our less observant brethren. At first glance, these thoughts might dictate that we approach our brethren on their terms and not appeal to them with "absolute truth." However, says R' Bloch (after additional discussion), such an approach could be appropriate only vis-a-vis a Jew who is a "clean slate," one who is not yet in the grasp of heretical ideas. In contrast, to approach a Jew who is beset by heretical ideas with anything less than *emet la'amitah* / absolute truth would lend credence to his misguided ideas. Rather, we must approach him with *emet la'amitah*. Even if he will not be outwardly receptive, the Jewish spark within him will listen. (Shiurei Da'at p.94) © 2005 Rabbi S. Katz & www.torah.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This week's parsha begins the story of the ten plagues. Pharaoh refused to acknowledge Hashem's existence and would therefore not consent to free his Hebrew slaves, as Moses had requested. The plagues had symbolic meaning and their ultimate message is all material for the Torah commentators to delve into. We will look at the plague of frogs and Moses' prayer to Hashem to remove them, as Pharaoh requested. Let us see what we can learn from it.

"And Moses said to Pharaoh 'Glorify yourself with me—for when shall I pray for you, for your servants and for your people, to destroy the frogs from you and from your house? Only in the river will they remain.' " (Exodus 8:5)

"For when shall I pray for you?"—RASHI: "With reference to the prayer which I shall pray for you today to destroy the frogs, when do you want them to be destroyed, and you will see whether I can carry out my promise by the time that you set for me. If it had said (in Hebrew) '*mati a'ateir*' without the letter '*lamed*,' it would mean 'when shall I pray?' but now that it says (in Hebrew) '*l'mati*' it means, 'I will pray today that the frogs be destroyed for the time you set for me. Tell me, then, by what day do you wish that they be destroyed?'"

Rashi is quite clear here as to the point of his comment. He wants to clarify the meaning of the word "when" (Hebrew "*l'mati*"). Since the addition of the letter "*lamed*" at the beginning of the word is unusual, Rashi shows us its special meaning here. Moses will pray now to have the frogs destroyed at whatever time in the future Pharaoh designates. So the word means "for when" and not just "when."

The Ramban (Nachmanides) differs with Rashi on the meaning of this word. He says it means simply "when."

Can you find support for Rashi's interpretation of the meaning of this word elsewhere in the text?

Rabbeinu Bachaya, in his commentary on the Torah, finds support for Rashi in Exodus 8:25. There, referring to the plague of mixed wild beasts, it says, "And Moses said: Behold I leave you and I shall entreat Hashem and the mixture of wild beasts will depart from Pharaoh, from his servants and from his people tomorrow etc."

Here it does not say "I shall entreat Hashem tomorrow" even though the wild beasts were to be removed only on the morrow. This, says Rabbeinu Bachaya, indicates that Moses would pray immediately for the cessation of a plague to take effect on the morrow.

Rabbeinu Bachaya points out an interesting pattern, not usually noticed in the plagues.

Why would Pharaoh ask for the plagues' cessation on the next day, when immediate relief would seem to be the desired objective? Commentaries suggest that Pharaoh was skeptical of Moses and the miraculous nature of the plagues. He assumed that Moses had some insight into natural events and thus predicted these "miracles" which he knew would happen naturally in any event. Thus, Pharaoh thought that since Moses asked him when he wanted the plague stopped, Moses expected Pharaoh to say "right now" and Moses was ready for that, because he knew it would stop soon due to natural causes. So Pharaoh thought to outsmart Moses and made the unusual request to stop the frogs only on the morrow, even though this would cause him and his people additional discomfort.

Now notice the pattern that Rabbeinu Bachaya points out. See Exodus 8:19 regarding the plague of mixed animals:

"And I will put a separation between my people and your people, tomorrow will be this sign."

See Exodus 9:5 regarding the plague of pestilence: "And Hashem set an appointed time, saying: Tomorrow Hashem will do this thing in the land."

See Exodus 9:18 regarding the plague of hail: "Behold I will rain at this time tomorrow very heavy hail, etc."

See Exodus 10:4 regarding the plagues of locusts: "For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring the locusts in all your boundaries."

It is as if Moses is mocking Pharaoh, "You asked me to remove the frogs 'tomorrow' to test me and my God; well, then, you will have your tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrows! You'll wait anxiously and expectantly for each plague, until... tomorrow." © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek and aish.org

