

ב"ה

Torah Tidbits

ISSUE 1644

JAN. 17TH 2026
כ"ט טבת תשפ"א

פרשת וארא
PARSHAT VA'EIRA

SHABBAT MEVARCHIM

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וַהֲבָאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ
שְׁמוֹת ר:ח'

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT VA'EIRA ZMANIM

CANDLES 4:22 PM • HAVDALA 5:39 PM • RABBEINU TAM 6:16 PM



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IMPORTANT REMINDERS

 **Rosh Chodesh** Sh'vat is on Monday January 19th

מוליך חדש שבט יהיה ביום רביעי, 15, 2016, 6 דקוטו ו- 11 חלקיים
ראש חדש שבט יהיה ביום שני הבא עליינו ועל כל ישראל לטובה

 Earliest Kiddush Levana, 3 Days After Molad: 4 Sh'vat/Wed. night Jan. 21

7 Days After Molad: 8 Sh'vat/Sun. night Jan. 25

Last Opportunity to Say Kiddush Levana until: 15 Sh'vat/Sun. night Feb. 1

COVER PHOTO Photographed by Howard Gordon



The rains have come.

We have lived in Beit Shemesh Aleph for two and a half years. It is on the edge of the Judean Hills, an area very popular with hikers and riders. Last Friday my son, a keen cyclist, was riding alongside the Nahal Ksalon near Eshtaol. He told me of the rushing river in the usually dried up river bed. When hiking in Israel water of any kind, pool, river, stream is always a welcome surprise.



We continue to pray for the return Ran Gvili, last of the Kedoshim held in Gaza



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OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

Ranges 11 days Wednesday - Shabbat
Jan. 14 - 24 / 25 Tevet - 6 Sh'vat

Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	4:22	5:39	4:29	5:45
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	4:41	5:42	4:47	5:48
Beit Shemesh/RBS	4:41	5:40	4:48	5:46
Gush Etzion	4:39	5:39	4:45	5:45
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	4:39	5:40	4:45	5:46
Modiin/Chashmonaim	4:39	5:39	4:45	5:45
Netanya	4:38	5:39	4:45	5:45
Be'er Sheva	4:41	5:41	4:47	5:47
Rehovot	4:40	5:40	4:46	5:46
Petach Tikva	4:22	5:40	4:29	5:46
Ginot Shomron	4:38	5:39	4:44	5:45
Haifa / Zichron	4:27	5:38	4:33	5:44
Gush Shiloh	4:37	5:38	4:44	5:44
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	4:39	5:40	4:46	5:46
Givat Zeev	4:42	5:39	4:49	5:45
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	4:39	5:40	4:45	5:46
Ashkelon	4:41	5:42	4:47	5:48
Yad Binyamin	4:40	5:40	4:46	5:46
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	4:29	5:36	4:35	5:42
Golan	4:35	5:36	4:41	5:42
Nahariya/Maalot	4:35	5:37	4:42	5:43
Afula	4:36	5:37	4:43	5:43

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Va'eira - 6:16 PM • Bo - 6:23 PM



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Daf Yomi: Zevachim 125



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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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When we moved the OU Israel headquarters from Keren Hayesod Street to Har Hotzvim a little over a year ago, I knew we were gaining something important: space, possibility, a new chapter. But I also knew what we were losing.

For decades, the OU Center was not only an office. It was a place you could feel. You would walk in and see people passing through all day long, coming for a shiur, heading to a woman's program, bumping into friends, stopping to ask a question, picking up a sefer, finding a seat in the library for just ten quiet minutes of Torah. There was a heartbeat in that building. A steady stream of Jews making their way through, each one carrying their own story, their own questions, their own search for meaning and connection.

Now, with our programming spread across Yerushalayim and across the country, we go to the people directly in their communities. I try to visit as many of our communities as possible, to see the learning and the chessed and the growth happening up close. To hear what people are carrying. To witness what OU Israel looks like on the ground, not only in an office, but in real lives.

May the Torah learned
from this Torah Tidbits be
לע"ז
and in loving memory of
our dear father

צחק איזיק בן שמואל ז"ל
Irwin Rosner z"l
נלב"ע כ"ז טבת תש"ט

Elliot and Nechama Rosner

Still, there was one part of leaving Keren Hayesod that stayed with me in a heavy way. For decades, the Yair Landau Memorial Library was housed inside our building. It was not just shelves and books. It was a living memorial. Yair Landau HY'D fell in battle in 1982. A young man. A hero. And his family chose to dedicate a library in his memory inside the OU Israel Center, filling it with *sefarim* that were used and loved by thousands over the years.

When we moved, we faced a question that did not feel technical. It felt sacred. What do you do with a library like that? You cannot just pack it up and place it somewhere "convenient." These were *sefarim* that carried memory. They carried love. They carried loss. They carried decades of Torah learned, searched for, argued over, and whispered late at night.

We knew one thing: the *sefarim* could not end up in boxes. They could not end up collecting dust. They had to keep doing what they were always meant to do, to be learned, to be held, to be opened, to keep Torah alive in the *zechut* of Yair.

Baruch Hashem, we found a number of places, *yeshivot* and *seminaries*, that were able to receive them. Some *sefarim* went to Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav and Yeshivat Bnei Heichala (YBH). Each place was told clearly: you are not just receiving books. You are receiving *sefarim* from the Yair Landau Memorial Library. And that message carries even more weight today.

We are living in a time when so many families in Am Yisrael are carrying the unbearable reality of sacrifice. The names are different, the years are different, but the heartbreak is not different.

A family that loses a child in battle keeps that child in their family forever. Time may soften certain edges, but it does not erase love, and it does not erase longing.

We made sure that Yair's name would remain attached to these *sefarim*. We requested that his name be placed inside each *sefer* donated, and that each institution put up a plaque so the Landau family could know, with certainty, that Torah is being learned in Yair's memory.

This past Thursday, I was invited to something that gave me a sense of closure I did not realize I needed, the official opening of the Yair Landau Memorial Library in its new home, Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya (MRC). To see the *sefarim* leaving our building in boxes was painful. But to walk into two rooms, one filled with Hebrew *sefarim* and one filled with English *sefarim*, organized, alive, ready to be used, was deeply moving.

The midrasha is led by Rabbi Anthony Manning, a rav who has been teaching in OU Israel programs and OU Israel *shiurim* for about a decade. There was something fitting about that. This was not the library being "moved away." This was the library continuing its life within the wider OU Israel family, within the broader mission of building Torah and building Jewish lives.

But the most powerful part of the evening was not the shelves. It was the Landau family. Yair's siblings spoke with such warmth, such

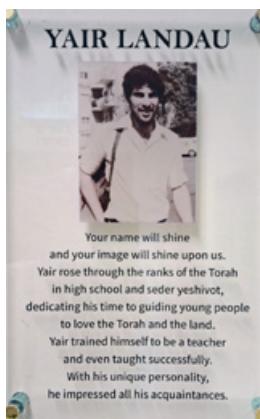
pain, such love, and it was striking to hear words that were still so raw, even forty-three years later. The loss was not a historical fact to them. It was present. Then I saw something that I will not forget. They had brought children and grandchildren. Some of them arrived in uniform, because they are now serving, some fighting in Gaza themselves. There are

moments when you see the continuity of Am Yisrael in a way that makes your heart tighten. Not as an idea, but as a reality. A family that gave a son, still giving. Still carrying. Still standing.

For me, it sent

a clear message about what OU Israel is here to do. OU Israel has always stood for helping Jews build lives of Torah, meaning, and belonging. Some people connect through a shiur. Some through a community program. Some through NCSY, JLIC, our Teen Centers, the Pearl and Harold Jacob's Zula Outreach Center, Torah Initiatives, the Women's Division, and so much more. We meet Jews in different places, at different stages, with different backgrounds, and we try to help them take their next step forward.

Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya is doing that kind



לע"ג
RABBI MOSHE CHAIM DOMBEY z"l
On the occasion of his 20th yahrzheit
ה' זכרו ברוך

of work. They serve women in their twenties who often come from non-observant backgrounds, but are now committed to *shemirat hamitzvot* and are hungry to learn Torah and build Jewish homes rooted in depth and commitment. They do not force one mold. They expose their students to the richness of Torah learning and help each woman find her path, her community, and her relationship with *HaKodesh Baruch Hu*.

I was also impressed by their Aliyah program, which includes weekly presentations with Nefesh B'Nefesh and other organizations offering practical guidance, and by their married couples program, run in conjunction with Shapell's Yeshiva, with classes for men, women, and couples, along with special *Shabbatonim* and fellowships.

After the event, I met a number of the young women learning at MRC and spoke with them. The conversation was real. Deep. Honest. The kind of conversation that reminds you what Klal Yisrael needs from its young people, and how much future is sitting in front of you in a room like that. I kept thinking that these sefarim are exactly where they belong.

Yes, we live in a world where you can find almost any sefer on an app. But there is still something irreplaceable about holding a sefer in your hands. Turning pages. Writing your name on the inside cover. Coming back to a

thought you underlined years ago. A sefer becomes part of a person's life.

To know that these sefarim will now be opened by young women building their lives of Torah, building their future homes, building the next generation, is a true continuation of Yair Landau's legacy. It is a way for his love of Torah to keep giving life.

So let me suggest something simple for this coming Shabbat. Take a few minutes. Pick up a sefer. Maybe it is a *sefer* from the Yair Landau Memorial Library. Maybe it is not. But let it be real. Let it be intentional. Read one more *Dvar Torah*. Share one more thought at your table. Learn something small in Yair's memory.

May Yair Landau's neshama have an aliyah, together with the neshamot of all those who have fallen *al kiddush Hashem* in the battles of Am Yisrael and for the speedy recovery for all of our soldiers. And may we merit the day when families no longer need to dedicate libraries, plaques, or rooms in memory of sons lost in war, because there will be peace for Am Yisrael.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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RABBI MOSHE HAUER ZT" L

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The Twilight Zone of Redemption

From the archives: Written a year ago after the release of some of the hostages, but still relevant today. Rabbi Hauer zt'l describes world events that make us both happy and sad, hopeful and fearful, and how we should move forward.

It feels like we are living in Parshat Va'eira.

The essential story of the *galut* in Egypt is comprised of three primary chapters. *Parshat Shemot* opens the story of the intensifying bitter enslavement of the Jewish people; *Parshat Bo* closes it with their leaving Egypt.

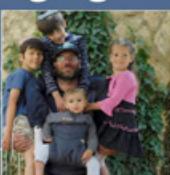
Parshat Va'eira is the prolonged twilight zone in between, when things start to get better as Hashem shows His hand on behalf of His people and beats back their enemies but does not do so decisively enough for their complete deliverance. Time and time again the Egyptians are made to feel the pressure but ultimately resist it and continue the bondage.

We can only imagine the roller-coaster of emotions that the Jewish people felt during that period with their hopes repeatedly raised and dashed until the story properly concludes with the Egyptians' clear recognition that they have been defeated. From the outset, Moshe made clear that it was going to be the plague of the first-born that would produce their ultimate deliverance (*Shemot* 4:22-23), and that would come as described in *Parshat Bo* (11:6), with terrible cries coming from the Egyptians. Put differently, it ain't over until Klal Yisrael sings and the Egyptians cry.

That is the straightforward meaning of the Talmud's reading (*Sanhedrin* 22a) of *Tehillim* 68:7: "G-d brings the isolated home, setting free those held captive with weeping and with song," referring to the weeping of the Egyptians and the singing of the Jews. Those are the sounds of the unambiguous clarity of the definitive victory of good over evil.

At this moment in time, we are not quite there yet as we find ourselves doing both the singing and the weeping. We have been blessed to see Hashem deliver via the heroic soldiers of Tzahal plague after plague to our enemies and miraculous protection for the Jewish people from hostile attacks, yet those attacks continue. We received the news of the freeing of three of the hostages earlier this week with mixed emotions; joy for them, sadness for those remaining

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in the hands of the Hamas monsters, and fear for the unfinished business of defeating the enemy. And we watched Hamas and many Palestinians cheer and jeer when handing over the hostages and celebrate the return of their own murderous and unrepentant terrorists from Israeli jails while raging over the death and damage inflicted on their own homes and families. Both sides are laughing and crying, a sure sign that there is as yet no clear victor. The tide may have turned, but it is not over.

What will it take to bring this to a conclusion? We cannot dare to “answer” that question, but we can think about it in broader terms. Jewish thought sees the essence of *galut* in its ambiguity and confusion, a “twilight zone” condition that originates in the original exile of Adam from the Garden of Eden. Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 1:1) noted that the nature of the original sin was such that it shifted our view of the world from the objective and clear knowledge of truth and falsehood – *da'at emet v'sheker* – to the more subjective and ambiguous knowledge of good and evil – *da'at tov v'r'a* - while Rav Chaim of Volozhin further noted (Nefesh Hachaim 1:6), that good and evil became so jumbled together that we are left without absolute good and evil. Emerging from that external confusion requires our own internal definitive clarity and commitment which will ultimately be reflected in a greater clarity in the world around us.

We may be astonished to consider that within the twilight zone of *Va'eira*, despite all the divine plagues being visited upon the Egyptians, the Jews' faith in God was incomplete and they were still attached to the idol worship of Egypt. It is only as they approached the final plague, the moment of clarity, that they “withdrew their hands from idol worship” (see Rashi to 12:6) and slaughtered/smashed the sheep/idols of the Egyptians. If the Jewish people were themselves

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vacillating on what they believed in without definitively standing for what was right and true, this would continue to be reflected in the ambiguity of their condition.

We are in a twilight zone. The world around us is terribly unclear; events are happening that make us both happy and sad, hopeful and fearful. Perhaps our best step out of this murkiness of *Va'eira* is to move to the clarity of *Bo* by turning from analyzing what is happening around us to focusing on what we ourselves believe and do, withdrawing our minds and hands from that which we know to be false and thinking and acting with greater clarity, purity, and consistency. ■



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PARSHAT VA'EIRA

Parshat Va'eira is the transition from Divine promises to Divine action. Responding to Paro's first refusal at the end of last week's parsha, G-d assures Moshe that He will release the Jewish people from slavery and bring them to the Land of Israel. After Moshe's reluctance, Moshe and Aharon are sent to Paro. The first seven plagues occur: blood, frogs, lice, wild animals, animal disease, boils, hail. Paro responds in fits and starts, at times acquiescing then changing his mind.

1ST ALIYA (6:2-13)

In response to the futility of Moshe's approach to Paro at the end of last week's parsha, G-d responds firmly and definitively: I am G-d, a name unknown to the Avot. I promised them the Land of Israel. I heard the people's cries. And I remember the covenant. So, tell the people: I, G-d, am taking them out, saving them, redeeming them, bringing them to Me, bringing them to the Land. The people cannot hear due to their burdens. G-d tells Moshe to go to Paro. He objects: the people

didn't hear me, how will Paro?

There is no other place in the entire Torah where G-d Himself acts as a Torah commentary. Here He states to Moshe that something was missing from the stories of the Avot, the Patriarchs. They did not know the name of G-d. And you, Moshe and the Jewish people, you will know that name.

And He explains. I *promised* them the Land. But you I will *take* to the Land.

Meaning. I made a promise. But they, the Avot, never saw it realized. You Moshe, you will see the promise realized.

This is the essential meaning of the story of the Exodus: G-d's direct intervention in Jewish history. Up until now, we know G-d as the One who promises to Avraham that he will be given the Land of Israel. But we have yet to see this promise become a reality. The promise of the Land has not been granted. It was promises and patience. Promises but waiting. Wondering. When?

Everything changes now. Now, for the first time, He tells us exactly what He is going to do. And it happens immediately. He tells Moshe and the people in vivid detail exactly what He is going to do: take them out, save them, redeem them, bring them to Him, bring them to the Land.

This is a profound lesson both in how G-d acts in the world. As well as how He doesn't.

Sometimes He acts directly. And sometimes His promises take time. Years. Hundreds of years. Understanding His Ways is elusive.

The Torah tells us He intervenes now. It doesn't tell us why He didn't intervene through



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all the suffering until now.

The story of the Exodus is to establish that G-d intervenes, manipulates the world. How? When? That remains elusive.



2ND ALIYA (6:14-29)

The lineage of Reuven, Shimon and Levi is outlined. Including the birth of Moshe and Aharon. These are the Aharon and Moshe who G-d commanded to go to Paro. The ones who speak with Paro.

Moshe's lineage is given. Kind of an odd sidebar. Perhaps the Torah is stating the pedigree of the actors in this story. Moshe is not pedigreed. He is

not distinguished in his lineage. He is not from the first-born son Reuven. Nor from the first-born son of Levi. Nor even the first-born son of Amram. There is only one pedigreed actor: the Creator.

Moshe's lack of lineage is to emphasize that he is but a pawn in the Hand of the Divine. You need someone to make all this happen; but the main billing is not Moshe. He is but a pawn in the Hand of the Divine.



3RD ALIYA (6:30-7:7)

G-d tells Moshe to go to Paro.

Moshe objects: I am tongue-tied, how will Paro listen? G-d tells Moshe: I am making you Paro's judge and Aharon your mouthpiece. I will harden Paro's heart. He will not listen to you.

By normal political measures, Moshe knows he will not be successful. He, weak. Paro, powerful. But he is told: You aren't the one making this happen. I am.



4TH ALIYA (7:8-8:6)

The plagues begin. Go to Paro in the morning when he goes to the river. In this you will know that I am G-d; the water will turn to blood. Moshe warns Paro. Aharon hits the water; it turns to blood. The

sorcerers do it. Paro does not listen. The 2nd plague: come to Paro and tell him G-d says to let My people go and serve Me. If not, frogs will invade your home, bed, ovens, and slaves' homes. Aharon raises his staff and the frogs invade. Paro calls Moshe and requests he pray for this to stop.

We are familiar with the 10 plagues. In our parsha we have the first 7.

The plagues divide into 3 groups; 1-3, 4-6, 7-9. And then the first born.

This grouping is based on the repeating patterns of the plagues. There are 3 patterns: where Moshe you will meet Paro. Where the plagues occur. And what their purpose is.

The first pattern is where Moshe meets Paro. Plague 1, at the water. Plague 2, in the palace. 3, no meeting. Then the pattern repeats with plagues 4, 5, 6; water, palace, no meeting. And 7, 8, 9.

The second pattern is where the plagues occur. Water. Land. Sky.

And a pattern of their purpose: so that you will know that I am G-d, that I am G-d in the midst of the Land, and that there is none like Me.



5TH ALIYA (8:7-8:18)

Moshe prays, the frogs stop, Paro reneges. 3rd plague: Aharon raises his staff; lice invade man and beast. The sorcerers unsuccessfully try to imitate; it is the hand of

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G-d. Paro does not listen. The 4th plague: Go to Paro in the morning when he goes to the river. Tell him: there will be wild beasts in Egypt but not in Goshen. In this you will know that I am G-d in the midst of the land.

This first set of plagues originate in the water. Water turns to blood. Frogs emerge from the water.

The Nile is the source of all agriculture in Egypt. Flood irrigation. It is the source of all life. And is ascribed Divinity. Naturally. In the world of idolatry, the most powerful forces are ascribed Divinity. The Nile is powerful.

Hence, it is hit first. Your god is made somewhat farcical in the face of our G-d. Water becomes blood; life becomes death. Frogs, all over Egypt. And the dead fish and frogs smell. You god has become a farce.

And the Torah states that. Moshe says in the warning to Paro: so that you will know that I am G-d.

The pattern of the plagues is 2 plagues emerging from the water, then one plague that attacks your body. The first 2 get warnings. The 3rd doesn't.

6TH ALIYA (9:19-9:16)

The plague of beasts happens.

Paro agrees to allow the people to leave to celebrate in the desert. Moshe prays for cessation of the plague. Paro changes his mind. The 5th plague: Come to Paro, the animals will be smitten with disease, though not those of the Jewish people. Paro checked, saw that it was true. But hardened his heart. The 6th plague: Moshe, throws dust in the sky in front of Paro. It became boils and blisters on animals and people. G-d hardened Paro's heart. 7th plague: Moshe, go to Paro in the morning. With this plague you will know that there is none like Me.

Plagues 4 and 5 repeat the pattern; warning at the river, then in the palace. And they both

occur on the land, attacking animals. The wild animals and animal disease attack only the Egyptians, not in Goshen. And their purpose is stated: so that you will know that I am G-d in the midst of the land.

Which is another way of saying: G-d is involved in the activity of man, distinguishing between evil and good.

Turning water to blood was an attack on the Egyptian god; hence you know that I am G-d. Here the plague distinguishes between people, the Egyptians and the Jews to teach: I am G-d working in the midst of the land.

Plague 7 begins the next series of the 3, plagues coming from the sky. And their purpose is stated: there is none like Me.



7TH ALIYA (9:17-35)

Hail will rain down and kill all in its path. Moshe raised his staff and hail rained down amidst thunder, with fire. Paro called Moshe and Aharon: I have sinned; G-d is righteous. Pray to remove this and I will let you go. Moshe did so. Paro refused to send the people out.

The parsha ends after 7 plagues. The last 3 will be in next week's parsha.

The plagues express the 3 core beliefs of Judaism: there is a G-d, He acts in the world, and He is One, Unique, none like Him. Kind of like the Shema. There is a G-d, He is our G-d, and He is One.

The story of the Exodus is the most repeated story in Jewish life. Because it teaches what kind of G-d we believe in: a Mover of history.

But there is another message, not in what happens, but in what does not. This story, of overt Divine involvement, will never happen again.

As if to say: I am going to show you My Hand once. Just once. Pay attention. It won't happen like this again. But I am doing it because I know

how difficult it is for you to see Me. Watch carefully: My Hand is revealed in Egypt, in the plagues, in the crossing of the sea.

I know all too well that you, My Jewish people will live in the future in the thick fog of life, when seeing My Hand is oh so difficult – you will refer back, many times, in prayer, in mitzvot to this glorious sunny, clear day of My Hand. And you will know that as my Hand was so clear and obvious then, so too is My Hand, while obscured in the fog of life, nonetheless present now.

Perception of G-d is hard in this foggy world of ours. He created it that way – the Hebrew word for world is olam, similar to ne’elam, hidden. To perceive His Hand as shaping history requires great faith and insight. Oh, how many have chosen in our time, due to the eclipse of His Face, the lack of His Hand in our history in the Holocaust, oh how many have abandoned Him.

We who are privileged to walk in our Land have glimpsed again His Hand in history. There are times when His Hand is oh so hard to see. And then there are the winks, like the exodus from Egypt, when the fog seems to clear. And those moments are blessed ones. ■



STATS

14th of 54 sedras; 2nd of 11 in Shemot. Written on 221.8 lines in a Torah; (16th). 16 parshiot; 8 open, 8 closed. 121 pesukim - ranks 20th (4th in Shemot). 1748 words - ranks 15th (3rd in Shemot). 6701 letters - ranks 17th (3rd in Shemot). Pesukim are above average in length.



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THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
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“Combatting Idolatrous ‘Gods’”

I was recently interviewed by one of my great-granddaughters. She is a high school student and was assigned to interview one of her ancestors. After responding to her questions about the different stages of my many careers, she commented, “Wow! You had some very colorful experiences!”

Among those “experiences” were my various encounters with non-Jews who took their Bible seriously. They included famous politicians such as President Bill Clinton, college professors of philosophy, and Christian clergymen. They also included students of biblical criticism.

I must admit that they often asked me questions that had me stumped. That is, stumped until I gave those questions further thought and researched traditional Jewish commentaries.

I'd like to confront you, dear reader, with one

of those questions and share with you some of the answers that I have discovered over the years.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parshat Va'eira* (Exodus 6:2-9:25) we read about seven of the ten plagues that the Almighty brought upon Egypt/ *Mitzrayim*. In next week's Torah portion, the final three plagues are described. In His prelude to the final plague, the Almighty informs Moses and Aaron, “I will pass through the land of *Mitzrayim* on that night and I will smite every first born in that land, man and beast, and I will mete out harsh justice (*shefatim*) to all the gods of *Mitzrayim* – I, the Lord!” (Exodus 12:12).

The question that I've been asked by my sceptical acquaintances is this: “Where in the biblical text is there any reference to the implementation of that harsh judgement?”

Yes, plenty of harsh judgements are meted out to the Egyptian slave masters, to the firstborn, to the general Egyptian populace, to the cattle in the pastures and the crops on the fields, and eventually to the Pharaoh himself. But where in the text, this week or next week, is there any evidence of the punishment of “all the gods of *Mitzrayim*”?

Admittedly, I was stumped by this question during the early stages of my serious Torah study. But it was not very long before I was “enlightened”. Several classical Jewish scholars raised this question centuries ago, and many more have raised it in the centuries since, down to modern times.

There is now a panoply of explanations available to us. One is offered by *Ramban al HaTorah*, the thirteenth century rabbinic sage,

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whose commentary can be consulted by the reader on the verse in question. The other is much more recent.

I came upon the latter when, as a young man, I received a birthday gift from my much younger sister, now an avid reader and frequent critic of this weekly column. I treasure that gift to this day.

The gift was a book in Hebrew, entitled *Bina B'Mikra*, by Rabbi Issachar Jacobson. It remains one of my favorite collections of analyses of the weekly Torah portions.

Rabbi Jacobson, whose works are available in English translation, deals with this question in his essay on this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Va'era*, although the verse in question is in *Parshat Bo*.

He cites an article by Professor A. Sh. Yehudah, from his book of learned articles entitled *Avar V'Erev*, which I respectfully translate as *Past and Prelude*. Professor Yehudah's thesis is a simple one. He asserts that each of the ten plagues, when "decoded", is aimed directly at one of the numerous gods of ancient Egypt.

Let's begin with the first plague, blood, *dam*. The waters of the Nile turned to blood. Surely rendering the waters of the mighty river undrinkable punished those guilty of enslaving the Children of Israel. But more to the point, states Professor Yehudah, one must be aware that the Nile was the source of the fertile farms and flourishing gardens and orchards of ancient Egypt. As such, it was worshipped as one of the gods of Egypt. Pharaoh descends to the banks of the Nile every morning to worship the river as a deity. When Moses insisted that he wished for the Jews to be freed to worship the Lord in the wilderness/*Midbar*, he was asserting that the God of Israel was not confined to one river but extended His dominion even unto the farthest reaches of Planet Earth and beyond. Thus,

argues Professor Yehudah, the plague of blood was a "direct hit" not only upon the people of Egypt but upon one of their gods!

Let's move on to plague number two, the frogs that infested the length and breadth of *Mitzrayim*, hopping around the living quarters of every citizen. Professor Yehudah informs us that the frog/*tzefardea* was a goddess of the ancient Egyptian people, the goddess of the midwives, whose image was that of a woman with a frog's head. Why a frog, you ask? Because frogs notoriously multiply rapidly and profusely. What better symbol of blessing for procreation and population growth, and what a wonderful emblem of blessing for the midwives who bring new babies into the world. Infesting the entire citizenry with frogs defames the goddess and is a "harsh punishment" for her, as well as for those midwives who collaborated with the decree to rid *Mitzrayim* of male Israeli babies.

And on to plague number three: *kinim*, fleas and lice, here, there, and everywhere. Brilliantly, Professor Yehudah draws upon one of the myths of the ancient Egyptian religion: One of the gods wanted to overthrow the ruling god.

The rebel disguised himself as a pig, approached his rival sneakily, and poked out the eye of the superior god with his finger. No wonder that Pharaoh's sorcerers exclaimed that the plague of fleas and lice was *etzba Elokim*, "the finger of the Almighty"! Furthermore, Professor Yehudah continues, one might be puzzled over the fact that, of course, lice and fleas were rife in ancient Near East countries—and still are to some degree. But the impact of those insects was not limited to the general populace. Rather, they descended upon

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the priests, holy men, and wizards of Egypt, who typically kept themselves meticulously pure and clean, shaven to retain their sanctity, and yet the plague brought the “harsh judgments” even upon these supposed delegates or surrogates of the gods of ancient Egypt.

Professor Yehudah goes on to show how all ten plagues were indeed directed toward “all the gods of *Mitzrayim*” as the Lord had assured Moses and Aaron would come to pass.

I close with an attempt to update the notion of the “gods” of an ancient culture to consider the “gods” of the cultures of our times. I must restrain my temptation to outline my thoughts of how to dethrone the ruling deities of contemporary society. But I can close this column with my “short list” of the “gods” we tend to worship: Power, Wealth, Beauty, Fame, Greed, Arrogance, Revenge, Victory.

I’m sure you can think of others.

Shabbat Shalom! ■

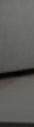


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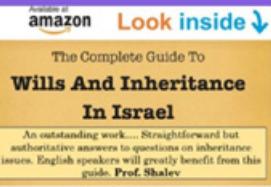
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A Puzzling Argument

The Torah couldn't be clearer...why, then, do the rabbis argue?

A few weeks ago, the Torah opened the story of Yetziat Mitzraim with the words:

“And a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef.”

Upon which the Talmud commented:

Rav and Shmuel [disagree]...

One authority accepts the straightforward meaning of the text. A “new” Pharaoh, he contends, rose to power following the passing of Yosef’s generation.

The other scholar, however, maintains that there was no physical transference of authority at all. The Pharaoh of the Exodus was the same king who had ruled previously. Only his decrees were “new.”

We find ourselves forced, however, to ask the obvious questions alluded to above...

What are Rav and Shmuel really arguing about?

The text explicitly asserts that the Pharaoh of the Exodus story was a “new king,” distinct from the Pharaoh who ruled in Yosef’s time. How could either of these sages state otherwise?

And, to strike even further, why does it matter whether the Pharaoh of the Exodus story was “new” or not? One way or the other, this king launched the first, horrific persecution of the Jewish people.

To answer our questions, we must read the Torah’s account of our oppression at the hands of the Egyptians as it is meant to be read.

This is not simply a tale of happenings long past. Like the rest of the Torah’s narratives, the story of our ancestors’ enslavement is as relevant to our day as it was at the moment of its unfolding.

What emerges is a “blueprint for persecution.”

Frighteningly familiar scenes greet our eyes, as Pharaoh embarks on a staged, calculated course designed to destroy the Israelite nation even before it is born.

With increasing intensity, the stages unfold: propaganda, isolation, debasement, back-breaking labor and torture, culminating in a final act of genocide that would have ended our story on the spot. A carefully planned pattern of persecution that first appears in Egypt, but is then repeated again and again, with only minor adjustments, across the face of our long, turbulent history.

Likewise, Pharaoh’s desperate determination to complete his plan—even at the cost of his own people’s welfare—and his inexplicable hatred of the Israelites—are also hauntingly mirrored by the fanatic enemies surrounding us to this day.

The opening parshiot of Shemot thus form a cautionary tale portending challenges to follow. *Prepare yourselves*, the Torah seems to say, *for you will face this scenario repeatedly on your national journey.*

But how does it all begin? What are the warning signs? How can we best prepare to meet an oncoming challenge?

Perhaps this is where Rav and Shmuel enter

the picture. These great sages may not be arguing at all, but rather suggesting two alternative paths. *The story of Egyptian slavery, they contend, could have begun in one of two ways: either a new king arose to confront the Israelites, or the same king transformed from friend to foe. Both possibilities are real, and both will confront you on your journey.*

Let this serve as an example and a warning: you cannot rest easy. The next challenge may erupt suddenly, from the most unexpected source. Remain vigilant. Expect the unexpected. Prepare for every contingency. Only an awareness of the many possible dangers surrounding you will enable you to meet the next test — before it is too late.

As our world changes daily and dramatically, our task becomes inordinately harder. From what direction will the next challenge emerge? What will the nature of that challenge be? How can we possibly prepare for events that we can scarcely predict?

And yet, the lessons emerging from the dawn of our history remain constant. We cannot allow ourselves to be surprised. With increased intensity, we must carefully and constantly study the world around us, searching for hints of potential challenges to come. And when those challenges do emerge, we must rise together to meet them with the courage and strength that has enabled our people, not only to survive, but to thrive, across the ages. ■

Rabbi Goldin is the author of the OU Press volumes "Unlocking the Torah Text," and "Unlocking the Haggada."

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Of Lice and Men

The dust of the earth was turned to lice all across Egypt. The magicians tried to produce lice with their sorcery, but they could not. Meanwhile the lice still infested people and animals alike.

"This," the magicians told Pharaoh, "is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was toughened, and – as the Lord had predicted – he would not listen to them. (*Exodus 8:12-15*)

Too little attention has been paid to the use of humour in the Torah. Its most important form is the use of satire to mock the pretensions of human beings who think they can emulate God. One thing makes God laugh – the sight of humanity attempting to defy heaven:

The kings of the earth take their stand,
And the rulers gather together against the Lord
and His anointed one.

"Let us break our chains," they say,
"and throw off their fetters."
He who sits in heaven laughs,
God scoffs at them. (*Psalm 2:2-4*)

There is a marvellous example in the story of the Tower of Babel. The people in the plain of Shinar decide to build a city with a tower that "will reach heaven." This is an act of defiance against the Divinely given order of nature ("The

heavens are the heavens of God: the earth He has given to the children of men"). The Torah then says, "But God came down to see the city and the tower . . ." (Gen. 11:5). Down on earth, the builders thought their tower would reach heaven. From the vantage point of heaven, however, it was so minuscule that God had to "come down" to see it.

Satire is essential in order to understand at least some of the plagues. The Egyptians worshipped a multiplicity of gods, most of whom represented forces of nature. By their "secret arts" the magicians believed that they could control these forces. Magic is the equivalent in an era of myth to technology in an age of science. A civilisation that believes it can manipulate the gods, believes likewise that it can exercise coercion over human beings. In such a culture, the concept of freedom is unknown.

The plagues were not merely intended to punish Pharaoh and his people for their mistreatment of the Israelites, but also to show them the powerlessness of the gods in which they believed ("I will perform acts of judgement against all the gods of Egypt: I am God", Ex. 12:12). This explains the first and last of the nine plagues prior to the killing of the firstborn. The first

involved the Nile. The ninth was the plague of darkness. The Nile was worshipped as the source of fertility in an otherwise desert region. The sun was seen as the greatest of the gods, Re (and Pharaoh was considered to be his child). Darkness meant the eclipse of the sun, showing that even the greatest of the Egyptian gods could do nothing in the face of the true God.

What is at stake in this confrontation is the difference between myth – in which the gods are mere powers, to be tamed, propitiated or manipulated – and biblical monotheism in which ethics (justice, compassion, human dignity) constitute the meeting-point of God and humankind. That is the key to the first two plagues, both of which refer back to the beginning of Egyptian persecution of the Israelites: the killing of male children at birth, first through the midwives (though, thanks to Shifra and Puah's moral sense, this was foiled) then by throwing them into the Nile to drown.

That is why, in the first plague, the river waters turn to blood. The significance of the second, frogs, would have been immediately apparent to the Egyptians. Heqet, the frog-goddess, represented the midwife who assisted women in labour. Both plagues are coded messages meaning: "If you use the river and midwives – both normally associated with life – to bring about death, those same forces will turn against you." An immensely significant message is taking shape: Reality has an ethical structure. If used for evil ends, the powers of nature will turn against man, so that what he does will be done to him in turn. There is justice in history.

The response of the Egyptians to these first two plagues is to see them within their own frame of reference. Plagues, for them, are forms of magic, not miracles. To Pharaoh's magicians, Moses and Aaron are people like themselves who practice "secret arts". So they replicate



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them: they show that they too can turn water into blood and generate a horde of frogs. The irony here is very close to the surface. So intent are the Egyptian magicians on proving that they can do what Moses and Aaron have done, that they entirely fail to realise that far from making matters better for the Egyptians, they are making them worse: more blood, more frogs.

This brings us to the third plague, lice. One of the purposes of this plague is to produce an effect which the magicians cannot replicate. They try. They fail. Immediately they conclude, “This is the finger of God”.

This is the first appearance in the Torah of an idea, surprisingly persistent in religious thinking even today, called “the god of the gaps”. This holds that a miracle is something for which we cannot yet find a scientific explanation. Science is natural; religion is supernatural.

An “act of God” is something we cannot account for rationally. What magicians (or technocrats) cannot reproduce must be the result of Divine intervention. This leads inevitably to the conclusion that religion and science are opposed. The more we can explain scientifically or control technologically, the less need we have for faith. As the scope of science expands, the place of God progressively diminishes to vanishing point.

What the Torah is intimating is that this is a pagan mode of thought, not a Jewish one. The Egyptians admitted that Moses and Aaron were genuine prophets when they performed wonders beyond the scope of their own magic. But this is not why we believe in Moses and Aaron. On this, Maimonides is unequivocal:

Israel did not believe in Moses, our teacher, because of the signs he performed. When faith is predicated on signs, a lurking doubt always remains that these signs may have been performed with the aid of occult arts and witchcraft. All the signs Moses performed

in the Wilderness, he did because they were necessary, not to authenticate his status as a prophet . . . When we needed food, he brought down manna. When the people were thirsty, he cleaved the rock. When Korach’s supporters denied his authority, the earth swallowed them up. So too with all the other signs. What then were our grounds for believing in him? The Revelation at Sinai, which we saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears... (*Hilchot Yesodei haTorah* 8:1)

The primary way in which we encounter God is not through miracles but through His word – the revelation – Torah – which is the Jewish people’s constitution as a nation under the sovereignty of God. To be sure, God is in the events which, seeming to defy nature, we call miracles. But He is also in nature itself. Science does not displace God: it reveals, in ever more intricate and wondrous ways, the design within nature itself. Far from diminishing our religious sense, science (rightly understood) should enlarge it, teaching us to see “How great are Your works, O God; You have made them all with wisdom.” Above all, God is to be found in the Voice heard at Sinai, teaching us how to construct a society that will be the opposite of Egypt: in which the few do not enslave the many, nor are strangers mistreated.

The best argument against the world of Ancient Egypt was Divine humour. The cultic priests and magicians who thought they could control the sun and the Nile discovered that they could not even produce a louse. Pharaohs like Ramses II demonstrated their godlike status by creating monumental architecture: the great temples, palaces, and pyramids whose immensity seemed to betoken Divine grandeur (the Gemara explains that Egyptian magic could not function on very small things). God mocks them by revealing His Presence in the tiniest

of creatures. "I will show you fear in a handful of dust", writes the poet, T. S. Eliot.

What the Egyptian magicians (and their latter-day successors) did not understand is that power over nature is not an end in and of itself, but solely the means to ethical ends. The lice were God's joke at the expense of the magicians who believed that because they controlled the forces of nature, they were the masters of human destiny. They were wrong. Faith is not merely belief in the supernatural. It is the ability to hear the call of the Author of Being, to be free in such a way as to respect the freedom and dignity of others. ■

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PROBING THE PROPHETS

BY RABBI NACHMAN (NEIL) WINKLER

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“So That They Know That I Am G-d!!”

It is somewhat curious.

Our haftarah commences with the closing p'sukim of the 28th perek – the final verses concluding the prophet's **previous** nevu'ah! It is, indeed, quite strange to have the haftarah **begin** with the **final** p'sukim of a prophecy! In truth, however, it is only problematic were we to ignore the earlier nevu'ot, those themes that flow logically into Yechezkel's lesson he prepares to share with the exiled Jewish community in Bavel.

In the earlier prophecies [chapters 25-28] we read of the navi's criticisms that focus upon the corruption of Israel's six neighbors: Amon, Moav, Edom, Philistia, and, later on, Tzor (Tyre) and Tzidon (Sidon). It is significant to note that

the navi's condemnation of Israel herself (i.e., Judea, for the bulk of the northern kingdom had already been exiled), is first found in the opening of 29th perek. It is there that we learn of the specific date when Yechezkel pronounced his nevu'ah, as our haftarah relates: “In the tenth-year and the twelfth day of the tenth month...”. This tells us that the prophet's oration was pronounced a mere **two days** after the Babylonian army had begun their siege around Yerushalayim (Asarah B'Tevet). In other words, Yechezkel shared his words to a nation in exile who had just heard about the “beginning of the end” to Jerusalem and their brethren in the capital. And yet, the prophet says nothing of the **Babylonian** enemy – the besieging hordes that surrounded Ir HaKodesh!!? He condemns Amon and Mo'av, he censures Edom and Philistia and he denounces Tzor and Tzidon. But says no word against Babylonia!!!

And, perhaps even more surprising, is the fact that the bulk of Yechezkel's rebuke that we **do** find in our haftarah, is directed toward none of these threatening enemies, but, rather, toward Egypt, the one nation who established a military alliance with Yehudah!

Yes, this too is quite curious. But, in truth, it is not so surprising.

Multiple messages found in the books of our nevi'im emphasize the treacherous behavior of the Egyptian Empire that denied their promised support for the Judean kingdom in their struggle against the Babylonian Empire. Undoubtedly, the inconstancy of the Judeans in their belief in Hashem, their lack of reliance upon the HaKadosh Baruch Hu to relieve them

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from the threat of Bavel, is what led them to ally themselves with Mitzrayim, and was the essential cause – and primary sin – of their destruction and exile.

But Rav Amnon Bazak clarifies the reason why Yechezkel focuses upon the sins of Egypt and her King. The navi “spotlights” the boast of Pharaoh: “Li y'ori va'ani ahsiti”, “The river (Nile) is mine and I made myself!” – Par'oh's boast claiming his divinity as an all-powerful creator. It is this outrageous attitude – together with Egypt's treacherous behavior toward Judea – that brought G-d's prophecy of their approaching punishments pronounced by Yechezkel.

Additionally, the harsh words directed to Egypt were also meant for the ear of Judea. Rav Bazak pointed to the punishments waiting for Egypt as those threatened to Israel as well. The prophetic penalties promised to Egypt, the warning that her land would become desolate and her cities – destroyed [29:9], closely parallels the cautionary notice Yechezkel gives to Israel that “the populated cities shall be destroyed and the land will be desolate.” [12:20] Likewise, the prophet's threat to Egypt that G-d would disperse them among the nations and scatter them to other lands [29:12], echoes the navi's intimidating words to Israel: “I shall scatter them among the nations and disperse them to others lands”. [12:15]

Why was this connection essential? Because the sins of both Egypt and Israel were the same: A denial by each reigning monarch (and many of their nation) of the existence, power and divinity of G-d Himself. The need to teach these deniers Who Hashem is, was the very theme of our parasha. Note how, after almost every plague brought upon Egypt, we are told “so

they/he shall know that I am G-d”. To know G-d, to believe in Him and to recognize His presence was essential–both for Egypt AND Israel.

And this is precisely why the haftarah starts at the end. For the final words of the previous prophecy stated exactly what the theme of the following nevu'ah, our haftarah:

“So that they shall know that I am G-d!” ■

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Achieving One's Potential

In Parashat Va'eira, we encounter a subtle but striking detail. Two adjacent *pesukim* appear to repeat the same phrase, yet reverse the order of the names they mention. In Shemot 6:26 the Torah states: *הוּא אַהֲרֹן וּמֹשֶׁה* - Aharon's name appears first. But in the very next *pasuk* (6:27) it states *חִיא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן*, placing Moshe's name before Aharon's. Why does the Torah reverse their order in consecutive *pesukim*?

Rashi offers a well-known explanation:
יש מקומות שמקדים אהרן למשה ויש מקומות
שמקדים משה לאהרן – כלל מכך יש קוקליין כאחד.

Sometimes the Torah places Aharon first and sometimes Moshe first, to teach that **they were equal**.

This comment immediately raises a difficulty. How can Aharon be considered *equal* to Moshe? The Torah itself declares *לא קם בישראל עד כמשה* – no prophet ever reached Moshe's level. The Rambam includes this principle

as one of the **13 Ikkarim**: Moshe Rabbeinu's *nevu'ah* stands alone. So how could Rashi imply that Aharon and Moshe were equals?

Several *mefarshim* resolve this tension. One possibility is that Moshe achieved his unparalleled status only at Sinai; until that point, he and Aharon were comparable.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Drash Moshe), however, offers a deeper insight. Moshe was unique, but *Aharon fulfilled his own potential* just as perfectly as Moshe fulfilled his. What the Torah equates is not their abilities or accomplishments, but their **achievement of personal shleimut** - their complete realization of what they were meant to become.

True greatness is not measured by comparison to others. It is measured by whether a person becomes the best version of himself or herself, with the tools, challenges, and opportunities Hashem has given.

Often we look at others and think, "They have so much they need to fix," or "They're not as accomplished as this or that person." What we fail to see is the inner world of each individual - the struggles that are invisible to us, the obstacles that we do not face, the victories that no one else witnesses. Our job is not to measure others, but to build ourselves, step by step, toward the unique mission Hashem has placed on our shoulders.

The Gemara (Bava Batra 12b) relates the story of Rav Yosef, who fell ill and became unconscious. When he awakened, his father asked him what he had seen. Rav Yosef replied, "*I saw an upside-down world: those who were high here were low there, and those who were low here*



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were high there.” His father gently corrected him: “You did not see an upside-down world. You saw the world of truth.”

In this world, human eyes often admire quantity—how much Torah someone learned, how many mitzvot they performed. But in the world of truth, Hashem measures effort, struggle, and the fulfillment of potential. A person who quietly battles their inner challenges may stand far higher in the next world than someone who seems to accomplish more externally.

A well-known story about **Rav Zusha of Anipoli** illustrates this beautifully. As he lay on his deathbed, he wept. His students tried to comfort him: “Rebbe, you were as righteous as Avraham, as holy as Moshe!”

Rav Zusha responded: “When I stand before the Heavenly Court, they will not ask me, ‘Why weren’t you Avraham? Why weren’t you Moshe?’ They will ask, ‘Why weren’t you Zusha?’”

Becoming the Person Hashem Meant You to Be

This is the message of Moshe and Aharon standing side by side, their names alternating in order: Greatness is not defined by comparison, but by authenticity. Moshe became Moshe; Aharon became Aharon - and each reached perfection within his own mission.

The Torah is teaching us that the truest measure of a life is not how it stacks up against someone else’s, but whether we rise to the heights that we, and only we, were created to reach.

May we learn to look inward rather than sideways, to embrace our unique strengths, confront our unique challenges, and strive each day to become the person Hashem intended us to be.

May we merit to live as the best version of ourselves and to fulfill the holy potential placed within us. ■

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Gauging Growth

The book of *Shemot* is rich with relevant lessons and patterns as it follows the development and growth of *Am Yisrael*. One particular theme focuses on perceptiveness and mindfulness, simply being “in tune” with one’s surroundings and allowing oneself to be affected by an experience. We find a classic example in Moshe Rabbeinu’s response to the burning bush, “*Va’yar ve’hinei hasneh bo’er ba’aish ve’hasneh einenu ukal vayomer Moshe asura na ve’er’eh... madu’al lo yiv’ar hasneh* — behold, the thorn bush was burning with fire, but the thorn bush was not being consumed. So Moshe said, “Let me turn now and see ...why does the thorn bush not burn up?” (*Shemot* 3:3-4) Rav Elya Svei zt”l offers an explanation based on the Midrash; Moshe Rabbeinu understood this sight as a symbol of the Jewish people’s

plight in Egypt. They may undergo scorching pain but Hashem assures them that they will never be annihilated. Moshe’s very pause to question led him to intuit this powerful lesson.

The beginning of the *parashah* details the dramatic showdown between Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon and the Egyptian magicians. At one point, Aharon turns his staff into a snake, as do the magicians. Aharon’s staff then returns to its form of a staff and then swallows the magicians’ staffs. The Egyptian sorcerers were clearly able to appreciate that this was an act beyond magic, and that there was truth in what it represented. Yet, such a revelation was not enough for them to persuade Paroh that Moshe and Aharon embodied truth, and it would benefit him to accede to their request. It took a few more *makot* before they were able to admit the truth and respond more appropriately. How strange is human nature that one can see obvious truth, and at the same time deny it, and refuse to allow it to impact him!

A further example is found at the end of the Torah reading as the plague of *barad* is depicted in detail. Moshe tells Paroh that hail will rain down upon Egypt and warns him to gather in all of the livestock so it will not be harmed. “*Ha’yarei et devar Hashem mei’avdei Paroh hei’nis et avadav ve’et mikneihu el habatim*—He who feared the word of Hashem of Pharaoh’s servants drove his servants and his livestock into the houses.” (*Shemot* 9:20) Those who did not pay attention

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left their property unprotected outside and they perished. Egypt had already experienced numerous plagues, and yet, there were still individuals who were unaffected by the experience.

HaRav Avraham Mordechai of Gur zt"l notes that this clearly teaches that the opposite of *yirat Hashem* is not paying attention to one's experiences. Thus, one who has *yirat Hashem* is someone who hearkens to the Will of Hashem, allowing it to direct his every action. It is fascinating, he adds, that one can witness open miracles, and yet it makes no impression. One must be conscious and aware to proactively integrate the lessons of every experience into his spiritual mindset, motivating him to respond appropriately.

However, people are uncomfortable leaving familiar behaviors and beliefs behind and thus prefer to ignore truth even if it is right before their eyes. How do we shake ourselves out of our indifference and thoughtlessness? Pay attention, teaches Rav Wolbe zt”l! Observe and take heart! The more cognizant one is to engage in the depth of each experience, the less self-absorbed one becomes, and can thus more easily contemplate how to live with greater purpose and attentiveness to the Divine Will. ■

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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
DIRECTOR, TORAH INITIATIVES,
OU ISRAEL

The second of the ten plagues, the plague of frogs, contains within it (like each of the plagues), profound symbolism and eternal messages.

The *pasuk* tells us: *VaTa'al HaTzfardya vat-echas et eretz Mitzrayim- And the Tzfardaya arose and covered the Land of Egypt.*

Rashi in a famous comment explains: *VaTa'al HaTzfardya- Tzfardaya Achat Hayta- One frog rose from the water-vehayu makin ota vhi matezetz nichilim nichilim- they hit the frog, and it streamed forth swarms and swarms of frogs....*"

The Lubavitcher Rebbe zy'a, points out the significance of the miraculous way in which this particular *makka* becomes gradually worse, initially there was only one frog, and once that frog was struck suddenly there came forth swarms of frogs. The Rebbe pointed out that this plague emphasized that unlike some of the other plagues which were able to be imitated or copied by the sorcerers in *Paroh*'s court, it's perhaps true that these sorcerers could bring forth frogs, but what they could not replicate was the miraculous capacity for one frog to suddenly spew swarms and swarms of additional frogs. Only *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* could orchestrate such a miracle.

The Meor Einayim, the Rebbe of Chernobyl zy'a, offered an interesting insight as to the message inherent in this particular plague.

"The essence of the suffering caused by the frogs was not their presence, but their sound. For sound that is unanchored in inner depth obscures rather than reveals."

The *Sefat Emet, the Gerrer Rebbe zy'a*,

explains that the word for frog- *tzfaardaya*, is comprised of the letters which make up the words *tzipor deia*—**a bird of awareness**. When the mind is in exile, this awareness scatters into **many voices and cries**, like the frogs filling all of Egypt. The *makka* of *tzfaardaya*, represents the noise and confusion of exile.

Rav Shamshon Refael Hirsch zt'l explained that a frog is noisy in the evening, but with day break becomes silent. How might *Rav Hirsch*'s words help us to understand the eternal message within the plague of frogs? If the frogs were indeed annoying, or a major nuisance how should the Egyptians have responded to that annoyance? How should we in turn respond when someone annoys or irritates us through their words, actions or world view?

The great tzadik **Rabbi Dr. Avraham J. Twerski zy'a**, offered this beautiful insight to address this fundamental question regarding responding to annoying or offensive actions or comments:

We may be negatively affected by what we hear just as we may cause harm by what we say. It is important to be as selective about our hearing as we are about our speech...



Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski zt'l

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, zt'l affectionately known as *the Steipler Gaon*, writes that initially the dreaded plague of

frogs only consisted of one frog, as *Rashi* teaches us. However, the Egyptians apparently didn't like the frog, and hit it in an attempt to make it go away. Unbeknownst to them, this frog had the miraculous capacity that each time it was struck, it actually multiplied and spewed forth many more frogs.

While one might understand the first few attempts to strike the frog, if indeed the frog kept reproducing with each time it was struck, at some point it should have been clear that they should no longer strike the frog, as it just kept making the situation worse!

The *Steipler* explained that this is what happens when one lets their anger overcome their intellect. When one gets caught up with anger, they tend to lash out, lose all sense of rational thought, and ultimately can make an uncomfortable or upsetting circumstance exponentially worse. We all can look in retrospect at how foolish and counterproductive it was for the Egyptians to continue to strike these frogs, so perhaps we also need to begin to ask ourselves why we so often fail to learn from their foolishness, and allow our anger to get the best of us.

The eternal message from the plague of *Tzfardaya*, is an important and relevant *musar haskel* for each of us. When we encounter any annoyance or frustration in life, it is important not to lash out at that annoyance in anger, which can only make the situation worse, but rather to take a step back, restrain ourselves, and let that nuisance pass, rather than lash out and make it potentially worse.

May we merit to heed each of these powerful messages that our sages suggest can be learned from the *makka* of *tzfardaya*. ■

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THIS WEEK'S INSPIRATIONAL TORAH LEARNING

**SUNDAY
JAN 18**

7:30 PM

Men's Safrut (The Bais)

Rabbi Tzvi Mauner

7 Hartum Street,

2nd Floor



*The schedule is subject to change

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**MONDAY
JAN 19**

8:30 PM

The Bais (for Men) - Semichat

Chaver Program Rav Elyada

Goldwicht@ Bet Knesset

Ohel Yitzchak

Keren Hayesod St.

SPECIAL EVENTS:

9:15AM-1:00PM YERUSHALAYIM

Rosh Chodesh Shevat Seminar

161 Rechov Yaffo- HaMerchav
HaChevrati

9:15AM-1:00PM BEIT SHEMESH

Rosh Chodesh Shevat Seminar
Rechov 5 Reuven Street - BMTL


OU Israel | Women's Division
2 Radak St., Rechavia

6:00-10:00PM

ATID Midrasha

7:00-9:00PM

Mother Daughter Tu B'Shvat Event

7:00-9:00PM

Dorot Choir Session with Hadassah
Jacob

8:00-10:00PM

Geula Mini Series Part 3:
Writing Workshop



**TUESDAY
JAN 20**

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COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN BAKAA

Classes @ Bet Knesset Nitzanim, 3 Asher Street, Bakaa

9:20 AM

Understanding Tefila **Rabbi Jeremy Perlow** (Rabbi Yossi Goldin will resume Jan 27)

11:25 AM

Modern Masters **Rabbi Sam Shor** (Rabbi Goldin resumes Feb. 3)

10:15 AM

Rambam: Letters & Introductions
Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz

12:20 PM

Unlocking the Messages
of Chazal
Rabbi Shai Finkelstein

TORAH TUESDAYS WITH THE WOMEN'S DIVISION

Classes @ Beit Knesset HaNassi, 24 Ussishkin St. Rechavia

9:15AM

Torah Tapestries Parsha Shiur
Mrs. Shira Smiles

MODIIN-THE BAIS

Men's Programs in Modiin Yeshivat Hesder Meir Harel,
Emek Beit Shean 53, Modiin

10:00AM -2:00PM

Weekly Kollel Boker-Instructors include
Rabbi David Fine
Rabbi Ian Shaffer

Rabbi Aschi Dick

Rabbi Avi Herzog

1:00PM- NEW!!!

Modiin Lunch and Learn with **Rabbi Aschi Dick**
Masamerica Offices, 28 Dam HaMacabbiim St,
3rd Floor, Shiur followed by mincha at 1:45pm

7:30 PM Men's Safrut in **MODIIN** **Rabbi Phil Schajer**

7:30 PM Men's Safrut in **BEIT SHEMESH** **Rabbi Elie Levi**

This Week's Inspirational Torah Learning with OU Israel

WEDNESDAY
JAN 21

COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN RECHAVIA

@ Bet Knesset HaNassi,
24 Ussishkin St., Rechavia

9:15AM

Holy Poetry
Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler

10:20 AM

Contemporary Issues in
Halacha and Hashkafa
Rabbi Anthony Manning

11:25 AM

Mussar and Self Improvement:
A study of Rav Kook's sefer
Midot HaRayah
Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

12:30 PM

Jews in the Middle Ages:
External Threats and Internal
Developments

Dr. Deborah Polster

SPECIAL EVENT:

7:00-9:30PM

Yerushalayim Bat Mitzvah
Chessed Event

THURSDAY
JAN 22

COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN ARNONA

@ Bet Knesset Shai Agnon,
11 Rechov Leib Yaffe, Arnona

9:15 AM

Parshat HaShavua
Rabbi Ari Kahn

10:30AM

Parashat Hashavua
Rabbi Baruch Taub

11:25 AM

Trailblazing the Text of Tanach
Rabbi Neil Winkler

8:00 PM

Halachic Controversies- (the Bais)
Rabbi Aschi Dick @ Bet Knesset
Ohel Yitzchak, Keren Hayesod Street

BET KNESSET OHEL YITZCHAK

@ Keren Hayesod Street

8:00 PM

Halachic Controversies
(the Bais) **Rabbi Aschi Dick**

SPECIAL EVENT:

7:00-9:30 PM

Beit Shemesh Bat Mitzvah
Chessed Event



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Women's Seminar in Beit Shemesh

Mitzvot HaTeluyot BaAretz: From Soil to Soul



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MOTHER-DAUGHTER TU B'SHVAT EVENT

Events taking place in multiple locations
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Mother-Daughter
Chavruta Learning

Mini-Shiur

Kahoot
Competition

Tu B'Shvat
Art Project

- **Beit Shemesh** (Carlebach) -Sunday Jan 18
- **Givat Eden** - (Mazkirut Building) Monday Jan 19
- **Pardes Chana** (Klal Yisrael) -Monday Jan 19
- **Efrat** (Makom Litzmoach) - Monday Jan 19
- **Yerushalayim** (Women's Hub) - Monday Jan 19
- **Ramat (Ramatayim Tzofim)** - Monday Jan 19
- **Chashmonaim** (Rimon Shul) -Tuesday Jan 20
- **Carme Hanadiv** - (חוּמָדָן דִּירִים) - Wednesday Jan 22

ALL EVENTS
RUN FROM
7:00-9:30PM



www.ouisrael.org/events/md-tubshvat2026



Rosh Chodesh Shevat

Women's Seminar in Yerushalayim

Mitzvot HaTeluyot BaAretz: From Soil to Soul

NOTE THE
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LOCATION!



ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI

Director, OU Israel Women's Division
Words of Introduction



SHOSHAN RAIZ

Machon Torah V'Haaretz
Hands-On Terumot
and Maasrot



MICHOEL WEICHBROD

Founder, Homebound to Eretz Yisrael
Our 2000 Year Journey
Back Home



RABBI MOSHE LICHTMAN

Author, Translator—
Eim HaBanim Semecha
Sacred Land, Sacred Fruits

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WITH AVIGAIL
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Monday, Jan. 19
9:15 am – 1:00 pm

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NextGen: A Taste of Tu B'Shvat



Monday
Jan. 26
8:00 PM

OU Israel
Women's Hub
Radak 2

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OU Israel Women's Hub - Radak 2

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SHIRA SMILES SHIUR - TUE. JAN. 20TH

Dedicated by Sarah Dahan as an aliyah neshama on her mother's and sister's yahrzeits which are on י' שבט & ז' שבט respectively

RABBI BREITOWITZ'S SHIUR - TUE. JAN. 13TH

Dedicated anonymously l'iluy neshmat every neshama from Adam until today

SHIRA SMILES' SHIUR

Dedicated for the year in memory of Elhanan Efriam Ben Abraham z"l by Robyn Pocker

THE WED. MORNING BEIT MIDRASH PROGRAM IN RECHAVIA

Dedicated for the 2026 academic year l'iluy nishmat: Daniel ben David z"l and Limud bat Avraham Strauss a"h, and Mordechai ben Moshe z"l and Reizel bat Yosef Meir Marcus a"h, zichronam livracha, parents of Judy & Menachem Marcus

RABBI BREITOWITZ'S TUE. SHIUR

Dedicated anonymously for the refuah shleima of Evelina bat Galina

RABBI ADLER'S WED. SHIUR

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RABBI MANNING'S WED. SHIUR

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RABBI GOLDSCHIEDER'S WED. SHIUR

עלילו בשכמת ברנדית ע"ה זוליג בן קלמן ז"ל מרים בת אברהם ע"ה ושם טוב ק שלמה ז"ל

RABBI TAUB'S WEEKLY THUR. PARSHAT HASHAVUA SHIUR

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RABBI ARI KAHN'S SHIUR

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RABBI YOSSI GOLDIN'S SHIUR

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RABBI ASCHI DICK'S MODIIN SHIURIM FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR

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The “Kedushas Tzion” of Bobov, Rebbe Ben Tzion Halberstam, was one of the most influential and respected Chasidic leaders of pre-war Poland. Respected for his brilliance and leadership, the Rebbe was a prolific *baal menagein*, musical composer, and a great *ohev Yisrael*, embodying the highest expression of *mesirus nefesh*, self sacrifice.

In the early 20th Century, years before the chaos of WWII and the horrors of the Holocaust, a wealthy and generous businessman travelling through Europe named Reb Yisrael Koenigsberg, arrived in Bobov. He had heard so much about the wise and inspiring *tzadik*, and arranged a meeting with the great Kedushas Tzion.

In those days, men of stature were accustomed to walking with a decorative cane. Reb Yisrael carried one with a silver handle, just like the Rebbe's. Before parting, Reb Yisrael asked, “Let us exchange canes. I will take the Rebbe's, and the Rebbe should take mine.”

Smiling, the Kedushas Tzion agreed. This interaction made an impression on the Rebbe's son, Rav Shlomo, and later he would reminisce about the generous visitor Reb Yisrael swapping canes with his father.

Reb Yisrael later traveled to Eretz Yisrael. On the way to Meron to daven by Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai, Reb Yisrael's wagon overturned on a badly damaged road. Taking this as a personal responsibility, he repaired the road for future travelers. It became known as “Derech Yisrael”, adding to his wonderful reputation as a generous and open-hearted Jew.

For years, the Kedushas Tzion discouraged his followers from leaving Poland for lands he feared would be spiritual deserts. When World War II broke out and bombs began to fall, in the face of deportation and often certain death, the Rebbe was offered escape abroad, and refused: “How can I leave a place from which I can still assist others?” When the Nazis entered the city in Menachem Av /July 1941, the Kedushas Zion asked quietly, “Can one really hide from the *chevlei Moshiach*, the suffering of the birth pangs of the Messiah?”

That month, the Ukrainian militia and local

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‘civilians’ launched a pogrom against the Jews of Levov (Lemberg). The Kedushas Tzion was forced out of hiding and taken to a larger round up of Jews in the street. An eyewitness account was given by Naftoli Eherenberg in his book, *Eilah Azkerah*: “I saw from his window how the Rebbe, dressed in his Shabbos clothing, was ruthlessly attacked by the soldiers. The cruel Ukrainians beat him on his head with their rifle-butts and his yarmulke fell to the ground. From time to time the Rebbe bent over and stooped to pick it up, and they beat him even more.”

Besides the Rebbe, most of his family and tens of thousands of Bobover chassidim were murdered in the *churban* of Europe. The Rebbe’s son, Reb Shlomo, lost his wife and two children. Miraculously, having survived with his son, Naftali, Reb Shlomo made his way to London, and then crossed an imposing sea to the United States. He arrived on Ta’anis Esther, 1946, afraid and uncertain. He had been raised from childhood on the belief that America was a desert of spiritual danger, where even the stones were *treif*. He doubted whether anything could be rebuilt from the ashes of Jewry and Yiddishkeit in this atmosphere of impurity.

When Reb Shloime disembarked, a small group of surviving Bobover chassidim and refugees came to greet him. Among them stood Yitzchak Koenigsberg, holding a familiar walking stick, the cane the Kedushas Tzion had once given to his father, Reb Yisrael. He approached the Rebbe and said softly, in Yiddish: *Du hut ir dem taten’s shtok*, “Here is your father’s cane.”

Trembling with emotion, the Rebbe exclaimed, “My martyred father has sent his cane ahead to America to greet me!” It was a clear *siman*: a sign that the chain had not been

broken, that rebuilding was possible, that a new generation of *ehrliche* Yidden would yet rise on distant soil. Filled with faith and hope for the future, he gave himself to rebuilding the glory of Bobov, raising up generations of Yidden who continue to carry the glory of Torah forward.

.....

Moshe Rabbeinu stands before Pharaoh with a simple *mateh*, a staff through which comes *simanim* and miracles that crack open a dangerous, impure empire. This *mateh* becomes a serpent, strikes the waters, carries within it the potential for redemption, and finally becomes the conduit for splitting an imposing sea. Again and again, the Torah emphasizes: “*Take the staff... stretch out your hand...*” The salvation does not descend abstractly from Heaven; it is funneled through a physical object, a wooden stick, held, lifted and carried forward by Moshe Rabbeinu. As a shepherd uses a staff to lovingly corral his flock, the *Raya Mehemna*, Moshe the Faithful Shepherd, guided his nation toward redemption.

Maharal explains that physical objects can embody spiritual lights when they are bound to a Divine task. They become vehicles of purpose and a brighter future — not mere relics of the past. Rav Kook carries this insight further. When objects bound to Divine purpose become vessels of spiritual form, *kedushah* settles into material reality. This is especially true of objects connected to the life and destiny of a holy community or to the Nation as a whole.

Chassidic masters describe such objects as extensions of a tzaddik’s *avodah*, conduits through which their mission—to rebuild after losses, to infuse this physical world with *kedushah*, and to continue walking toward redemption—passes from generation to generation.

.....

Perkei D'Rebbi Eliezer (Ch. 40) teaches that Moshe's staff was created on the *bein ha-shemashos* of the first Erev Shabbos. It was passed from hand to hand from Adam to Chanoch, to Noach, Shem, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and to Yosef. It later fell into Pharaoh's possession, but was removed from his palace by Yisro. Ultimately, Moshe Rabbeinu inherited it when he proved himself worthy.

Similarly, a *mateh*, a *rebbishe* cane exchanged in mutual admiration, was carried across continents, preserved through catastrophes, and returned at the moment of greatest need. Handed from father to son and through destruction to rebuilding, when Rav Shlomo held it upon arriving in America, it was as if the glory of the Torah itself was placing something in his hand, telling him: *You are not alone. Continue!*

Like Moshe's staff, it was not the object itself that mattered, but what it carried and what came through it: memory, the inheritance of sacred mission, trustful continuity, and the accompaniment of Divine presence *baderech*, along the path to redemption.

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Broken Boundaries, Bonds of Hate

All the makkot were dramatic disclosures of the power of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Ten relentless blows bent a mighty empire to its knees and shattered the resolve of a stubborn, unyielding tyrant. By the time *makat bechorot* tore through Egypt—turning its cities into rivers of death—the Egyptians were pleading with Pharaoh to release the Jews. Pharaoh himself raced through the silent, stricken streets of Mitzrayim, frantic to find Moshe and Aharon and hasten the departure of the slaves he had once guarded so jealously. It was a display of divine presence that unraveled nature, empire, and the inner certainty of a ruler who believed power could not be taken from him.

Of the ten makkot, some were thunderous and overt, others quieter and more elusive. *Barad* and *tzefardeia* were loud and unmistakable; *dever*, by contrast, was a silent killer. *Dam* was dramatic because it came first, while

arbeh felt almost anticlimactic after the crashing hailstorms of *barad*.

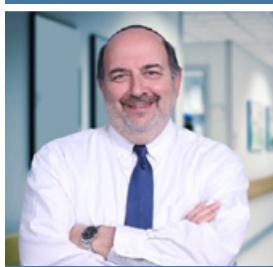
Yet perhaps the most frightening of all the plagues—at least until midnight would strike and the firstborn would be torn from their homes—was the onslaught of wild beasts. They came from everywhere: fields, jungles, and deserts. They entered homes and attacked Egyptians in their beds. *Arov* left no escape—inside the house or outside it. Fear spread in a way Egypt had never known.

The first three makkot could be managed. When the Nile turned to blood, alternate water sources were dug. *Tzefardeia* was repulsive and disruptive—perhaps even lethal if it included dangerous predators—but it could still be contained. The *arov* avalanche of wild beasts, attacking from every direction, could not. For the first time, Pharaoh himself summons Moshe and offers partial liberation. He did not understand what had struck him—and something in his inner world never fully recovered.

Yet intriguingly, the plague is called *arov*, not *chayot*. The Torah chooses a word that means mixture rather than the more natural term for wild animals. Why was this dramatic assault described as a mixture instead of simply an attack of beasts?

A MIX OF TERROR

The Midrash explains that the name *arov*



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captures the unnatural character of the onslaught. Wild animals normally hunt alone or within narrow groupings. Each species has its own territory, its own rhythms and schedule, and its own prey. Even when animals hunt in packs or prides, they do not hunt alongside other species. Nature maintains clear boundaries.

During the nightmare of *arov*, those boundaries collapsed. Snakes and lions, wolves, leopards, and bears surged together in a single assault. According to some midrashim, even domesticated animals turned on their masters and joined the attack. This was not predation as the natural world knows it, but a coordinated blitzkrieg of disparate forces that should never have converged.

The terror lay not only in the violence, but in the collapse of order. *Arov* was frightening because it was a mixture—a convergence of dangers Egypt had never faced. The name does not merely describe the attackers; it signals the unraveling of the natural patterns that once contained fear.

CREATION UNRAVELED

When human beings betray basic moral responsibility, nature itself becomes unstable and the boundaries set at *ma'aseh bereishit* begin to give way. The world was fashioned to sustain human life and to allow humanity to find God and live before Hashem. When that mission is violated, the limits that make human life possible begin to collapse.

This pattern—moral collapse triggering the breakdown of creation—had appeared before. Eight hundred years earlier, an entire generation descended into moral chaos. During the *mabul*, the boundaries Hashem set at creation fell apart. The upper waters, once held apart from the world below, poured down upon the earth. Dry land, separated from the seas on the

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third day of creation, disappeared beneath the flood. Moral collapse did not remain moral; it reshaped the physical world and suspended the terms of *ma'aseh bereishit*.

This is exactly what happened during *arov*. For human life to endure, boundaries must exist—between jungle and city, between wilderness and home. Hashem placed fear of human beings within animal instinct. Kayin was granted this human imprint to protect himself from beasts, and Hashem later institutionalized it for all humanity in His covenant with Noach. Over time, human beings learned how to build cities, to create protected spaces, and to hold the wild at bay.

By enslaving millions, the Egyptians shattered a basic moral law woven into creation: that free human beings, endowed with the image of Hashem, are not meant to be degraded and treated like animals. When they violated that code, they ruptured the system itself. Once the



system broke, its boundaries collapsed. The line between jungle and city vanished. The distinction between domesticated animals living alongside humans and predatory beasts dissolved. Even the internal boundaries of the wild—separating species from one another—fell away.

Nature turned into an all-against-all frenzy. Wild animals surged everywhere, bedrooms became forests, and the ordered streets of Egypt were transformed into teeming, dystopian jungles. The word *arov* captures this breakdown—the mixing across boundaries, the collapse of limits, both human-made and God-given. What Egypt unleashed through moral cruelty returned as disorder in the natural world, mirroring the chaos it had imposed upon humanity.

THE BOND OF HATRED

Yet beyond this moral lesson of collapsing boundaries, *arov* carried a second message embedded in the mixture itself. Wild creatures do not merely hunt separately; they are often natural rivals, competing for the same territory or the same prey. When one animal intrudes into the domain of another, the encounter usually ends in violence.

Here, those rivalries vanished. Predators that would normally clash acted in concert. That unity among enemies was both ironic and punitive—a distorted harmony born not

of peace, but of shared aggression.

The Egyptians united in their hatred across many different lines in order to persecute us. The Midrash describes a summit convened to address the “Jewish problem”—the population surge and the fear it provoked. That gathering included Pharaoh, Bilam, Iyov, and Yitro. It was an awkward coalition with little in common. Midyan and Egypt were natural rivals, and Iyov’s presence in Egypt remains puzzling.

Of course, the Midrash need not be read as a historical record. It may be a metaphor, describing a reality in which forces that share no natural alliance—and no shared interests—nevertheless converge. These disparate groups were united by a single element: hatred.

HATRED ACROSS GENERATIONS

Jewish history repeatedly confirms this pattern. Hatred is a powerful unifier. When it is directed at the people of Hashem—and, by extension, at the presence of Hashem in this world—it can bind together sworn enemies. What cannot be achieved through shared values or shared interests is often achieved through shared animosity.

Jewish history unfolds in cycles, and certain patterns of antisemitism recur with unsettling consistency. Across generations, religious and ideological factions with little shared ground have united in their hatred of our people. Sunnis and Shiites have warred for centuries, yet they converge—violently or rhetorically—in opposing Jewish presence in the land of Hashem. In the past century, fascists, communists, and global capitalists despised one another and fought bloody battles for Europe’s future, yet they shared a common enemy: the people of Hashem. As history advances, it curiously remains the same.

What are we to make of Islamic fundamentalists shouting at protests against the Jewish

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state alongside hyper-liberals? What are we to make of white supremacists and hard-left wokists—sworn enemies—joining voices in hostility toward Jews? What are we to make of members of the LGBTQ community protesting Israel's existence shoulder to shoulder with murderers who would kill them if they set foot in their countries of origin? We have seen this scene before. It is not new.

Hashem sent the plague of *arov* to Egypt to expose the madness of hatred—and the madness of antisemitism. The Egyptians hated us so intensely that they were willing to ally with their sworn enemies. They did then, and others do now. Hashem punished those who assaulted us with a mixed assault of His own, and He continues to respond measure for measure—to demonstrate the folly and self-destruction of using hatred as a unifying force. ■



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From Promise to Prayer

YECHZEKEL 28:25-29:21

בְּקָבֵץ אֶת־בָּתָר יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעִמִּים אֲשֶׁר נִפְצָׁו בָּם
וּנִקְדְּשָׁתִי בָּם לְעֵינֵי הַגָּנִים וַיָּשִׁבוּ עַל־אֶדְמֹתָם אֲשֶׁר נִתְּתִי
לְעַבְדִּי לְעַקְבָּבָן

When I gather in the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they have been scattered, and I have been sanctified through them in the eyes of the nations, then shall they dwell on their land that I gave to My servant, to Jacob.

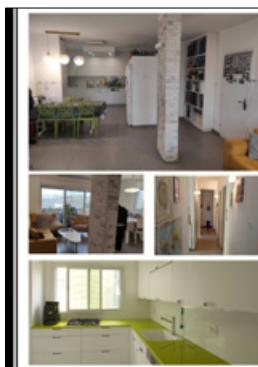
One cannot read the opening pasuk of the Haftarah without hearing its echo in the Shemoneh Esrei. “When I gather the House of Israel from among the nations...” becomes, in our daily prayer, “Gather us together from the four corners of the earth.” Yechezkel speaks in the language of promise; the Amidah answers in the language of longing. What the Navi describes as Hashem’s future act, we articulate as a daily request. Both frame kibbutz galuyot not as private consolation, but as public

recognition — something meant to be seen.

Yechezkel then clarifies what that gathering entails. He does not speak of return, but of gathering — קָבֵץ — a word that assumes fragmentation and patience. Gathering is not a single moment but a process, drawing scattered pieces toward one another over time. Nor were the people merely displaced. They were — נִפְצָׁו — scattered outward, dispersed into other cultures and histories, at risk of losing cohesion altogether.

The verse culminates not in survival, but in sanctification. Rashi explains that Hashem’s name is sanctified when the nations see that Israel’s story did not end in exile. The Malbim sharpens the point: sanctification does not wait until the gathering is complete; it unfolds through the gathering itself. The process becomes the revelation and recognition of Hashem’s name.

To pray these words today, in a world where the scattered are quite literally being gathered, is to sense how closely prophecy and prayer can stand beside one another. In Yechezkel’s vision, holiness emerges not only through miracles that suspend nature, but through history that refuses to erase a people. A people drawn together. A promise unfolding. A revelation of Hashem in full view of the world. ■



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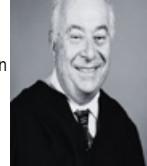
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Clinging to God with Our Feet on the Ground

RAV KOOK ON DEVEKUT

In the opening teachings of *Midot HaRa'ayah* on the topic of *devekut* - clinging to God - Rav Kook presents a profound and practical framework for fulfilling the Torah's command: "And to Him shall you cleave" (Devarim 13:5).

Rav Kook writes:

1. The divine philosophy (Kabbalah) teaches us the attributes of God—the divine *sefirot*—so that we may link ourselves to the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He.
2. We must study God's names, His attributes, and the *sefirot* so that we understand that it is incumbent upon us to cleave to God's attributes; that we are capable of cleaving to them; and that we cannot cleave to God in His



awesome transcendence.

(*Midot HaRa'ayah*, *Devekut*, §§1–2)

The Torah commands every Jew to cling to God—but how is this possible? Rav Kook answers that *devekut* is achieved not through metaphysical ascent but through moral and spiritual imitation.

We study God's ways in order to **embody them in our own lives**. The *sefirot* and *midot*—such as *chesed* (kindness), *gevurah* (moral strength), and *hod* (majesty and beauty)—are not abstract concepts; they are character traits meant to be integrated into one's personality. Through ethical conduct, kindness toward others, and the cultivation of beauty and dignity in the world, a person ascends spiritually and bonds with the Creator.

WALKING IN GOD'S WAYS

This idea is articulated explicitly in the Talmud:

"What does it mean, 'You shall walk after the Lord your God' (Devarim 13:5)? Is it possible for a human being to walk after the Divine Presence, of whom it is written, 'For the Lord your God is a consuming fire' (Devarim 4:24)?

Rather, it means to imitate His ways: Just as He clothed the naked (Bereishit 3:21), so too

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should you clothe the naked; just as He visited the sick (Bereishit 18:1), so too should you visit the sick; just as He comforted Yitzchak after Avraham's death (Bereishit 25:11), so too should you comfort mourners; just as He buried Moshe (Devarim 34:6), so too should you care for the dignity of the dead." (Sotah 14a)

Our conception of God is thus translated into a **code of human behavior**.

RABBI SOLOVEITCHIK: IMITATIO DEI AS A FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik emphasized that *imitatio Dei*—emulating God—is a foundational principle of Jewish life. Rabbi Hershel Schachter, in *Nefesh HaRav*, records teachings in which the Rav urged students to look beyond the list of divine attributes enumerated by the Sages and to identify additional dimensions of God's ways that demand imitation (pp. 49–71).

Strikingly, the **first attribute the Torah reveals about God is His capacity to create**. The Torah opens not with commandments, but with the story of Creation.

The Rav asked: Why devote an entire chapter to a narrative that is enigmatic, incomplete, and shrouded in mystery?

His answer was profound: Creation is meant to be a **moral challenge**. Just as God creates, so too must man create.

As the Rav expressed it beautifully:

"Man, like God, is often confronted with *tohu va-vohu*, utter chaos. He doubts his ability to say *yehi or*—let there be light.' Yet man is commanded, by the principle of *imitatio Dei*, to create, to become a partner (*shutaf*) in *yetzirah*, fashioning form out of chaos." (Reflections of the Rav, p. 26)

RAV KOOK AND THE ACT OF PLANTING

Rav Kook similarly understood Creation as

a paradigm for walking in God's ways. Rabbi Ze'ev Gold recounts a powerful episode:

While accompanying Rav Kook to Magdiel in the Sharon region for a tree-planting ceremony, Rabbi Gold observed something remarkable. As Rav Kook received a sapling, his face radiated with intensity and his body trembled with emotion. He knelt down, dug into the soil with his bare hands, and planted the tree with reverence, murmuring gratitude to God for the privilege.

On the return journey, Rabbi Gold asked why Rav Kook was so moved, given that hundreds of trees were planted daily in the Land of Israel.

Rav Kook replied:

"When I held that sapling, I recalled the teaching of the Sages: At the beginning of Creation, the Holy One engaged in planting—'God planted a garden in Eden' (Bereishit 2:8). Likewise, when you enter the Land, you must first engage in planting (Vayikra 19:23).

At that moment, I felt as though I were clinging to the Shechinah." (Vayikra Rabbah 25:3; *Mo'adei HaRe'iyah*, pp. 222–223)

PRAYER AND ACTION

Rabbi Soloveitchik applied this principle to prayer itself. Each morning we recite blessings for sight, mobility, clothing, and sustenance. God does not require our praise; rather, these blessings sensitize us to the needs of others.



They call upon us to ensure that those who lack these necessities are cared for—by us.

In a similar vein, Rav Kook explains why the *Amidah* is recited silently, yet with moving lips. Silence reflects inward contemplation and humility before God. The movement of the lips symbolizes **action**. Meditation alone is insufficient; spiritual closeness must be actualized through concrete deeds (*Ain Ayah*, Berakhot 5:20).

THE CHAFETZ CHAIM: EIGHT EXPRESSIONS OF IMITATION

The Chafetz Chaim opens *Ahavat Chesed* by noting that the Torah commands us to emulate God **eight times**. The number eight often represents transcendence beyond the natural order—such as the eighth day of circumcision or the eight garments of the Kohen Gadol.

Through acts of kindness and the cultivation of divine *midot*, a person rises above the limitations of the natural world and touches a higher, sanctified realm.

The Chafetz Chaim adds that this principle pervades the entire Torah. A quintessential example is:

“You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Vayikra 19:2).

The Ohr HaChaim explains that *kedoshim tihyu* is written in a future, ongoing tense: **“You shall become holy.”** Holiness is not a static achievement but a lifelong process. Just

as God’s holiness is limitless, so too must our striving for sanctity have no upper bound.

LIFE LESSONS

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander summarizes this lofty ideal with practical wisdom (*Sifsei Chaim*, vol. 1, p. 205):

- Supporting another person emotionally
- Greeting others with warmth and kindness
- Thoughtfully seeking ways to benefit others

These seemingly small acts constitute **walking in God’s ways**—and through them, we achieve genuine closeness and *devekut* with Him. ■



Rabbi Goldscheider’s most recent OU Press Publication, “Torah United” on the weekly Parsha, can be ordered directly from Rabbi Goldscheider at aarong@ouisrael.org at a special price for Torah Tidbits readers.

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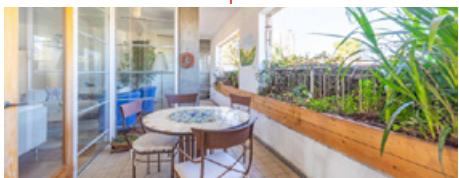
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Collecting Money for a Specific Medical Cause

לעילו נשמת
יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל ולצמן ז"ל

Question: Sometimes, when I hear about someone who needs expensive surgery or the like, I raise money for him directly from my contacts. What would I do with the money if, after collecting it, the person dies or the great expense ends up not being necessary?

Answer: A *mishna* (Shekalim 2:5) says that if money is raised to support a poor person or ransom a captive, any leftover money after the needs were taken care of goes to the person for whom the money was raised. There are multiple opinions of what to do with money remaining from what was raised for a funeral – to the inheritors; left untouched; to create a commemoration. The Yerushalmi (ad loc.) brings a *machloket* regarding money that was raised but turned out was not needed.

Among *Rishonim*, the Beit Yosef (Yoreh Deah 253) cites a *machloket* between the Rashba and Rosh regarding unspent money of *pidyon shvuyim*. The Rashba (Shut IV:55) says that if money was raised to ransom someone and he died before being ransomed, the money goes to his inheritors, based on the *mishna* above. The Rosh (Shut 32:6) addresses a case where the kidnapped woman decided not to return to the Jewish community. He ruled that since

the donors did not intend to donate money for such an occurrence, the money should return to them. He distinguishes between his case and the *mishna* – the *mishna* is when the money was primarily used as planned, in which case, donors do not seek any returns. In contrast, if the money turns out to not be needed, it is returned. The Shulchan Aruch (YD 253:7) cites both opinions, but prefers the Rosh. The Rama (ad loc.) and other *poskim* (see Shut Chatam Sofer II:237) also accept the Rosh.

Therefore, the general answer to your question is that if the need disappears, the money should be returned to the donors. However, cases can differ from each other. The Chevel Nachalato ((Epstein) II:37) refers to a case where the fundraising campaign focused on the dire financial situation of the family of the sick woman, so that there was logic to want the money to go to the family when she died pre-surgery. He justifies this due to a weaker assumption that people would want their money and also due to authority of *tzedaka* collectors, as we now explain. A public charity organization has the right to make decisions to change the intended recipient from that which the donors were informed of (Shulchan Aruch, YD 256:4). Therefore, Rav Epstein encouraged the charity fund to change the funds from medical to helping the impoverished family.

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It is not clear if you are fundraising independently for the family or funneling funds to and through an NPO. The latter has some technical and halachic advantages. First of all, donors who pass the tax threshold benefit from significant tax breaks through a qualified NPO. It also shields you from questions that could arise about how you handled the money. On the halachic end, we have seen that public charity *gabbaim* have the authority to make decisions about what to do with funds in cases like you raise. If someone specifically does not want that but wants the money back if the need changes, he could indeed use you with an explicit stipulation, which would work. On the other hand, some organizations (one should not generalize) take a percentage of the contributions earmarked for a person to cover overhead (which is legitimate), so raising and giving the money directly to the person in need can sometimes help him.

If you act independently, you should document the sources of the money carefully, for several reasons. The Rosh (above), while fundamentally advocating return to the donors in

cases like these, acknowledges that this is not always feasible, and suggests using the money for a project helping the masses or for a need of the same type. If you have already passed the money on, you have no responsibility to try to get it back. However, if you document at least sizable donations that are still in your control, you would owe to the people who trusted you to ask them what to do with the money that became unused for its intended purpose. ■

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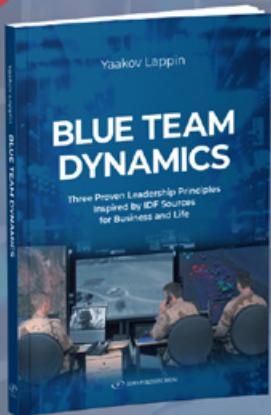
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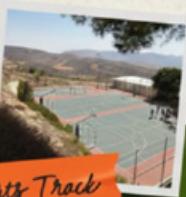
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Va'eira: Warmed by the Fire

This time of year affects me strongly. When the days are darker and colder, the world feels even more confusing and chaotic and it pushes me to search for comfort and warmth on a soul level.

In the parsha, Am Yisrael is suffering in Galus Mitzrayim, the paradigm for all Galus, including ours. By definition, Galus manifests as feelings of separateness, overwhelm, hopelessness and despair, G-d forbid.

Geulah is the realm of light, connection and hope, of feeling like an essential piece of the puzzle. Being fully seen. And loved.

For Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim, Geulah is just around the corner. Hashem has already appointed their Redeemer, Moshe Rabbeinu, at the Burning Bush. And, although there are more stages of growth to pass through, Redemption has already begun.

The Seforim HaKedoshim say that the Burning Bush was an aspect of Ohr HaGanuz, the transformational light from the beginning of Creation. The light, Chazal tell us, by which a person can “see from one end of the world to the other.” The light of clarity, connection and healing.

The Torah tells us that the fire in the burning bush was, בלבת אש as a blazing fire, and Rashi uses the term ליבו של אש to explain. This can be translated as “the heart of the fire,” but also as “his heart of fire.”

The Burning Bush essentially represents the

way that Hashem’s light can burn in our own hearts.

I love the image of Moshe Rabbeinu’s heart being set ablaze during this interaction with Hashem. This fire, the Ohr HaGanuz, penetrated his heart and enabled him to see Bnei Yisrael differently, with eyes of compassion and love. He internalized the fire and it accelerated his transformation to *Moshe Rabbeinu, Eved Hashem and Goel Yisrael*.

There is a spark of Moshe Rabbeinu in every Jew. Each of us has the potential to burn with love and dedication to Am Yisrael and to yearn with fiery passion for attachment to Our Creator. But how do we stoke the spark into a heart of fire?

The Zohar tells us that:

ובכל אמרך דלעאון באונייה כליליא, חד חוטא נפי
מיההא אור גני, ואחתמישיק על אינון דלעאון ביה

Whenever the Torah is studied by night, a little thread of Ohr HaGanuz is drawn down upon those studying.

“Night” is another name for Galus, a time of insecurity and darkness, and Torah is the light that guides us through. With our regular eyes it might look like the world is going off the rails. But the Ohr HaGanuz that shines through Torah and the words of the Tzadikim can penetrate our hearts and strengthen us to expand how we see the world and ourselves. In the loving light of the Ohr HaGanuz, we can glimpse the Infinite and connect ourselves to Eternity.

The awareness of what is possible increases its potency. If we open our hearts to it.

The Shpoler Zeide, R' Aryeh Leib of Shpoler, once said that when he was 3 years old, "the Baal Shem Tov placed his holy hand on my heart, and from that time onward, I have felt warm." (HaYom Yom 14 Teves)

May Hashem bless us to find the Seforim and teachers that warm our neshomos and empower us to look with deeper eyes, to seek the parts of Torah that ignite our hearts, and to grasp the threads of light that pull us towards Geulah. ■

Shoshana Judelman is passionate about learning and growing through Chassidus. She gives shiurim to women in many communities around Israel, including Efrat, Elazar, Raanana and Jerusalem as well as at Midreshet Rachel V'Chaya. Shoshana also guides groups at Yad Vashem and leads journeys to Poland and other countries around Europe for JRoots.

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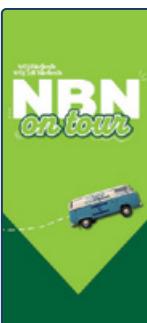


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When Silence Feels Scary: Helping Singles Relax on a First Date

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Yochi asks:

Aleeza, one of my candidates, is extremely anxious about awkward silences on a first date. She's afraid that if there's a quiet moment, it means something is wrong or that the date is failing. How can I help her feel calmer and more confident?

Aleeza answers:

This is a common fear, and she is totally justified in having this concern. First dates can feel like an emotional performance, especially when someone is already nervous and deeply wants things to work. Ironically silence can feel loud, but it's not nearly as dangerous as we imagine.

Let's start by reframing the silence. Think about music. There is a rest which is a beat

and is very important. It allows all the other sounds to be amplified. Quiet moments don't mean failure; sometimes they mean two people are simply settling into each other's presence. In fact, comfort with silence is often a sign of safety, not disconnection. Silence is simply a pause before what comes next.

You're not there to entertain or impress. You're there to notice how you feel with this person. Do you feel calmer over time? More yourself? Those answers often come through moments of pause or silence. Not via constant conversation.

Practically, you can help her prepare by shifting her mindset. Instead of thinking, "I need to keep this going," she can tell herself, "It's okay to pause. We're allowed to breathe." A sip of water, a smile, or a simple comment like, "I'm enjoying this," can gently reset the moment without pressure.

You can also remind her that silence is shared, it's not hers to carry alone. If there's a pause, it belongs to both people. And if the other person is comfortable, that's actually valuable information. We're not looking for constant conversation. We're looking for connection and that often grows in the quiet moments.

I would also encourage her to remember that attraction and connection don't come from constant talking, they come from feeling seen



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and safe. Some of the strongest bonds are built when two people can simply be together, having moments where they look into the other's eyes, without rushing to fill the space. Silence allows authenticity to enter.

Most importantly, reassure her that her worth is not measured by how smooth the conversation feels. Dating is not just about finding someone, it's about building something. And building begins with presence, not performance.

Encourage her to trust that the right person won't be scared off by a moment of silence. The right person will sit in it with her, and maybe even feel at home there.

May she find comfort in the quiet moments and in confidence too.

Blessings,
Aleeza ■

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YOUR ANCESTORS MUST HAVE SEEN MANY OF PHAROAH'S SORCERERS PLAYING "FETCH" WITH THEIR DOGS...



...WHEN ALL OF A SUDDEN...



I'LL BET THAT TALES OF "FETCH-STICKS" TURNING TO CROCODILES HAVE BEEN PASSED FROM CAT TO KITTEN FOR GENERATIONS...

I'LL BET YOUR GREAT-GRANDAD WARNED YOU THAT IT'S SAFER TO SLEEP IN AN ACTIVE WASHING-MACHINE, LIKE YOU OFTEN DO - THAN TO TAMPER WITH SUSPICIOUSLY THROWN STICKS...



BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT MOST STICKS IN ISRAEL ARE SAFE!

STICKS ONLY ERUPT INTO CROCODILES IN EGYPT, BECAUSE IT'S ONE OF THE PROPHET'S SYMBOLS FOR EGYPT!



WHAT REMINDER? THAT A STICK OR A STAFF IS A SYMBOL OF LEADERSHIP!

AND AS G-D'S CHOSEN PEOPLE, WE, ISRAEL, SHOULD BE LEADING THE WORLD IN THE WAY OF THE CREATOR...



THAT'S WHAT SFAT EMET SAYS, ANYWAY...

BUT G-D WON'T LET "LEADERS" LIKE PHAROAH GET AWAY WITH IT...



SO DON'T WORRY, YOU CAN PLAY "FETCH" HERE, IT'S PERFECTLY SAFE!



MAYBE IT'S NOT SO STRAIGHTFORWARD TO PLAY THIS GAME AFTER ALL...



...YOU JUST CAN'T GET THE STAFF!





YACHAD



Learning from Aharon

This Dvar Torah was written by Akiva Whiteman, facilitator of Slice of Torah, Yachad's chevruta program at Yeshivat Ha-Kotel and Aharon Brand, Jerusalem Chapter participant.

I'm always struck by the same strong question every parshas Va'eira: Why doesn't Pharaoh learn his lesson when it comes to the plagues? Did it really take so many plagues to get him to send out the Jewish people? How stubborn can you be?

A similar question also bothered me last week. Why is Moshe Rabbeinu so hesitant to take Pharaoh head on and lead the Jewish people out of Egypt when its success is guaranteed by none other than God Himself? What was really going on in attempting to disagree with Hashem? What is really going on under the scenes with Moshe and Pharaoh?

Upon a closer look, the two problems that seem like opposites are one and the same. Moshe Rabbeinu, the gadol that he was, unfortunately suffered initially from an inflated sense of self-doubt, allowing the heart to take control of his head. Pharaoh suffered from an inflated sense of self-esteem. Both suffered from emotions that pulled them away from the right choice. However, there was someone that struck the sweet spot.

Enter Aharon. A leader of the Jewish people

for many years (see Rashi 4:13), the *older brother* of Moshe Rabbeinu now became his spokesperson, talking in front of Pharaoh and for all 10 plagues, who together are the tag team who in this parsha and for the rest of Chumash help the Jewish people through all their struggles.

Aharon was the perfect mix of both. Aharon put both his humility and pride to the side when it was time to, even submitting to his younger brother on Hashem's command. In fact, it may have been *critical* that the spokesperson of Moshe Rabbeinu was not just someone else, but *specifically* his older and more famous brother who would *step down* from his role for Moshe Rabbeinu to take it, to teach both Moshe Rabbeinu and Pharaoh a sharp lesson. Aharon taught Moshe Rabbeinu that *anavah* and *zerizus* are both important, but only within the framework of *ratzon Hashem*, and teaches Pharaoh that even the biggest leaders don't lead for themselves, but rather for a higher purpose.

We are constantly surrounded by opportunities to be calm and quiet or allow our pride to get to our heads even though deep down we know that the right choice is to simply do what Hashem wants. How will you be like Aharon, master your emotions and not just excel as a leader yourself, but bring others up around you and bring out their best? ■

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