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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

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

To gain insight into the unique leadership lesson of this week's parsha, I often ask an audience to perform a thought-experiment. Imagine you are the leader of a people that is enslaved and oppressed, that has suffered exile for more than two centuries. Now, after a series of miracles, it is about to go free. You assemble them and rise to address them. They are waiting expectantly for your words. This is a defining moment they will never forget. What will you speak about?

Most people answer: freedom. That was Abraham Lincoln's decision in the Gettysburg Address when he invoked the memory of "a new nation, conceived in liberty," and looked forward to "a new birth of freedom."[1] Some suggest that they would inspire the people by talking about the destination that lay ahead, the "land flowing with milk and honey." Yet others say they would warn the people of the dangers and challenges that they would encounter on what Nelson Mandela called "the long walk to freedom."[2]

Any of these would have been the great speech of a great leader. Guided by God, Moses did none of these things. That is what made him a unique leader. If you examine the text in parshat Bo you will see that three times he reverted to the same theme: children, education and the distant future.

And when your children ask you, "What do you mean by this rite?" you shall say, "It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when he smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses." (Ex. 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." (Ex. 13:8)

And when, in time to come, your child asks you, saying, "What does this mean?" you shall say to him, "It was with a mighty hand that the Lord brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage." (Ex. 13:14)

It is one of the most counter-intuitive acts in the history of leadership. Moses did not speak about today or tomorrow. He spoke about the distant future and the duty of parents to educate their children. He even hinted – as Jewish tradition understood – that we should encourage our children to ask questions, so that the handing on of the Jewish heritage would be not a matter of rote learning but of active dialogue between parents and children.

So Jews became the only people in history to predicate their very survival on education. The most sacred duty of parents was to teach their children. Pesach itself became an ongoing seminar in the handing on of memory. Judaism became the religion whose heroes were teachers and whose passion was study and the life of the mind. The Mesopotamians built ziggurats. The Egyptians built pyramids. The Greeks built the Parthenon. The Romans built the Coliseum. Jews built schools. That is why they alone, of all the civilisations of the ancient world are still alive and strong, still continuing their ancestors' vocation, their heritage intact and undiminished.

Moses' insight was profound. He knew that you cannot change the world by externalities alone, by monumental architecture, or armies and empires, or the use of force and power. How many empires have come and gone while the human condition remains untransformed and unredeemed?

There is only one way to change the world, and that is by education. You have to teach children the importance of justice, righteousness, kindness and compassion. You have to teach them that freedom can only be sustained by the laws and habits of self-restraint. You have continually to remind them of the lessons of history, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt," because those who forget the bitterness of slavery eventually lose the commitment and courage to fight for freedom. And you have to empower children to ask, challenge and argue. You have to respect them if they are to respect the values you wish them to embrace.

This is a lesson most cultures still have not learned after more than three thousand years. Revolutions, protests and civil wars still take place, encouraging people to think that removing a tyrant or

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[1] Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address" (Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Penn., Nov. 19, 1863).

[2] Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (Back Bay Books, 1995).

having a democratic election will end corruption, create freedom, and lead to justice and the rule of law – and still people are surprised and disappointed when it does not happen. All that happens is a change of faces in the corridors of power.

In one of the great speeches of the twentieth century, a distinguished American justice, Judge Learned Hand, said: I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it; no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it.[3]

What God taught Moses was that the real challenge does not lie in gaining freedom; it lies in sustaining it, keeping the spirit of liberty alive in the hearts of successive generations. That can only be done through a sustained process of education. Nor is this something that can be delegated away to teachers and schools. Some of it has to take place within the family, at home, and with the sacred obligation that comes from religious duty. No one ever saw this more clearly than Moses, and only because of his teachings have Jews and Judaism survived.

What makes leaders great is that they think ahead, worrying not about tomorrow but about next year, or the next decade, or the next generation. In one of his finest speeches Robert F. Kennedy spoke of the power of leaders to transform the world when they have a clear vision of a possible future: Some believe there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills -- against misery, against ignorance, or injustice and violence. Yet many of the world's great movements, of thought and action, have flowed from the work of a single man. A young monk began the Protestant reformation, a young general extended an empire from Macedonia to the borders of the earth, and a young woman reclaimed the territory of France. It was a young Italian explorer who discovered the New World, and 32 year old Thomas Jefferson who proclaimed that all men are created equal. 'Give me a place to stand,' said Archimedes, 'and I will move the world.' These men moved the world, and so can we all."[4]

Visionary leadership forms the text and texture of Judaism. It was the book of Proverbs that said, "Without a vision [chazzon] the people perish." (Prov. 29:18). That vision in the minds of the Prophets was always of a long-term future. God told Ezekiel that a Prophet is a watchman, one who climbs to a high vantage-point and so can see the danger in the distance, before anyone else is aware of it at ground level (Ezek. 33:1-6). The Sages said, "Who is wise? One who sees the long-term consequences [ha-nolad]."[5] Two of the greatest leaders of the twentieth century, Churchill and Ben Gurion, were also distinguished historians. Knowing the past, they could anticipate the future. They were like Chess Masters who, because they have studied thousands of games, recognise almost immediately the dangers and possibilities in any configuration of the pieces on the board. They know what will happen if you make this move or that.

If you want to be a great leader in any field, from Prime Minister to parent, it is essential to think long-term. Never choose the easy option because it is simple or fast or yields immediate satisfaction. You will pay a high price in the end.

Moses was the greatest leader because he thought further ahead than anyone else. He knew that real change in human behaviour is the work of many generations. Therefore we must place as our highest priority educating our children in our ideals so that what we begin they will continue until the world changes because we have changed. He knew that if you plan for a year, plant rice. If you plan for a decade, plant a tree. If you plan for posterity, educate a child.[6] Moses' lesson, thirty-three centuries old, is still compelling today. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"May the renewal of the moon be for you [the Festival of] the first day of eac " h month; this month being for you the first of the months of the year" (Exodus 12:2) This interpretation of the verse, cited by Rashi and chosen by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch as the primary translation of the text, renders each phrase of the verse another lesson bound up with the Exodus from Egypt. We must mark the Festival of the New Moon, and Nisan is to be counted as the first of the months of the year.

I understand why Nisan was chosen as the first month; it is the month in which Israel became a free nation; but what has the renewal of the moon to do with the exodus from Egypt? And why is this Festival of the New Moon the very first of God's commandments to the Israelites? The answer, and the most profound reason that we celebrate the Festival of the New Moon each month, harks back to the special Name of God identified with the book of Exodus, which points toward the realization of Redemption. The ineffable Name Y-H-

[3] Learned Hand, "The Spirit of Liberty" - speech at "I Am an American Day" ceremony, Central Park, New York City (21 May 1944).

[4] The Poynter Institute, The Kennedys: America's Front Page Family (Kansas City, Mo.: Andrews McMeel, 2010), 112.

[5] Tamid 32a.

[6] A statement attributed to Confucius.

V-H (Exodus 6:1-3) is closely related to the name Ehyeh asher ehyeh, which God revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:13-15). Generally, it is translated "I am that I am" or "I am whatever is, the Source for the animation of all life." It is more correctly translated "I will be what I will be."

The first translation emanates from Maimonides (at the beginning of his Mishne Torah), and is closely allied to Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover" and Tillich's "ground of all being." The second emanates from Yehuda Halevi (The Kuzari) and is more closely allied to the plain meaning of the biblical text ("I will be what I will be").

The first is the God of Aristotelian "being," the God of Creation; the second is the God of Platonic "becoming," the God of history and of redemption.

The God of Creation exudes power and establishes limits (El Shaddai); He operates alone, within a specific period of time (the seven primordial days of creation). The God of history exudes patience and only guarantees a successful end-game of redemption and world peace; during usual world-time. He operates with partners – human beings, especially the heirs to the Abrahamic covenant – for whom He must wait and with whom He must be patient until they truly wish to be redeemed, until they are worthy of being redeemed.

Hence, the God of Creation and "let there be light" evokes certitude and precision, whereas the God of Redemption, "I will be what I will be," evokes open-endededness.

Such is always the case when one takes on independent partners with freedom of choice to whom one grants empowerment. And God has chosen Israel to teach and ultimately lead the world to adopt ethical monotheism and realize redemption because He believes in us and in humanity.

However, unlike the seven specific and successful acts of Creation, Redemption is fraught with advances and setbacks, successes and failures, progression and retrogression.

That is the major distinction between creation and history; the laws of nature are basically unchanging, whereas history – "his story," our story, not only God's story – is dependent on human input and is therefore subject to change.'

This change is positive and salutary. God created a functioning world, but one which is incomplete and therefore imperfect.

Conventional wisdom would have it that just as the laws of physics seem to be unchanging, so are the social structures of totalitarian empires unchanging and so human nature is unchanging.

The sun-god Ra – identified with Aries the ram (lamb) – is the zodiac sign of the spring month of Nisan. Indeed, the sun, from the perspective of people on earth, also seems unchanging.

Enter the Hebrews with their celebration of the renewal of the moon each month; sanctifying the changing moon over the static Egyptian sun. The Hebrew nation was formed out of the cataclysmic change that overthrew Egypt's slave society, the change that forced Egyptian power to bow before biblical concepts of human equality and freedom.

Hence the Jewish people fight for change, glory in change and even sanctify change. But change wrought by human faith and action demands human responsibility.

It is with this sense of responsibility that we must approach the miraculous change of our status as a nation state after close to 2,000 years of being dependent on host nations. Now we must believe in ourselves as God's full partners; we must resuscitate the vision of the prophets who insisted that our leaders and populace must be righteous and moral. We must promulgate laws that express human equality, especially in terms of women's rights and minority rights. If we expect to be respected; we must recognize the sea of change that has overtaken much of the leadership of the Christian world and warmly clasp the hand of friendship they are proffering.

National commitments (such as service in the IDF) must be taken into the account alongside of religious commitments for those Israelis wishing to convert.

Clearly, we have a long way to go. But if we change, we will not only survive; we will prevail.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Since every word of our holy Torah carries with it many layers of significance and importance, it is incumbent upon us to understand why this particular word, Bo, is employed by the Torah to describe a certain situation.

In the opinion of the commentators to the Torah, the word Bo, which appears at the beginning of this week's reading, contains a deeper meaning than the simple translation meaning 'to come.' The fact that the word is then followed by the Hebrew word 'el' meaning not only 'to' but perhaps more literally 'into,' gives us insight into what the word Bo in this context really means.

It was not sufficient for Moshe merely to visit or come to the Pharaoh of Egypt to deliver the warnings from God regarding the plagues that were going to descend upon the Egyptian nation, because of their refusal to free the Jewish people from bondage.

Moshe could have delivered this information by proxy, by messenger, by letter or any of the other means that human beings used then to communicate one with another.

Rather, it was necessary for Moshe to enter

into the brain and feelings of Pharaoh, so to speak, that propels the entire narrative of this week's reading and will lead to the great moment of freedom and emancipation for the Jewish people.

It is as though the Lord, so to speak, wants Moshe to really understand the stubbornness and almost suicidal behavior of the Pharaoh, and to appreciate that it is this intransigence itself that will be his undoing and the destruction of Egypt.

It is as though the Torah is teaching us that if one is unable to comprehend the depths of the personality of evil, one can never really combat evil in a practical and strong fashion. It is this recognition of the evil lurking originally, though only in the background of events, that is the beginning of the process of preventing it from triumphing.

The Jewish people were fooled by the Pharaoh into volunteering for their own forced labor and eventual slavery. They did not recognize his call for patriotism as the true evil that lay behind his national the plan for them. The Jewish people were so willing to be recognized as good Egyptians that they volunteered to become their own worst enemy and submit themselves to centuries of slavery and servitude.

Jewish people, for centuries, have often been unable to perceive that they themselves create the seeds of their own destruction. In the rush for acceptance and approbation by others, Jews are often blinded, willfully overlooking the evil arising around them.

It is insufficient to come to the Pharaoh to argue one's case. One must be able to come 'into' Pharaoh and to see the true motivation that created this situation of sadness and servitude. This lesson, recorded for us in the Torah, forms a message that applies to all ages of Jewish existence and to all circumstances of political, social, and national life.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Wearing Tefillin

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

What are the parameters of the obligation to wear *tefillin*? Must they be worn all day? What if someone forgot to don his *tefillin?*

Based on the Talmud, it would seem that in Talmudic times, men wore their *tefillin* all day even if they worked at menial jobs. Some say that doing so fulfills a biblical mandate: "And this shall serve you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead" (*Shemot* 13:9). Others say that the biblical requirement is fulfilled by wearing *tefillin* for even a moment. It is only a rabbinic obligation, or perhaps not an obligation but an ideal fulfillment of the mitzva, to wear them for a more extended period (either the entire day, or at least during the recitation of *Shema* and the *Amidah*).

Nevertheless, our Sages speak harshly about men who do not don *tefillin* at all, declaring them to be "sinners of Israel with their bodies" (*posh'ei Yisrael be-gufan*). It is unclear who exactly is included in this category. The Rambam maintains that this is limited to a person who never in his life put on *tefillin*. Someone who put them on even once is not included. In contrast, the Rosh applies the Sages' harsh language to someone who wears his *tefillin* sporadically. The *Pri Megadim* sees the condemnation as even more sweeping, applying it to someone who misses even a single day.

In deciding who is categorized as this type of sinner for not wearing *tefillin*, some commentaries focus on what informs the person's neglect. Rabbeinu Tam states that a person is categorized thus only if he neglects this mitzva because he is contemptuous of it, or cannot be bothered to take the time and effort to do it. However, if someone refrains from putting on *tefillin* because he is afraid that he will not be able to maintain the requisite level of holiness and purity while doing so, he is not included. The *Yere'im* disagrees, saying that someone who does not wear his *tefillin* because he is lazy is included. Finally, the *Tur* (according to the *Beit Yosef*) states that any man who does not put on *tefillin* for any reason is included.

Why do our Sages describe men who do not don *tefillin* specifically as "sinners of Israel with their bodies" (*posh'ei Yisrael be-gufan*)? Perhaps it is because the mitzva of *tefillin* involves placing the *tefillin* directly on the body, with nothing separating them from the skin. Thus, the *tefillin* feel like a part of the person. If someone does not don them, it is as if he is missing a body part.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Our eldest granddaughter, Ariella, spent a year studying at a yeshiva of higher learning in Jerusalem. As an icebreaker the new students, who hailed from all over the world, were asked to canvas Jerusalem and photograph the most interesting couple they saw.

One returned with a picture of an elderly man with his walker, strolling arm in arm with a middle-aged woman with grey dreadlocks. Although the shot didn't show their faces, their body language nonetheless conveyed the love they shared.

Unbeknownst to the photographer, the photo had captured Ariella's Zaidy, her great-grandfather, and her great-aunt Suri – my father, and my sister.

The photo says a lot about the Jewish attitude toward the elderly, promoting intergenerational relationships, "integrating" if you will, people of all ages.

This in many ways differs from the American or Western norms. Here in the West, as has been noted, the elderly are often "segregated," kept out of sight and out of touch from society.

It's too often the case that we adopt this attitude in our communities. Consider, for example, the phenomenon of new minyanim (prayer services), which cater exclusively to young people. For me, there is something fundamentally wrong with older people not being a part of the prayer community. It's even more problematic for those young families' children, who in their most formative years – sometimes the only time they are in synagogue – never see the tears of an older person in fervent prayer. Older folks lose out from this approach as well. As former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt observed, the secret to staying young is surrounding oneself with young people.

The Talmud accentuates the importance of bringing together the generations when it declares: "What was the coin of Avraham (Abraham) our patriarch? – An older man and an older woman on the one side, and a young man and a young woman on the other." (Bava Kama 97b)

For me, this means that Avraham, the father of Am Yisrael, carried a message that people of all ages have much to contribute and much to learn from each other. Wisdom of life experience, together with youthful energy, are both necessary to forge a better destiny for Israel and for the world. In a similar spirit, old and young together can lift the prayer experience to extraordinary heights – synthesizing the ancient words of prayer with the yearning for a better tomorrow.

More broadly, Day Schools, Supplementary schools, Hillels on campus, would gain if seniors would become part and parcel of their programming – not once a year or month – but on an ongoing, intensive basis.

In this spirit Moshe (Moses) tells Pharaoh in our parsha that when we leave, we will do so intergenerationally. In his words, "We will go out with our young and with our old." (Exodus 10:9)

Thus, for Avraham, the father of Am Yisrael, and Moshe, the prophet of prophets, people of all ages have much to contribute and much to learn from each other. All are necessary to forge a better destiny for Israel and for the world.

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Lesson of Darkness

Of all of the Ten Plagues brought on Egypt, the plague of Choshech, Darkness, can be the most confusing. The idea of total darkness for six days might seem troublesome but does not appear to be the penultimate plague designed to change Par'oh's mind nor does it seem more damaging than the fiery Hail and the Locusts which destroyed the last remnants of food in Egypt. It is only when we delve into the words of our great commentators that we can begin to comprehend the shock and fear that grasped the Egyptians during this plague.

The Torah tells us, "and Hashem said to Moshe, 'Stretch forth your hand toward the Heavens and there shall be darkness upon the Land of Egypt, and the darkness will become darker.' And Moshe stretched out his hand toward the Heavens and there was a darkness of gloom throughout the Land of Egypt for a three-day period. No man could see his brother nor could anyone arise from his place for a three-day period but for all the B'nei Yisrael there was light in their dwellings."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin deals with each of the ten plagues as midah k'neged midah, each punishment was designed against the same type of sin which had been committed. The punishment of choshech, darkness, was in response to the fact that the Egyptians made themselves blinded to the suffering of the B'nei Yisrael and did nothing to stop their suffering.

There is a difference of opinion as to the source of this darkness. The Rabbis are uncertain as to whether the darkness emanated from the Heavens, or from the Netherworld (Gehinom). In the Mechilta, Rebbi Yehudah says that the darkness was created in the Celestial Heavens, whereas Rebbi Nechemiah says that the darkness was a sign to the Egyptians of their approaching death and stemmed from The Netherworld. The Ramban tells us, "this darkness was not a mere absence of sunlight where the sun set and it was like night. Rather, it was a thick darkness. That is to say, it was a very thick cloud that came down from heaven to bring down from there a great darkness which would descend upon them and which would extinguish every light, just as in all deep caverns and all extremely dark places where light cannot last [as it is swallowed up in the density of the thick darkness]." The Or HaChaim explains that Moshe raised his hand to the Heavens and not his staff which was used to perform all of the plagues except for this one. He suggests that it would have been inappropriate for Moshe to point the staff of Hashem towards the Netherworld.

What were these three-day sessions of darkness? According to Rashi the first three days of darkness were necessary because of the large number of the B'nei Yisrael who were so influenced that they were no longer willing to leave the Egyptian way of life. Hashem had these people die during the first three days so that they could all be buried before the Egyptians could see. Had they seen that the B'nei Ysrael died, they would have assumed that Hashem was merely an angry god who caused everyone to

suffer. This would have expunged any feelings of guilt for their actions. The second set of three days enabled the B'nei Yisrael to enter the homes of the Egyptians to locate objects of wealth. HaRav Sorotzkin explains the two, three-day sections of darkness. The words, "no man could see his brother nor could anyone arise from his place for a three-day period" indicate the parameters of these two sets of days. During the first three-day period, "no man could see his brother" because it was then that those who would not leave Egypt were buried. The second period of time "nor could anyone arise from his place" enabled the Jews to enter the Egyptian homes and discover the wealth of their neighbors.

Several questions still arise about these two sets of days. We know that Hashem has foreknowledge of our choices and decisions, but the B'nei Yisrael who died at this point were not given the opportunity to do teshuvah, return to the right path of Hashem. One should also ask if the fear of standing up to Par'oh and the might of Egypt might be considered extenuating circumstances. A second opinion is that these people had become so evil from the influences of their Egyptian masters that they were no longer considered worthy of being saved. Still we are aware that the B'nei Yisrael who were eventually saved were not significantly better. Had they remained in Egypt one more day they might also have not been worthy of saving.

Another question we should ask involves the spying during the second set of days. This was not an act of rebellion in which the downtrodden enslaved now rose up against their masters. This was all part of Hashem's promise to Avraham that the B'nei Yisrael would be enslaved and would suffer under a "nation" which Hashem would later judge, and that "they would go out with a great amount of possessions." In addition, we are told that the Egyptians would look favorably on the B'nei Yisrael. This was accomplished when the Egyptians saw that the B'nei Yisrael knew exactly where everything was and yet had not stolen anything during the second set of days. They understood the quality of this nation and they began to reevaluate their enslaving such a righteous people. Several commentators explain that this was not a loan but an outright gift (Hizkuni), whereas others say that the Egyptians anticipated the B'nei Yisrael's question and presented them with the objects they desired (Saadya).

We have not as yet answered our original question of the seriousness of this plague when compared to the others in which widespread destruction and suffering occurred. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch provides us with some greater insight. "Just as geirut, exile, and avdut, slavery, were all embracing, hail and locusts threatening to destroy the whole land and the whole of Egypt's riches, so this third and last inui-plague, a plague causing personal suffering, was the most all-embracing and affected the whole of each person. Every man was completely cut off from his fellow man, and from access to his possessions. It was the most complete, the most comprehensive literal inui. Each person felt helpless and the lack of light and movement only increased that isolation and suffering.

In every community there are people today who feel cut off from their fellowman and suffer from isolation. We fail as a community if we allow ourselves to be blind to their needs and not see their suffering. Even though the Egyptians brought about their own suffering and perhaps some within our communities are the cause of their own suffering, it is still our responsibility to prevent ourselves from being blind to their pain. May we not only see but may we react, and may we work to relieve the suffering around us.

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And also our livestock will go with us… for we do not know how we will serve Hashem until we get there." (Shmos 10:26) When Pharaoh relented after the Plague of Darkness, he told Moshe that all the Jewish People could go, even the babies who would of course not be performing any of the rituals or ceremonies for serving Hashem. All he demanded was that their animals remain behind.

Moshe responded that that was impossible. "Not a hoof will be left behind!" he said. "For we don't know how we will serve Hashem."

The commentaries offer various explanations for this. Rashi comments, "Perhaps He will ask us for more than we have brought with us." The Ibn Ezra says that Moshe's answer was that we needed to bring everything because we didn't know which type of animal we would sacrifice, nor how many offerings we would need to bring.

The Netziv goes to an even more granular level by saying we don't know whether we'll offer sheep or oxen; a yearling or an animal that is two years old. Therefore, we need to take whatever we have with us. Even if we know we won't use every animal, we will take from our flocks so we need to take it all.

One thing that stands out here is that Moshe was telling Pharaoh that our service of Hashem is not dependent on what we want to offer to Him, but on what He will ask of us.

Not only that, but we understand that He may ask us to give up everything, and we're willing to do so. Finally, we acknowledge and accept that we won't know in advance what He will ask of us, but we agree to step forward when the time comes.

What a powerful lesson for all of us. In order to be an eved Hashem, a true servant of G-d, we must

prepare ourselves to be asked to stretch ourselves to the limit without warning or preparation. We are to be ready at any moment to do what Hashem wants us to do and know that He has given us the tools and wherewithal to complete the task.

Rashi said, "Perhaps He will ask us or more than we have." How does that answer Pharaoh? Maybe even if you take everything along it won't be enough.

It must be that Hashem never asks us for more than we can do, but only what He has given us the means and ability to do. We can achieve what Hashem wants from us and fulfill our potential, if we're willing to give it all we've got.

Rabbi Y. Y. Jacobson relates that once, he had been booked for a weekend, but the organization canceled at the last minute on Friday afternoon just as he was about to leave his house. He was so annoyed. Besides for the other opportunities he had turned down for that week, he'd made arrangements for his children to be in other places, they didn't have food prepared for Shabbos, and he didn't feel that it was right to be canceled like that at the last minute.

That night, he fell asleep at his table while learning and woke up at 3:00 in the morning. Wide awake, he decided to walk to his office on the fourth floor of his building to look something up. He saw a young man sitting on the steps, and sat down next to him and asked if everything was okay.

The young man jumped up, ran into his apartment and attempted to slam the door. The rabbi sensed something was very wrong. He ran after him and saw lots of pills the youth man was planning to use to commit suicide. The rabbi wrestled him, finally pinning him down, so that he could speak to him until he got him out of his suicidal mood. He took him to his apartment and spent the day with him.

After Shabbat, he took him to get the proper help and, Baruch Hashem today, years later, this man is a successful, bright and delightful person living a happy life. Rabbi Y.Y. realized he needed to be there that night to save this man's life and if the organization would have canceled any earlier, he most probably would have been somewhere else that Shabbos. Hashem knows what He's doing.

RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

With the presidential inauguration on January 20th, the country is going to experience a seismic shift in leadership -- one that we all must hope and pray will lead to a cohesive union. Unfortunately, right now any cohesion at all would be a vast improvement.

I believe that the value of leadership is often underestimated. This past week, a property manager on one of the school's campuses was bemoaning the culture and behavior of the 21st century young adults -- commonly known as millennials.

As a result of COVID, our maintenance and custodial staff was severely depleted to the point that some shifts had no regular staff. The school administrators had been frantically searching for additional staff to handle a special program that was being organized for a large portion of the student body. They had made it very clear to the property manager that he shouldn't expect even the most basic elements of human behavior -- such as cleaning up after oneself and throwing trash into the bins -- thus leading him to take a dim view of the current generation.

I had an entirely different perspective on the matter. Having taught in a classroom for many years, I knew from experience that the key to getting students to achieve at a very high level was simply to expect it of them. I had learned that if you come to expect more from your students they inevitably come through and justify your faith in them. (This is true of one's children as well.)

I explained to my property manager that if the students don't practice even the most basic elements of proper behavior it's not their fault, it's a failure of leadership. I have to believe that if the students were patiently explained the unique circumstances of the situation that they would come through and take the responsibility upon themselves to maintain a level of cleanliness and organization on campus, to a create an environment of which everyone may be proud.

In addition, leadership is almost always about modeling the proper behavior. I remember hearing from one of the school's original students, a brilliant man who also happens to be a world class scholar, the following story about my father.

A very late night of studying in the beit midrash (library and study hall) had stretched into the early morning hours and he had fallen asleep on top of the books surrounding him. He woke with a start at about 6 am. Through his bleary eyes he noticed a figure on the other side of the room repeatedly bending down and standing up. As he struggled to focus his eyes he realized it was the Rosh HaYeshiva (head of school) picking up all the bits of paper that were strewn on the floor. He told me that experience, seeing the head of the school (my father), taking responsibility for the cleanliness of the beit midrash transformed him.

I am reminded of a similar story told about George Washington. One rainy day during the American Revolutionary War, George Washington, on his way to a camp, rode past a group of soldiers who were attempting to raise a wooden beam to a high position. The corporal in charge was shouting orders and also some encouragement, but the soldiers couldn't get the beam in position.

Because he was interested in seeing how the corporal would resolve the situation Washington

decided to stop and observe. After watching their lack of success for some time, Washington asked the corporal, "Why don't you join in and help?" To which the corporal looked at George Washington (not knowing who he was) and replied, "Don't you realize that I am the corporal? Have you ever seen a corporal do something like that?" Very politely, General Washington replied, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Corporal, but I did know that you are a corporal."

At that moment, Washington dismounted his horse and went to work with the soldiers to get the oak beam in position. As they finished, General Washington wiped some sweat from his face, looked at the corporal who had continued yelling at them the whole time and said, "If you should need help again, call on Washington, your commander-in-chief, and I will come."

Of course, the Torah isn't merely a collection of stories and laws; it's a blueprint for life. In this week's Torah reading we find a similar message, and we see that Moses truly understood the essence of leadership.

"And the children of Israel went and did as God had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did." (Exodus 12:28)

The great medieval Biblical commentator Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by the seemingly repetitious conclusion of the verse. The Torah, being the very word of the Almighty, does not contain any extra words nor even an extra letter.

The beginning of the verse clearly states that the Jewish nation did as God commanded Moses and Aaron; so why did the Torah find it necessary to conclude with the words "so they did"? Rashi goes on to explain that the words "so they did" is referring to Moses and Aaron. In other words, they too did the mitzvah of the Pascal lamb.

Maharal in his work Gur Aryeh, one of the famous commentaries on Rashi, wonders: Why is it presumed that Moses and Aaron would not have had to bring the Pascal lamb that the Torah had to tell us otherwise? In addition, if it was referring to Moses and Aaron, why didn't the Torah explicitly say that Moses and Aaron did it as well?

Very often, when telling our children to do something that we feel will improve their lives greatly (e.g. they should commit to regular Torah study, a proper diet, healthy exercise habits, etc.), they silently wonder why we ourselves are not modeling that very same behavior (and sometimes not so silently).

Of course they don't realize all the obligations that we are under (stress at work, money issues, etc.) or that we have a very hectic work schedule, communal obligations, and personal responsibilities. So how can they possibly understand why we aren't able to make that very same commitment to Torah study and other important life habits?

But, in fact, our kids are actually right.

Certainly, there are myriads of excuses we can make as to why we ourselves don't do what we are asking our children to do, but that's exactly what they are -- excuses. Certainly, when one has many responsibilities, there are conflicts that cannot be avoided. But our kids aren't fooled, they know when we are serious about an ideal and when we are merely paying lip service to an ideal. Our kids are a lot sharper than we credit them.

They also know that we have unavoidable conflicts, but they will absolutely judge what we consider to be important in our lives by how we choose to spend our free time.

Leadership follows some of the same rules. Obviously, a leader has many responsibilities and obligations, after all, that is what leadership is all about -- taking responsibility to get things done. Yet some leaders see themselves as above others; that they don't have to adhere to the very same laws that everyone else must keep. They "forget" that they too have a responsibility to follow the rules.

The Torah is teaching us a remarkable lesson about what kind of leaders Moses and Aaron were. Undoubtedly, on the night that the Jewish nation left Egypt, there were a multitude of things to do and details to be worked out. Moses and Aaron could easily be forgiven for not personally fulfilling the mitzvah of the Pascal lamb.

But they were not that type of leader; they led by example and did exactly what everyone else was supposed to do. They weren't above the law; they had the same obligation as everyone else. That's also what the Torah is teaching us by not mentioning their names ("so they did"): They fulfilled the Pascal lamb like everyone else -- as ordinary members of the Jewish people about to leave Egypt. That is what made them exemplary leaders.