

ב"ה Torah Tidbits

ISSUE 1645

JAN. 24TH 2026
ו' שבט תשפ"ו

פרשת בא
PARSHAT BO

How History Becomes Memory
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היום אתם יוצאים בחדש האביב
שמות י"ג:ד'

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT BO ZMANIM:
CANDLES 4:29 PM • HAVDALA 5:45 PM • RABBEINU TAM 6:23 PM



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A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOCH YERES
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

לא ראו איש את אחיו ולא קמו איש מתחתיו שלשׁת ימים (יב:כג)

"They did not see one another, nor rose any from his place for three days?" (10:23)
Why the need for the verse to describe that first one did not see the other and then they were immobilized?

Rashi points out that there were amongst the Israelites in that generation wicked people, and they did not want to leave Egypt. First, they were identified and then they died during these three days without their punishment being exposed to the Egyptians.

The Chidushei HaRim (Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter 1799-1866, First Admor of Gur Chassidut) explains deeper. Dreadful darkness transpires when one individual refuses to lend a hand to his neighbor in need. The consequence of ignoring the difficulties and challenges that one's friend experiences is that they themselves will not be able to proceed from their place or function. In this verse, describing the beginning of the plague, no one paid attention to the other, ignoring the other's distress which in hand led to where all Egyptians were refrained from total movement and immobilized.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

- 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 Heshy Engelsberg

I made Aliyah from Queens, New York 2 months after October 7th in 2023. I live in Center City Yerushalayim. I love traveling all around the country taking pictures of everywhere I go. This picture is from one of the caves at Beit Guvrin-Maresha National Park. I have a YouTube channel with over 240 videos of all over Eretz Yisroel which I share with friends back home giving them a virtual taste of our holy land. My channel is: www.YouTube.com/@gems_of_israel/videos.



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. 21 - 31 / 3 - 13 Sh'vat

Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	4:29	5:45	4:35	5:51
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	4:47	5:48	4:54	5:54
Beit Shemesh/RBS	4:48	5:46	4:54	5:52
Gush Etzion	4:45	5:45	4:52	5:51
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	4:45	5:46	4:52	5:52
Modiin/Chashmonaim	4:45	5:45	4:52	5:51
Netanya	4:45	5:45	4:51	5:51
Be'er Sheva	4:47	5:47	4:54	5:53
Rehovot	4:46	5:46	4:52	5:52
Petach Tikva	4:29	5:46	4:35	5:52
Ginot Shomron	4:44	5:45	4:51	5:51
Haifa / Zichron	4:33	5:44	4:40	5:50
Gush Shiloh	4:44	5:44	4:50	5:50
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	4:46	5:46	4:52	5:52
Givat Zeev	4:49	5:45	4:55	5:51
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	4:45	5:46	4:52	5:51
Ashkelon	4:47	5:48	4:54	5:53
Yad Binyamin	4:46	5:46	4:52	5:52
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	4:35	5:42	4:42	5:48
Golan	4:41	5:42	4:48	5:48
Nahariya/Maalot	4:42	5:43	4:49	5:50
Afula	4:43	5:43	4:49	5:49

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Bo - 6:23 PM • Beshalach - 6:29 PM

All Times According to MyZmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities;
40 mins in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat and Haifa)

Daf Yomi: Menachos 13



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Torah Tidbits and many of the projects of OU Israel are assisted by grants from THE JERUSALEM MUNICIPALITY

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RABBI AVI BERMAN
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There's a small social moment that I think about more often than I'd like to admit. Someone starts telling you a joke, and within the first few words you realize you've heard it before. So what do you do? Do you let them finish, smile, and "discover" the punchline again with them because you know it will make them feel good that they brought something fun to the conversation? Or do you cut it short with a quick, "Yes, yes, I know that one"?

A number of years ago, one of my sons came home and told me a joke that I'm sure many of you reading this have heard as well. A man comes to the rabbi and says, "Rabbi, I really, really want to be a Kohen." The rabbi tells him, "I'm sorry. I can't make you a Kohen." But the man keeps coming back. Again and again. He won't let it go. Eventually the rabbi says, "Tell me something. Why is it so important for you to be a Kohen?" And the man answers, "Because

my father was a Kohen. My grandfather was a Kohen. My great-grandfather was a Kohen. I also want to be a Kohen."

As a father who wanted to build up my child's confidence, I made sure to laugh. I made sure he felt great. I wanted him to feel like he had just told me something new, something funny, something that brought light into our home. But the joke stayed with me for a different reason. It made me think about Kohanim and the emotional connection that they have to their lineage and the unique mitzvot that they are commanded to fulfill. Just like Kohanim, Jews of all types develop emotions when we learn Torah. The way that we connect to Torah and mitzvot is often more personal than we realize.

It is natural that each of us connects to some mitzvot more than others. Whether because of our personalities, our values, or our life circumstances. With 613 mitzvot in the Torah, we are bound to have a stronger relationship to some over others. I think it makes sense that those who live in Eretz Yisrael feel a different connection to mitzvot related to the Land than someone who doesn't live here. It makes sense that Kohanim connect more to mitzvot involving Kohanim, Leviim to those involving Leviim. That emotional connection is important because it helps us pay particular attention to the mitzvot that speak most directly to our lives.

I remember a friend from elementary school who was a Kohen. There was a *chidon*, a contest, held annually for Kohanim at Yeshivat Ateret Kohanim, and he studied an entire book on the mitzvot related to the Kehunah in order to win. Even then, he felt connected

**May the Torah learning this week
be in loving memory of**
our twin brother
Moshe Leib ben Yosef Baer z"l
(Michael) on his 17th yarzheit
and our dear cousins
Matthew Meir Zalman
ben Godel Pesach Silverberg z"l
on his 12th yarzheit
and
Richard Reuvan ben Saul Tilis z"l
on his 3rd yarzheit
Sorely missed by many
Avraham & Malka Shrybman

as a Kohen to the *avodah* of the Beit HaMikdash and he wanted, just like so many other Kohanim, to understand it more and prepare for the upcoming Beit HaMikdash.

In this week's parsha, right as the Torah begins transitioning from the drama of the *makot* to the first mitzvot that will shape us as a nation, we encounter the mitzvah connected to firstborns, *pidyon haben*. And it is not random that it appears here. In the very shadow of *makat bechorot*, the Torah says, "*Kadesh li kol bechor*," "Sanctify for Me every firstborn", and ties it directly to *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and what Hashem did for us that night. The Torah then paints a scene that is so Jewish it almost feels like it could happen at your own Shabbat table: "V'hayah ki yishalcha bincha machar," when your child asks you tomorrow what this is all about, you answer with the story, "*b'chozek yad hotzianu Hashem miMitzrayim*." In other words, this mitzvah is built as a parent-child moment. It is not only about coins. It is about what we choose to remember and what we choose to prioritize inside a Jewish home.

One would think *pidyon haben* is very common, and therefore many people naturally connect to it, either because they are firstborn themselves or because they are parents of a firstborn. But actually, it's pretty rare. There are many halachic factors determining who has a *pidyon haben*. For example, if the father is a Kohen or Levi, they don't perform *pidyon haben* for a firstborn son. Same thing if the mother is the daughter of a Kohen or Levi. Likewise if the firstborn is a girl, or a boy born via C-section, or if there was a previous pregnancy that ended in miscarriage, there is no *pidyon haben*. I've heard a statistic that roughly five percent of Jewish people experience this mitzvah.



Taken at my *pidyon haben*, with Rabbi Baruch Taub and his son serving as the kohanim. Rabbi Taub is part of the OU Israel family today, sharing Torah through his shiurim.

Before my first grandson's *pidyon haben*, I was learning in chavruta with Rav Nachman Kahane. I mentioned to him the three-generation connection: I had a *pidyon haben*, my firstborn son had a *pidyon haben*, and his firstborn son was about to have this mitzvah performed with him as well. I realized that I was lucky to have such a strong bond with this mitzvah, more than most other people.

When I told this to Rav Nachman, he shared with me a beautiful idea about the ceremony, one which I always try to internalize. At one point during the *pidyon haben* ceremony, the Kohen looks at the father and asks the following Aramaic phrase: "*Mai ba'it tefei?*" What do you

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ה' זכרו ברוך

want more, the child or the money? At first glance, it seems like a ridiculous question. Why would a Kohen ask a father if he wants his money or his child? After nine months of pregnancy, preparing the baby's room, building a home, building a family, clearly they want the child. What kind of question is "*Mai ba'it tefei?*"

Rav Nachman explained that this is not a question we're supposed to answer only at the *pidyon haben* ceremony. It is a question we're supposed to ask ourselves every single day. It is a question that should guide us each time we're sitting in the office wondering: should I go home and spend time with my children, my spouse, my parents, my brothers and sisters, my nieces and nephews? Or should I stay for more meetings? The work-life balance is a question that we all experience and battle with. Every time we have to choose between professional obligations and being present with our loved ones, we are answering this question: "*Mai ba'it tefei?*"

Now obviously, when we are talking about making ends meet so that there's food on the table and the rent is paid, a person must do what they need to in order to support their family. But I'm sure I'm not the only one who reaches moments asking: should I attend this work event, or should I have dinner with my children? Should I stay in the office, or should I spend this time at home? Rav Nachman said it to me like this: there will be many times when the answer will be that work is necessary right now. But there will also be times when you'll decide, "*Mai ba'it tefei?*" what do I really want? I would rather be with my family.

Even when we ultimately decide that a particular work obligation is unavoidable, that an event will not happen without our presence, that people are depending on us, the very fact that we go through this thought process matters tremendously. When we are

constantly asking ourselves, "Where would I rather be right now?" and the answer is "with my family," even if circumstances require us to be elsewhere, there is tremendous value in that internal dialogue. We are keeping our priorities clear. We are recognizing what truly matters most.

I heard a similar idea recently in Parshat Shemot. Moshe finally agrees to go down to Mitzrayim, and he stops at a lodging with his family. The Torah describes a frightening moment until Tzippora performs a *brit milah* and saves their son. Chazal understand that Moshe was held accountable for delaying the *brit milah*. Whatever the exact *pshat*, the message lands with force: before Moshe Rabbeinu could lead a nation, he had to make sure his own home was in order. Family comes first. The most important leadership decisions begin with the priorities we set when no one is applauding.

This consciousness, this constant awareness of "*Mai ba'it tefei?*" is what enables us to think about how we can spend more time with our children, our spouse, our parents, our loved ones. It is essentially about setting priorities and keeping them straight, because it is very easy to fall into the trap of focusing on things that are less important. But when we maintain our *sechel yashar*, our clear thinking, directing us in the right direction, this is what will enable us to continue raising our families and our next generation with the proper love, attention, and support they need to, *be'ezrat Hashem*, become leaders and contributors to Klal Yisrael.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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The Curse and Blessing of a Hardened Heart

From the archives: Written as hostages still remained in captivity, Rabbi Hauer highlights the ability of the Jewish People to not take the path of least resistance of freeing unrepentant murderers, and instead stay the course for the goal of long-lasting peace in Israel.

Is a hardened heart a curse or a blessing?

In the end, as the Reich imploded ... the scientific side of the Final Solution broke down or was abandoned and ... merged into one insensate force: the desire, right up to the last possible moment, to kill any Jews who remained.... As the front collapsed, the SS made determined efforts to march columns of Jews away from it so they could be killed at leisure. The fanaticism with which they clung to their duties as mass murderers long after the Third Reich was irretrievably

doomed is one of the gruesome curiosities of human history. (Paul Johnson, History of the Jews p 512)

It was not only the Nazis whose fanatical hatred of the Jews persisted to the point of self-destruction. We sense the same in the diabolical evil of Hamas and their many Palestinian supporters who continue to celebrate their monstrous attacks on Israel despite the destruction it has brought upon them by their own design. And it all may originate in what we read in the Torah (Shemot 7:3, etc.) about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart that led him to continue his enslavement and persecution of the Jews to the point where his own people beseeched him to let the Jews go, saying, (Shemot 10:7) "Do you not yet realize that Egypt is being destroyed?!"

Seen this way, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart was not a one-time mind game played by G-d on the wicked Pharaoh, but a salient and harsh feature of the Jewish historical experience throughout the generations (ma'aseh avot siman l'banim), a pattern we find in the pathological antisemitism we repeatedly encounter.

While the notion of a pathological hatred of the Jews gives us a framework to understand the biblical story of Pharaoh, we nevertheless need to understand Hashem's role in breeding this hatred. The Torah regularly describes this

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hardening as G-d's doing, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart," raising the philosophical problem that if G-d had removed from Pharaoh the freedom to choose otherwise, how could Pharaoh be culpable for decisions that were not his to make? Many explained that Pharaoh was liable as it was he alone who had originally chosen the path of hatred that he then became locked into, punished as it were with a loss of free will to choose a better path (see Rashi and Ramban to Shemot 7:3, Rambam Hilchot Teshuva 6:3).

Rav Ovadya Sforno (Shemot 7:3; see also Ramban there) offered another interpretation that has its own painful resonance in current events. He suggests that in fact Pharaoh was not precluded from making a truly better choice and breaking free from the spiral of hatred, and that the hardening of his heart was what preserved his ability to make that choice. The hardening was a divine boost of fortitude to stubbornly withstand the pressure campaign of the plagues and not simply release the Jews as the path of least resistance, the easy way out. To reach the end goal of Egypt knowing Hashem, Pharaoh needed to hold out until he and they would finally encounter Hashem himself passing through Egypt on the night of the Exodus. Had Pharaoh's heart not been hardened, the campaign would have ended earlier, and that goal would never have been achieved.

In this light, hardening of the heart may be a blessing worth seeking as it may be vital to our own future. Klal Yisrael can easily buckle under the painful pressures it has been subject to through almost 500 days of cruel imprisonment and conflict. The path of least resistance would move Israel to immediately do whatever it takes to end the conflict and bring the hostages and its soldiers home, even if it entails freeing horrific and unrepentant murderers and ending the war before having achieved essential goals.

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As that is the case, we would benefit from the kindness G-d extended to Pharaoh, that He harden our hearts, not heaven forbid by making us callous to anyone's suffering, but by giving us the fortitude and determination to stay the course if and as necessary and make the choices that will yield a more completely and continuously peaceful future, impacting generations. ■

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Each week we will share one of OU Israel's impactful programs helping English speaking *olim* with their *klita* and impacting Israeli society.



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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PARSHAT BO

The 8th and 9th plagues occur. Before the 10th, death of the first born, the mitzvot of Korban Pesach and of Matza are given. The first-born die. The Jews are sent out of Egypt. Mitzvot are given to commemorate the momentous event of the Exodus from Egypt.



1ST ALIYA (10:1-11)

The eighth plague: locusts. Moshe and Aharon come to Paro: locusts will swarm, eating all vegetation left from the hail. They leave. Paro's advisors warn him that Egypt is heading to destruction. Moshe and Aharon are brought back. Paro says: go and serve your G-d. Who is going? Moshe replies: young, old, men, women, animals. Paro refuses: only men. And sends them out.

The plagues have patterns.

One pattern in these last plagues seems to be a reversal of creation. The order of creation was: day 1, light. Day 2, heavens. Day 3, land and vegetation. These last plagues reverse that pattern: plague 8, locusts eat and destroy the

vegetation. They swarm from the sky. Plague 9, darkness, no light. As if the world of Egypt is unraveling back to chaos.



2ND ALIYA (10:12-23)

The east wind brings in the locusts. They darken the earth, eating all vegetation. Paro quickly calls Moshe and Aharon: I have sinned to G-d your G-d. Pray to remove this death from me. Moshe does. The wind brings the locusts back to the sea. Paro does not send the people out. The 9th plague: 3 days of darkness. There is light for the Jews.

You can't help but think of Creation for the plague of darkness. "Let there be light" of Creation is in contrast to darkness. The lights are being turned out in Egypt.

There are more patterns to the plagues.

The plagues rise – from water (blood, frogs), to land (wild animals and their death) and to the sky (hail, locusts, darkness). As if to say: He rules over all.

And though the ultimate plague is death of the first born, all the plagues involve death. The water turns to blood and all the fish die, creating a putrid smell. The frogs all die, again with a horrible smell. The animals are smitten with a plague and die. The hail kills all who are in the field, man, animal and vegetation. And the locusts consume all that remains in the field of the vegetation.

The plagues bring death to living things in the water, living beings on the land and vegetation. The only thing left is humans and the death of the first born.

And, the plagues are educational. They are to teach fundamental principles of belief in G-d.

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Moshe states that to Paro in plagues 1, 4, and 7. Plague 1: that you may know that I am G-d. Plague 4: that you may know I am G-d in the midst of the land. Plague 7: that you may know that there is none as I.

These are the 3 core ideas of belief in G-d that we say in the Shema – there is a G-d, He is ours (connected to this world) and He is One.



3RD ALIYA (10:24-11:3)

Paro calls Moshe: Go serve G-d, even your babies. Just leave the animals behind. Moshe replies: we need to take them – we don't know what to offer until we get there. Paro: don't ever see me again or you will die. G-d tells Moshe that after the next plague they will go free. And the Egyptians will equip the people with gold and silver.

The promise that the Egyptians will give gold and silver is the fulfillment of what Avraham was told; your children will be afflicted in a foreign land and will leave with great wealth.



4TH ALIYA (11:4-12:20)

Moshe tells Paro of the impending plague of the first-born. Your people will plead with us to leave. Moshe leaves angrily. G-d tells him that Paro will not listen. Moshe and Aharon are given the instructions for the Korban Pesach: on the 10th of the month take a lamb for the family, guard it until the 14th, the entire Jewish people shall offer it, consume it at night roasted with Matza and Maror, with your staff in your hand, shoes on your feet. Meanwhile I will smite all first born at midnight. This day and its celebration will be marked eternally. 7 days eat Matza; no chametz shall be eaten for 7 days.

Moshe instructs the people to make a seder in Egypt before they leave.

He instructs them to bring the Pesach offering broiled on an open fire. It may not be cooked in water or in the oven – it must be dry cooked,

broiled. Why must it be roasted on an open fire?

I don't know, I speculate, but, well, you can't hide the smell of a barbecue. The whole neighborhood enjoys it. The Jews are commanded to celebrate, unashamed, on full display, burning what is sacred to the Egyptians, right in their faces – *before* they go free!

With Matza. I know why we eat Matza; to remember the haste of the redemption. But the people are told to eat Matza *before* they leave. They are waiting to leave. And having a seder. With Matza.

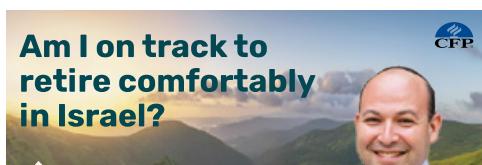
The seder on the night of the exodus seems to be an anti-Egypt dinner. Animals are sacred to Egypt – we roast one, with everyone in the neighborhood smelling it. And bread that rises is a proud Egyptian development. All bread in these parts of the world is flatbread – pitas, laffa. Bread in fancy bread molds is Egyptian.

The seder night in Egypt is a finger in the eye of Egypt. Your sacred animals? We'll roast them. And your fancy Egyptian bread? Not impressed – we'll have Matza.



5TH ALIYA (12:21-28)

Moshe instructs the people in the Pesach offering, including marking their doors with its blood. You are not to leave your home on that night. This holiday will be observed forever; when you get to the Land, observe it. Your children will ask you why; tell



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them because G-d passed over our homes. The people hearing these instructions bow and go and do exactly as G-d commanded Moshe and Aharon.

Imagine the faith necessary to follow these instructions. Ok, G-d has promised that the first-born Egyptians will be smitten on the 15th at midnight. And with that, we will go free. But you Jews, you have to opt in. You have to mark your home. I am a Jew.

The Pesach seder in Egypt was a statement: I am a Jew.

And Moshe, in Egypt, before the Exodus is already planning for the future, that children will ask you in years to come why we are doing this.

The commandment to observe this for all generations is one of the great educational successes of human history. To this day, the seder is the moment when we declare ourselves as Jews, part of Jewish history. And remains one of the most observed holidays. A profound statement of belonging to our people.

6TH ALIYA (12:29-51)

At midnight, all the first-born in Egypt died. Paro calls Moshe and Aharon and orders them to leave to serve G-d. Quickly, so all of Egypt is not smitten. 600,000 adult men were amongst the Jews who left Egypt. The dough was baked as Matza as they could not wait for it to rise. The sojourn in Egypt was 430 years. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the rules of the Pesach offering: only circumcised slaves, not employees, the whole people, don't take it out of the home, one rule for all the people.

The Exodus happens. Paro orders the Jewish people to leave. Immediately.

What an ironic juxtaposition. They left in a hurry. After 430 years. It took an awfully long time to get there. And then it happened in a

flash.

The Exodus from Egypt is a core belief: that G-d shapes Jewish history, with a Yad Chazaka and an outstretched arm. There is no other theme of Jewish life that is repeated as often in our prayers and in a plethora of mitzvot. That G-d took us out of Egypt.

And that is because G-d working in history is a core belief. And a difficult thing to see.

G-d's Hand in history is just hard to see. We live in a foggy world, where ebbs and flows of our history seem random. Our 2,000 years of exile was a time where the belief in a G-d active in our history was, well, was very difficult. Challenging. Culminating in the darkest eclipse of them all in the Shoah. G-d's Hand in history has too often, in fact most often, been obscured from our view. Where is He leading us, how is He guiding us?

But for us it is different. We, the privileged generation, oh, how privileged, we, who have returned to our Land, we are truly privileged; because when we read of His Yad Hachazaka and His Zroa Netuya, His strong hand and Outstretched Arm – well, we know what that is. We see it. We ourselves are a part of His Guiding Hand. We can give a nod, yes, affirm, that He does guide our people, does intervene in our history. For us, He has made it easier.

7TH ALIYA (13:1-16)

G-d commands: all first-born people and animals of the Jewish people shall be holy to Me. Moshe tells the people: remember this day, for on it, G-d took you out of slavery with a strong Hand. When you come to the Land of Israel, observe this: eat matza for 7 days, rid the house of chametz, tell your children that it is for this that G-d took us out of Egypt. And bind them as a sign on your arm and remembrance between your eyes. Every first-born animal is a dedicated offering. When

your child asks what is this?, tell them that G-d took us out of Egypt. Bind this as a sign on your hand and a guide between your eyes, as G-d took us out with a strong hand.

Now, the entire Torah changes. From narrative to mitzvot. There will be some more stories but the entire rest of the Torah is mitzvot.

The narrative up until here is to create the relationship. I, Creator, Promisor, Redeemer. You, created, recipient, indebted.

We now are a people not just of faith in the promises, not just a people with a unique bond with our Creator, but a people commanded. With Mitzvot.

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THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, EMERITUS

“Flow”

Sometimes we feel inspired. We may be working hard, but we don't seem to mind, because we love the work we are doing and believe in it.

Our objectives are based on our heartfelt convictions, and our labors are consistent with our deepest attitudes. No task feels onerous, because time flies by and we have a constant feeling of accomplishment.

This sense that everything is just right and the ability to do all that is expected of us effectively and enjoyably is called “flow” by some psychologists. One such psychologist, Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi, has written a book entitled *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, where he reports his research on this vital feeling of how the work we do conforms with our innermost beliefs and highest principles.

Other times, however, there is also a very different manner in which we work. We feel unhappy with our jobs not merely because they are difficult, boring, or stressful, but because

we don't really want to be doing what we are required to do. We perform out of a sense of obedience and duty, but we would rather that someone else take up our task.

In this instance, we often do not feel competent to perform our labors. We are certain that there are others much more capable than we are who could do much better. We feel unworthy and uncertain of our success.

In reading the recent Torah portions, this week's (*Bo*) and last week's (*Va'era*), we encounter one man, Moses, working very hard at some complex and almost impossible tasks: leading the Jewish people and challenging Pharaoh to free them.

I often ask myself about Moses' inner experience while carrying out his mission. Are his feelings like the first set of emotions described above? Does he feel inspired, happy, eager? Does he experience this sense of “flow”? Or does he find himself reluctant, uncomfortable, and perhaps even feel awkward, at least at times?

Does he experience thrill in his comings and goings into Pharaoh's royal court? Is he excited by the words he finds to challenge Pharaoh and to debate with him? Or does he approach these experiences with trepidation and suffer in agony as each successive attempt to free his people is disturbed?

There is a transition, in this week's Torah readings, in Moses' role. Moses' initial role is being an advocate for freedom, but by the end of the *Parsha*, he becomes a law giver and teacher as well. And his role further expands to that of master of logistics and desert travel

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guide as he prepares his people for their journey and embarks upon it.

Is Moses in “flow?” Or is he struggling inwardly with reluctance, resistance, and perhaps even resentment?

The answer lies in Moses’ initial reaction to his assignment, in his ongoing expressions throughout his life, in his disappointments with his people, and in his willingness to shed his leadership role.

Initially, he asks God to send another in his stead. He insists that his handicaps disqualify him from God’s mission. He does not trust his people to respond to him, and he is certain that Pharaoh will mock him. He never, even at the end of his life, seems comfortable with his many tasks.

What, then, motivates Moses to stand before Pharaoh, suffer his taunts, threaten him repeatedly, and teach his people lessons which they often do not wish to hear?

What motivates him is his sense of duty, his commitment to a life of responsibility. He models for us, for all of us, a life of obedience to a higher authority. He teaches us that we each have a vocation, a mission, a part to play in life’s drama.

More importantly, he teaches us that our tasks will often be frustrating and painful. We may not experience “flow.” Our careers may not go smoothly and may not bring us gratification. But we will, nevertheless, prevail if we recognize the truth of our calling and respond dutifully and faithfully, even if it doesn’t “feel good.”

Obedience is a major value in Judaism. It may not be trendy these days, but it was certainly the hallmark of the life of Moses, and we are all challenged to emulate him in our own lives. ■

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May the learning of these Divrei Torah be for the soul of Nachshon ben Yaakov Zvi ben David Arieh zt"l

לעילו נשמה של

פנחים בן יעקב אשר וגולדה בת ישראל דוד איזע"ה ועזריאל בן אריה ליב ומעניה בת יצחק שרטער ע"ה

Freedom's Defence

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

It was the moment for which they had been waiting for more than two hundred years. The Israelites, slaves in Egypt, were about to go free. Ten plagues had struck the country. The people were the first to understand; Pharaoh was the last. God was on the side of freedom and human dignity. You cannot build a nation, however strong your police and army, by enslaving some for the benefit of others. History will turn against you, as it has against every tyranny known to humankind.

And now the time had arrived. The Israelites were on the brink of their release. Moses, their leader, gathered them together and prepared to address them. What would he speak about at this fateful juncture, the birth of a people? He could have spoken about many things. He might have talked about liberty, the breaking of their chains, and the end of slavery. He might have talked about the destination to which they were about to travel, the "land flowing with milk and honey". Or he might

have chosen a more sombre theme: the journey that lay ahead, the dangers they would face: what Nelson Mandela called "the long walk to freedom". Any one of these would have been the speech of a great leader sensing an historic moment in the destiny of Israel.

Moses did none of these things. Instead he spoke about children, and the distant future, and the duty to pass on memory to generations yet unborn. Three times in this week's *sedra* he turns to the theme:

And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' you shall say... (*Ex. 12:26-27*)

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

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

About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators. That is what made Moses not just a great leader, but a unique one. What the Torah is teaching is that freedom is won not on the battlefield, nor in the political arena, nor in the courts, national or international, but in the human imagination and will. To defend a country, you need an army. But to defend a free society, you need schools. You need families

and an educational system in which ideals are passed on from one generation to the next, and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. So Jews became the people whose passion was education, whose citadels were schools and whose heroes were teachers.

The result was that by the time the Second Temple was destroyed, Jews had constructed the world's first system of universal compulsory education, paid for by public funds:

Remember for good the man Joshua ben Gamla, because were it not for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. At first a child was taught by a father, and as a result orphans were left uneducated. It was then resolved that teachers of children should be appointed in Jerusalem, and a father (who lived outside the city) would bring his child there and have him taught, but the orphan was still left without tuition. Then it was resolved to appoint teachers in each district, and boys of the age of sixteen and seventeen were placed under them; but whenever the teacher was angry with a pupil, he would rebel and leave. Finally, Joshua ben Gamla came and instituted that teachers be appointed in every province and every city, and children from the age of six or seven were placed under their charge. (*Baba Batra 21a*)

By contrast, England did not institute universal compulsory education until 1870. The seriousness the Sages attached to education can be measured by the following two passages:

If a city has made no provision for the education of the young, its inhabitants are placed under a ban, until teachers have been engaged. If they persistently neglect this duty, the city is excommunicated, for the world only survives by the merit of the breath of schoolchildren. (*Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah 2:1*)

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towns of Israel to establish teachers in every place. They came to a town where there were no teachers. They said to the inhabitants, "Bring us the defenders of the town." They brought them the military guard. The rabbis said, "These are not the protectors of the town but its destroyers." "Who then are the protectors?" asked the inhabitants. They answered, "The teachers." (*Yerushalmi Haggigah 1:6*)

No other faith has attached a higher value to study. None has given it a higher position in the scale of communal priorities. From the very outset, Israel knew that freedom cannot be created by legislation, nor can it be sustained by political structures alone. As the American justice Judge Learned Hand put it: "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it." That is the truth epitomised in a remarkable exegesis given by the Sages. They based it on the following verse about the Tablets that Moses received at Sinai:

The Tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the Tablets. (*Ex. 32:16*)

They reinterpreted it as follows:

Read not *charut*, engraved, but *cherut*, freedom, for there is none so free as one who occupies himself with the study of Torah. (*Mishnah Avot 6:2*)

What they meant was that if the law is engraved on the hearts of the people, it does not need to be enforced by police. True freedom – *cherut* – is the ability to control oneself without having to be controlled by others. Without voluntarily accepting a code of moral and ethical restraints, liberty becomes license and society itself a battleground of warring instincts and desires.

This idea, fateful in its implications, was first articulated by Moses in this week's *sedra*, in his

words to the assembled Israelites. He was telling them that freedom is more than a moment of political triumph. It is a constant endeavour, throughout the ages, to teach those who come after us the battles our ancestors fought, and why; so that my freedom is never sacrificed to yours, or purchased at the cost of someone else's. That is why, to this day, on Passover we eat *matza*, the unleavened bread of affliction, and taste *maror*, the bitter herbs of slavery, to remember the sharp taste of affliction and never be tempted to afflict others.

The oldest and most tragic phenomenon in history is that empires, which once bestrode the narrow world like a colossus, eventually decline and disappear. Freedom becomes individualism ("each doing what was right in his own eyes", Judges 21:25), individualism becomes chaos, chaos becomes the search for order, and the search for order becomes a new tyranny imposing its will with the use of force. What, thanks to Torah, Jews never forgot is that freedom is a never-ending effort of education in which parents, teachers, homes, and schools are all partners in the dialogue between the generations.

Learning - *Talmud Torah* - is the very foundation of Judaism, the guardian of our heritage and hope. That is why, when tradition conferred on Moses the greatest honour, it did not call him 'our hero', 'our prophet' or 'our king'. It called him, simply, *Moshe Rabbeinu*, Moses our teacher. For it is in the arena of education that the battle for the good society is lost or won. ■

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Two Parashot; Two Goals; Two Haftarot

Although the two parashot of Va'era and Bo recount the story of the ten plagues for us, Chazal separated the narrative by including the first seven plagues in Parashat Va'era and leaving the details of the final three punishments for Parashat Bo. As a youngster, I always felt a bit “frustrated” to have the culmination of the exciting “adventure”, the depiction of Israel’s release from slavery, delayed until the next Shabbat. Understandably, I assumed (at that time), that such a division would create a far-too-lengthy parasha or one that was far-too-concise. Not surprisingly, I was wrong.

In actuality, each of these two Torah portions, though similar, have separate goals, for, although they are both centered around the plagues, the **purpose** of each separate set of makkot differ from each other. As I mentioned in last week’s article, Parashat Va’era includes

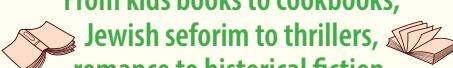
those plagues whose primary objective was to impress upon Par’oh and his nation God’s absolute sovereignty and unequaled power – clearly reflected in the repetitive phrase that accompanies the plagues: “so that they know that I am G-d”.

Rav Moshe Lichtenstein enlightens us by revealing how, upon reading the last makkah of Parashat Va’era (the plague of ‘barad’, hail), we sense a change in the Pharaoh’s attitude. For the first time, Par’oh reacts to a plague with the words: “Chatati hapa’am;” “I have sinned this time;” Hashem Hatzaddik, va’ani v’ammi har’sha’im”, “G-d is the righteous One, while I and my nation are the guilty ones.” And this change in attitude leads to Hashem’s ‘adjustment’ to the purpose of the plagues in Parashat Bo, which were meant to punish the Egyptians for their cruelty to B’nai Yisrael.

As the two parashot differ in their ultimate goals, so too, the two haftarot readings, though reacting to the very same historical event in their time, differ in the prophecies of the two contemporary nevi’im, Yechezkel and Yirmiyahu. Yechezkel’s nevu’ah that follows Parashat Va’era, centers on G-d’s anger toward the Pharaoh and his boast of being a god and the creator of the Nile, the life-source of Egypt. His denial of the omnipotence of the One Creator and the One Sovereign reflected the

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very sin of Par'oh that we read in the parasha. For that reason, the punishment prophesied by Yechezkel includes the removal of Egypt's life-source, predicting a serious impact on the population through Hashem's strike upon the Nile itself and their eventual banishment from the Nile and into the wilderness.

Rav Lichtenstein explains that Yirmiyahu's nevu'ah that we read in the haftarah of Parashat Bo [perek 46], echoes the purpose of the three final plagues depicted in the parasha, i.e. to punish Mitzrayim for the heartless behavior of the Pharaoh and his nation. Reflecting the theme of the parsha, Yirmiyahu prophesies of punishments for the **inhumanity** of Egypt-not for her denial of G-d. Just as their behavior toward the Israelites in Egypt was deplorable, so too, was their behavior toward the Jews in Judea in the time of Yirmiyahu and Yechezkel. The treachery of the Pharaoh in abandoning his alliance with Judah in order to avoid his defeat in the hands of Bavel, would be punished by the weakening of his empire and the eventual fall to the Babylonian Empire. Yirmiyahu prophesies of an invasion of Mitzrayim from the North in which the enemy would drive out the Egyptian military, lay waste to her land and put Egypt to shame (see p'sukim 20-24).

Two haftarot sharing two nevu'ot from two nevi'im. Yet, each one echoes a divine message for past, present and future. ■

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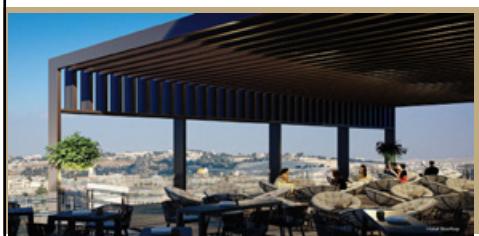
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Freedom and Self-Restraint

One of the mitzvot given only to the generation that experienced the Exodus was the command to place the blood of the Korban Pesach on the doorposts. Immediately afterward, the Torah adds:

וְאַתֶּם לَا תַצְאוּ אַשְׁר מִפְתְּחַת-בַּיִתְךָ עַד בָּקָר

“...None of you may go out of the entrance of your house until morning.” (Shemot 12:22)

Why were Bnei Yisrael forbidden from leaving their homes that night? One might suggest a practical reason — to avoid the “peripheral danger” of the plague of the firstborn. But Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (Masoret HaRav) offers a far deeper insight.

The Rav explains that the transition from slavery to freedom is a spiritually volatile moment. Freedom does not grant license to abandon morality; rather, it demands an elevation of morality. The very masters who had humiliated, tortured, and broken the slaves were suddenly helpless before them. The natural reaction of a newly freed slave — whose children were murdered, whose dignity was



Rav Joseph B.
Soloveitchik zt"l

desecrated, whose body was beaten — is to erupt in vengeance.

History has seen such eruptions: the slave uprisings in ancient Rome, the German Peasants’ Revolt, the Cossack rebellions in Eastern Europe. Oppression boiled into bloodshed, and cruelty was repaid with cruelty.

Yet in Mitzrayim, at that moment of hysteria — וְתַהֲרֵתְךָ גָּדוֹלָה בְּמִצְרָיִם, “a great outcry filled Egypt” — something unprecedented happened. When the Jewish slaves finally had the opportunity to avenge a century of pain, there was no rioting, no smashing of store fronts, no violence, no retaliation.

Instead, the people stayed indoors by Divine command — not because they were hiding, but because they were rising. They were eating the Korban Pesach, singing Hallel, and preparing not only for physical liberation but for moral elevation. Their first act as free human beings was not revenge — it was **restraint, holiness, and gratitude**.

This was not just noble behavior; it was the beginning of the Jewish people’s unique moral identity. From that night on, it became part of our national DNA: We celebrate God’s salvation without sinking into cruelty. We defend ourselves without losing ourselves.

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The world often distorts the way the IDF defends the State of Israel, ignoring both the moral code we uphold and the restraint we exhibit. But we know the truth — that our army's very name, **Israel Defense Forces**, reflects a moral mission rooted in that night in Egypt. Just as our ancestors refused to allow suffering to warp their character, so too we must remain vigilant that our victories never compromise our values.

Freedom is not simply granted — it is shaped by the choices we make once we have it. That night in Mitzrayim, Hashem taught us that true freedom begins not with breaking chains, but with mastering the self. The greatest revolution of the Exodus was not the fall of Egypt; it was the rise of the Jewish soul.

Every generation faces its own Egypt, its own moments of fear, anger, and uncertainty — times when the call for vengeance or despair feels natural. Yet the Torah whispers the same timeless message: *Stay inside tonight. Hold onto your holiness. Become the kind of free person who will build a redeemed world.*

When we choose dignity over rage, conscience over impulse, and faith over fear, we walk the path our ancestors forged that very first night. We show the world — and remind ourselves — that Jewish freedom is not only a gift from Hashem, but a commitment to Him. May we have the strength to defend ourselves with courage and to uplift ourselves with restraint. ■



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Redemptive Realization

We have been given numerous mitzvot that direct us to remember *yetzi'at Mitzrayim*, our Exodus as a people from Egypt. Why is it so essential to recall this idea throughout our day? Is the Seder night, with its focus on retelling the story of the Exodus, not enough?

Ramban's answer to this question, found at the end of our *parashah*, has become a classic approach. *Yetzi'at Mitzrayim* was a fountain-head event, establishing our collective *emunah*,

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irrevocable faith, in Hashem. The miracles we experienced on a national scale embedded within all generations to come, the belief in the existence, power, and Divine Providence of Hashem. When we do mitzvot that remind us of the Exodus, we tap into this energy, reinforcing these beliefs in a practical way.

Another valuable message conveyed in remembering the Exodus is that we are a nation of royalty. *Am Yisrael* left Egypt during the day with our heads held high, not as fugitive leaving in the night. *Sefer Hachinuch* notes that this is one of the reasons we may not break any bones while eating the *korban Pesach*, as we want to proclaim our dignity as Hashem's chosen people. Rav Shmuel Rosovsky zt'l comments that mentioning *yetzi'at Mitzrayim* regularly allows this lesson to permeate our lives, motivating us to always act in a manner fitting of one who is part of a royal family. Remembering the events of leaving Egypt reminds us of the transformation that we made from slavery to freedom. In doing so, we assume the persona and demeanor of the King's children, regal and noble.

Rabbi Zev Leff observes that the command is to recall leaving **Egypt**, rather than leaving the land of Egypt. The name *Mitzrayim* indicates its very philosophy. Rabbi Shmuel Zucker points out that "Mitzrayim" is composed of two words, "meitzar" — restrictiveness, confinement and "yam" — the sea. Egyptian philosophy believed that everything follows an organic course and is limited to the confines of the natural world. Even the "yam," the ocean, has borders and is limited. In *Mitzrayim* there was no place for expansiveness or freedom, as Chazal relate that

no slave ever escaped the land of Egypt. The command to remember the Exodus, therefore, is a directive to view ourselves as not defined by the world of nature, statistics, or professional predictions. Rather we must firmly believe that Hashem is Master of all, directing and guiding every detail with precision. We must also realize that we each have more potential than we imagine and can break out of the confines of our perceived limitations.

An additional dimension of the injunction to remember *yetzi'at Mitzrayim* is based on an insight from the *Sefer Mitzvot Katan*. He remarks that included in the mitzvah of “*Anochi Hashem*,” to recognize that Hashem took us out of Egypt, is also the mitzvah to believe that Hashem will redeem us once again in the future and is the source for the mandate to yearn for *Mashiach*. Just as Hashem redeemed us from *Mitzrayim*, He will once again liberate us from our present *galut*. Thus, as we focus on recalling the Exodus, we must yearn and desire to be redeemed once again in the Final Redemption, speedily in our days. ■

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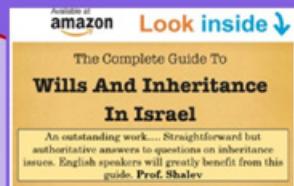
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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
DIRECTOR, TORAH INITIATIVES,
OU ISRAEL

Among the many important passages in our *Sedra* this week, we read the *pesukim* related to *Makat Choshech*- the plague of darkness.

The *Torah* tells us:

וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים נְטוּ יָדֶךָ עַל־הָעָם וְיִרְאֶה עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וְמֵשֶׁת חֹשֶׁךְ: וַיַּטְנוּ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יְדָוָו עַל־הַשְׁמִינִי וַיַּהַי חֹשֶׁךְ־אָפָלָה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: שְׁלֹשָׁת יְמִים לֹא־אָרַי אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו וְלֹא־קָנוּ אִישׁ מַתְחָרֶגֶת שְׁלֹשָׁת יְמִים וְלֹכֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִיא אָרֶן בְּמַוְשְׁבָתָם:

Then Hashem said to Moshe, “Hold out your arm toward the sky that there may be darkness upon the land of Egypt, a darkness so dense that it can be touched.” Moshe held out his arm toward the sky and thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days. People could not see one another, and for three days no one could get up from where he was; but the Jewish People had light in their dwellings...

The *Degel Machane Ephraim*, *Rebbe Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudilkov zy'a*, the grandson of the *Baal Shem Tov*, points out that our

meforshim explain that there was no physical difference between what physically was unfolding throughout *Mitzrayim* and what physically transpired within the Jewish homes. The actual darkness was equally dense throughout all of Egypt.

However, explains the *Degel Machane Ephraim*, what was different is that the Jewish people saw light, even within this intense utter darkness! What was the source of this heightened ability to see and perceive light even within total darkness? The *Rebbe* explains that since the Jewish people kept *Shabbat*, which is a source of light and spiritual clarity, the light of *Shabbat* remained with them, and sustained and protected them from the danger of the utter darkness that had descended upon all of Egypt.

Indeed, *Shabbat* is a source of great light and protection to the Jewish people, and has both identified, kept us together and sustained *Am Yisrael* throughout many periods of darkness, turmoil and tragedy.

The *Netivot Shalom*, the *Slonimer Rebbe zy'a*, explains:



Ohel Leah
SYNAGOGUE

“Shabbat is the source of light for all the days of the week. For on Shabbat a unique Divine light shines forth—a light of rest and of wholeness. One who merits to properly receive the light of Shabbat draws forth from it, illumination for all six days of the workweek.”

Similarly, the *gemara* in *Masechet Shabbat* (118b) presents to us the following passage about

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the inherent redemptive power of *Shabbat*:
אמר רבי יוחנן משום רב רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אמר אלמלי מישמוריין ישאל שטני שבתות כהלוותן – מיד נגאלים,

Rebbi Yochanan said in the name of Rebbi Shimon ben Yochai: If only the Jewish people would fully keep two Shabbatot they would immediately be redeemed.

How exactly are we to understand this teaching, does it mean any two *Shabbatot*, does it mean two successive *Shabbatot*, does it mean every single Jew must keep those two *Shabbatot*?

In a beautiful teaching, the *Piaszczna Rebbe, Rebbe Kalonymus Kalmish Schapira zy'a*, explained our *gemara*. The Rebbe taught the first *Shabbat* we must observe fully is *Shabbat* itself. The second *Shabbat* our Sages are speaking of, explained the Rebbe, is the *Shabbat* that we bring into the other seven days of the week. **If we are able to bring the light of *Shabbat* into our week, if we bring the *achdut* we experience on *Shabbat* into our week, if**

we bring the spiritual consciousness and closeness to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* that we feel on *Shabbat* into the rest of our week, then we can indeed redeem our entire week, experience a taste of *geula*.

Yehi Ratzon, during these days filled with so much darkness and confusion, may we merit to appreciate and be guided by the great light that sustains us, the great redemptive light of *Shabbat Kodesh*..... ■

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Meir Marcus a'h, zichronam livracha, parents of Judy & Menachem Marcus

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ברנה בת ברנדית ע"ה וויליאם קלמן ז"ל

RABBI GOLDSCHIDER'S WED. SHIUR

לע"ו נשמת ברנדי ג'ין וויליאם קלמן ז"ל
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**SUNDAY
JAN 25**

7:30 PM

Men's Safrut (The Bais)

Rabbi Tzvi Mauner

7 Hartum Street,

2nd Floor



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*The schedule is subject to change

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#THEOUIISRAEL

**MONDAY
JAN 26**

8:30 PM

The Bais (for Men) - Semichat

Chaver Program Rav Elyada

Goldwicht@ Bet Knesset

Ohel Yitzchak

Keren Hayesod St.

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

6:00-10:00PM

ATID Midrasha

7:00-9:00PM

Dorot Choir Session
with Hadassah Jacob

8:00-10:00PM

Pre Tu B'Shvat Event



**TUESDAY
JAN 27**

OU Israel is supported by the Jewish Federation of Broward County



COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN BAKAA

Classes @ Bet Knesset Nitzanim, 3 Asher Street, Bakaa

9:20 AM

Understanding Tefila

Rabbi Yossi Goldin

11:25 AM

From Text to Tachlis: Halacha in Action

Rabbi Jeremy Perlow (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 28**

COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN RECHAVIA

@ Bet Knesset HaNassi,
24 Ussishkin St., Rechavia

9:15AM

Holy Poetry
Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler

10:20 AM

Torah in its Natural Habitat:
Text, Tradition, and the Land
Rabbi Joel Kenigsberg
(Rabbi Manning will resume
Feb. 18)

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

Bat Mitzvah Chessed Event

**THURSDAY
JAN 29**

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

12:20 PM

Modern Masters
Rabbi Sam Shor

BET KNESSET OHEL YITZCHAK

@ Keren Hayesod Street

8:00 PM

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



NextGen Beit Shemesh: A Taste of Tu B'Shvat

Sunday, February 1
8:00PM

Kehillat Menorat
Hamaor
Nachal Maor 6

THE INNER TREE-
A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF
TU B'SHVAT
Effie Sussman

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Please note Rebbitzin Shira Smiles will not be giving her regular shiur.



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NextGen: A Taste of Tu B'Shvat



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Yud Shvat

Reb Zushe Wilmowsky, zy'a, the legendary chasid, tireless builder and activist was affectionately referred to by the Lubavitcher Rebbe as '*mein partisan*'. During the war Reb Zushe escaped a Nazi labor camp and joined the Bielsky brothers, and was renown for his his physical and spiritual strength, spirit of determination and persistence. After the war upon arriving in Eretz Yisrael, Reb Zushe dedicated his life to fulfilling the Rebbe's directives. He was one of the founders of Kfar Chabad as well as dozens of other schools and yeshivot, spearheading countless programs to teach Torah and spread Yidishkeit throughout the land.

This coming week is *Yud (the 10th of) Shvat*, the date which marks both the yahrtzeit of Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak, the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, as well as the date upon which his holy son-in-law and successor, Rebbe Menachem Mendel, formally accepted the mantle of leadership. In advance of *Yud Shevat* 1970, a plane load of chasidim from Eretz Yisrael — among

them Reb Zushe Partisan — embarked on a journey to spend the special day in Crown Heights together with the Rebbe.

The El Al flight was a twelve hour *farbren-gen*, filled with raucous holy energy, the joyful sounds of singing and chasidim eagerly offering the stewards and other staff members the opportunity to lay tefillin. One after another, the male staff participated in *mitzvas tefillin*, each time bringing the joyful singing and ruach to a higher pitch. At one point the cockpit opened and the captain poked his head out to see what was going on. Naturally, a couple of shluchim spotted him and asked if he'd like to lay tefillin as well.

The noise in the cabin dropped to hushed whispers, and the demure pilot hesitated, "To be honest with you, I'm not a *ma'min*, I don't really believe in all these traditions and *mitzvos*. How can I do something that I don't believe in?"

Rav Dovid Chanzin, a seasoned Chabad shaliach and Chief Rabbi of Petach Tikvah, then approached the pilot and began to explain with patience and passion, the fundamentals of Emunah. 'While it may seem at times that we are disconnected from Hashem, there lies a reservoir of faith inherited from our forefathers

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deep within! Although that faith may be covered up and hidden, there is no such thing as a Jew who does not believe! The holy act of laying tefillin helps to uncover the light and activate the essence of the Yiddishe Neshama..."

Deeply moved by the genuine love and insight shared by the rabbi, the captain glanced back for a moment at his co-pilot now steering the plane, and then slowly stretched out his arm to lay tefillin for the first time in his life. With great emotion and tears in his eyes, the captain mouthed the words of the Shema and then a silent prayer. The cabin erupted into wild singing and dancing in the aisles.

As soon as the captain finished and removed the tefillin, Reb Zushe made his way over to him. Swinging a bottle of *mashkeh* in his hand, his voice boomed, "Mazal Tov! My name is Zushe Partisan. I am now from Kfar Chabad and during the war I fought as a partisan in the Russian forests. My dear brother, you must know... all of this world, all our strength and accomplishments mean nothing! The whole world is *hevel havalim* - empty and meaningless, none of it real and lasting. If there is something true in the world, however, one thing that is forever: a Jew who lays tefillin. Everything else? *Ze Klum*, it is nothing! *Gurnisht*, nothing, topped with more nothing! Now, dear brother," he beamed, raising his bottle and producing a plastic cup, "your putting on tefillin calls for a celebration — let's make a *l'chaim*!"

While the captain respectfully passed on the vodka while on duty, Reb Zushe was all too happy to drink both of their *l'chaims*.

Our sedra this week culminates with the Mitzvah of Tefillin:

וְהִיא לְאוֹת עַל־יָדך וְלִתְזֹופֶת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ כִּי בְּתַזְקָה יָד
הוֹצִיאנוּ הָמִצְרִים:

"And it shall be a sign upon your arm, and

for *totafos* between your eyes, for with a strong hand Hashem removed us from Egypt." (13:16)

Midrash (Mechilta) extrapolates an important halacha regarding the sequence of laying tefillin on our arms and heads: As long as we are wearing *tefillin shel yad* on our arm, *tefillin shel rosh* must to be worn on our heads. Thus, first we put on the tefillin shel yad, followed by the tefillin shel rosh. When removing our tefillin, first we take off the tefillin from our head and then the tefillin from our arm. The sages of the Midrash draw this teaching from the defining moment in history when we stood at Har Sinai and declared *Na'aseh v'nishma*, "We will do and we will understand." The covenantal relationship with Hashem forged at Matan Torah is based on our acceptance of the commandments and commitment to fulfil them as obligations, regardless of whether or not we understand them intellectually.

The practice of Yiddishkeit is based on first doing and then seeking premise, purpose or reasoning. Action precedes the asking of questions and intellectual understandings. Therefore, we first lay tefillin on our hand and arm, to represent the world of action and fulfillment, and only afterwards do we don head tefillin to represent our intellect and understanding. The foundation of *Na'aseh* must be in place before we can build the tower of authentic *nishma*.

Few mitzvos represent our tradition and activate our Jewish identity and pride as does laying tefillin. The Gemara (*Brachos*, 30b) describes an episode in which R' Yirmiyah was "excessively joyful". When his peer R' Zeira inquired as to why, R' Yirmiyah replied with wonder: *Ana tefillin manachna*, "I have put on tefillin!"

When we fulfil our parsha's directive and merit to physically manifest this special 'sign' expressing our deep faith in Hashem's love and strength... how could we not want to make a *l'chaim*?



GEULAS YISRAEL

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

How History Becomes Memory

At the beginning of **Parashat Bo**, *Yetziat Mitzrayim* accelerates. Seven of the ten plagues have already struck Egypt, and Hashem prepares the final stage—the last three blows that will shatter Egypt and force Pharaoh to drive us from his land, just as Hashem promised: *b'yad chazakah yegarseim me'arto*.

These final plagues—hinted at in the gematria of נז (bet is two, alef is one)—deliver the decisive blow. They do not merely punish Egypt; they dismantle Pharaoh's sense of power and control.

When Hashem introduces these plagues to Moshe, He adds a striking instruction. These events are meant to become a story. The Jewish people are commanded to recount what happened in Egypt—the way Hashem confronted Pharaoh and revealed His power. This story must be told to children and grandchildren.

As redemption draws near, we become storytellers. The Exodus is not only an event to be

experienced, but a memory to be preserved and passed on.

SOCIETIES AND FAMILIES

This new national identity is important in part because we are told *who* will hear our story. We are commanded to tell it to our children and to our grandchildren. That command itself is already a vision of redemption. Slaves do not have family life. They are reduced to property, bought and sold at will. Wives could be taken from their husbands, children seized at birth and sold in open markets.

Chazal note that the plague of *arov* included wild animals brought from distant places. This was, in part, *middah k'neged middah*—a fitting response to the Egyptian practice of sending Jewish slaves to far-off and isolated locations for long stretches of labor. Men were kept away from their wives, ensuring that the population growth which so frightened Egypt would be curtailed. In such a world, the very ideas of family, children, and certainly grandchildren were unimaginable.

Redemption of a nation includes redemption of family life. A society is built upon the quiet foundations of the home, where values are absorbed naturally, without slogans or performance. When values are learned only in public arenas, they often become brittle and artificial. History has shown that societies which attempt to build themselves without the backbone of

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family life ultimately fail.

In recent history, the Soviet Union attempted to weaken family identity and redirect loyalty entirely toward the state. The result was a society that appeared powerful but proved fragile, and eventually collapsed. Western civilization, now grappling with sustained challenges to family structure, may be courting similar danger. Without stable family life, values are not transmitted, and societies lose resilience. What looks strong on the surface begins, quietly, to fracture.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

The night of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was a family event. The *korban Pesach* carries two unique halachot not found with other offerings, both of which ensure that it would be eaten within a family setting. First, the meat could be eaten only at night and had to be completed by morning. Rabbinically, the window became even narrower, with some opinions requiring it to be finished by midnight—leaving only a few short hours to consume an entire lamb.

Second, the meat could not be taken outside the house in which it was eaten. These two halachot, unique to the *korban Pesach*, effectively guaranteed that it would be shared by a family: enough people gathered together to finish the lamb on time, seated around a single table, remaining within one home.

Redemption from slavery meant redemption of family life. Being told that we would one day recount this story to our children and grandchildren planted that vision at the very outset of redemption. We would not remain slaves forever. We would become free, and we would one day build the kinds of families that slavery had denied us the ability to form.

The Holocaust also reshaped the structure and texture of Jewish family life. It produced a generation of survivors who, in many cases,

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were constrained—emotionally, physically, or financially—from raising large families. On a broader level, it drastically pruned the size of Jewish families as a whole.

Older readers may remember smaller *sedarim*, quieter tables marked by absence as much as by presence. Today, the large *sedarim*, crowded with extended families, stand as a quiet symbol of renewal. They reflect the slow regeneration of Jewish family life—something that could not fully emerge in the first two generations after the Holocaust, but has gradually returned as part of our collective healing.

UNDERSTANDING THE "MOMENT"

However, this message to Moshe—to ignite redemptive imagination—was also vital because it taught us to see ourselves as storytellers. Knowing that the events unfolding around us were larger than life allowed us to view them with proper gravity. These moments were not fleeting; they were becoming history. They would one day be told to future generations. Our children and grandchildren would ask—directly, or across time—what role we played in these history-shaping moments.



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At times, we fail to recognize the magnitude of our own story. We shrink back, rather than act with courage and vision.

Chazal comment that had Reuven fully understood that the Torah would record his attempt to save Yosef, his response would have been bolder and more decisive. Instead of merely pleading with his brothers not to kill Yosef and then disappearing—only to return and discover that Yosef had been sold—he would have acted differently. He would have carried Yosef back to Yaakov on his shoulders. Reuven did not realize that history hung in the balance, and so his response was hesitant rather than daring.

Recognizing that our moments are chapters in a larger story lends weight to our actions and calls for greater courage.

Every part of Jewish history is a single strand woven into the larger fabric of redemption. Redemption did not begin in 1948; it is a cumulative process built from every mitzvah, every moment of Torah study, and every act of chesed across two thousand years of exile. Still, there are moments when history accelerates. Over the past century, with the return of our people to their Land and the restoration of sovereignty, history has shifted into high gear.

Our children will one day ask what our role was during these seismic changes. How did we respond when new horizons opened before the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael? How did we face moments of darkness, and how did we carry ourselves through the shattering rupture

of October 7th?

The generation that left Egypt had an extraordinary story to tell. So do we.

MEMORY VS. HISTORY

Finally, we were not only told to become storytellers; we were instructed how to tell the story. At the end of the parashah, the Torah describes a future scene in which a child asks a parent about the rituals and practices of Pesach and *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. The Torah does not merely command us to answer. It provides the framework for our response. We are to say that Hashem took us out of Egypt with great strength, and that when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to listen, Hashem struck the firstborn of Egypt to break his intransigence. Evidently, it was not enough for Hashem to tell us to recount the story. He also wanted us to shape it carefully.

There are many ways to tell the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Yechezkel, in chapters 16 and 23, presents the image of a young woman who betrays the trust of her redeemer. Yechezkel chapter 20 offers a darker account still: a people commanded to abandon paganism and prepare themselves for redemption, yet stubbornly refusing to listen. Hashem becomes so angered that He considers abandoning redemption altogether, rescuing the people only to prevent a greater *chillul Hashem*.

Similarly, Tehillim—especially chapters 78 and 106—juxtaposes Hashem’s miracles and steadfast commitment with the people’s repeated rebellions, beginning already at the Yam Suf. Yet Sefer Shemot records none of these failures. It presents a cleaner, more luminous account of the Exodus—not to rewrite history, but to emphasize different elements of the story and to shape a very different narrative.

Hashem did not want our foundational story

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to be told in only one register. He wanted it told with intention, with selectivity, and with purpose—so that the memory we pass on would not only recall what happened, but would also form who we are meant to become.

The Torah reminds us that a story is memory, not history. What we choose to include—and what we leave out—shapes how events are remembered. Where we place emphasis, and where we remain silent, defines the contours of the story itself.

On the night of Pesach, we tell the story of the Exodus along carefully guided lines. We begin with the unflattering elements of our past—*matchil b'genut*—and conclude with uplift and gratitude—*umesayem b'shevach*. We follow a deliberate script rather than recounting every detail. We choose how the story is told.

Storytelling is not historical documentation. It is how we interpret events, how we process meaning, and how we construct a narrative that shapes identity and faith.

OUR STORY

We have just lived through a complicated period—years marked by triumph alongside heartbreak, victories shadowed by enduring challenges. Moments of national strength were coupled with profound strain on the State of Israel and on Jewish communities abroad. All this unfolded while many of us continue to carry the weight of war and the lingering toll of trauma. How we choose to frame these years will shape how they are remembered and how future generations understand them.

That framing must be nuanced. It should include what truly matters and leave aside what is secondary, including much of the political noise—both domestic and geopolitical. Leaders and actors will come and go; their names will fade. The central figures of the story are the quiet people who showed up, who fought for



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our people, who sustained the struggle, and who carried one another through it.

The story must recognize the great miracles we witnessed, without erasing pain or simplifying complexity. It must include the powerful reawakening of Jewish identity across the world, alongside the dark resurgence of aggressive antisemitism that this conflict unleashed.

Above all, it must reflect the gentle presence of Hashem—felt in moments of darkness as well as light.

That ancient instruction echoes across the generations. We are living through history, and we will be the storytellers for those who come after us. ■



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TOWARDS MEANINGFUL PARENTING

REBBETZIN ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI
DIRECTOR OF OU ISRAEL WOMEN'S DIVISION

Sanctifying Our Time: Parenting Lessons from Parshat Bo

In Parshat Bo, we learn that the very first mitzvah given to Bnei Yisrael as a nation was “הַחְדֵשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם רَאשׁ חֶדֶשׁ” — the commandment of Rosh Chodesh. **Rashi** explains that Hashem showed Moshe the moon in its renewal and said, “*When it looks like this, you shall declare the new month.*” This moment

marked the first time the Jewish people were given control over their own calendar — and, symbolically, over their own time.

Rav Soloveitchik (Reflections of the Rav p.201-202) points out that it is no coincidence that this was the very first mitzvah given to the newly freed nation. He writes as follows -

“Time-awareness is the singular faculty of the free man, who can use it or abuse it. To a slave, it is a curse or a matter of indifference. It is not an instrument which he can harness to his purposes. The free man wants time to move slowly because, presumably, it is being employed for his purposes”.

A slave's days are not his own — every hour is dictated by someone else. But a free person can choose how to spend his time, and with that comes responsibility: to use time well and to ensure that his days have meaning.

As parents, we often experience this tension. We sometimes feel like our time isn't our own — swallowed by endless cycles of meals, laundry, carpools, and bedtime routines. Yet, in truth, *this* is our sacred opportunity to sanctify time. Every interaction, every bedtime story, every small act of patience or love is a chance to elevate the hours of our day.

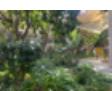
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come to mind: “אם אין אני לי, מי לי? וכשאני: “לעצמי, מה אני? ואם לא עכשי, אימת? The balance between caring for others and caring for ourselves is one that every parent feels deeply. *“If I am not for myself, who will be for me?”* reminds us that we must also nurture our own growth — to learn, to rest, to reconnect to Hashem and to ourselves. But the final phrase — *“If not now, when?”* — brings us back to the urgency of the present moment. These years of parenting, though often exhausting, are precious and fleeting.

If one calculates it, there are roughly 940 Shabbatot between a child's birth and the day he leaves home. It sounds like a lot — until we realize how quickly those weeks pass and how little time we have to spend with our children during the week. Each Shabbat, each bedtime, each car ride becomes a chance to invest in our children's hearts and neshamot.

Rosh Chodesh teaches us that time is not just something to get through; it is something to sanctify. Just as the moon renews itself each month, we too can renew our commitment — to our children, to ourselves, and to using our time with intention. ■

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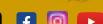
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Who Shapes History?

YIRMIYAHU 46:13-28

At first glance, Yirmiyahu's vision of Egypt reads like a familiar story of empires and war - the rise and fall of nations throughout history. But beneath the military imagery, the Navi is asking a far deeper question: what actually governs the course of history?

Rashi sharpens the point. Egypt's downfall is not accidental; it is timed. "That day belongs to Hashem" — a phrase that strips Egypt of the illusion that history bends to military strength or political calculation. This is not a lucky victory or a strategic failure. It is a moment of moral accounting.

Yirmiyahu insists that history is not chaotic. It does not lurch forward at the whim of empires, even when they believe themselves to be directing its course. There are days that are claimed — moments when Hashem asserts

that force alone does not confer legitimacy, and that dominance without moral grounding cannot endure. Egypt's confidence collapses not because it misjudged Babylon, but because it misunderstood the nature of power itself.

And then, against this thunderous backdrop of empires rising and falling, the haftorah pivots — suddenly and gently — to Israel.

"אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים עֲבָדִי יַעֲקֹב... כִּי אַתָּה אָנָּי"

Do not fear, My servant Yaakov... for I am with you.

The shift is almost disorienting. From nations to a name. From armies to a single servant. From spectacle to intimacy.

The contrast could not be sharper. Egypt is expansive, dominant, self-assured — a civilization that defines itself by visibility, scale, and control and it falls. Yaakov is diminished, scattered, vulnerable, exiled, corrected, uncertain — and yet, he endures.

Nations rise through force and disappear into history; Israel remains not because it dominates, but because it is bound — to Hashem, to responsibility, and to a destiny shaped not by spectacle, but by endurance. ■

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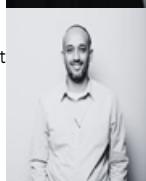


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RABBI AARON GOLDSCHIEDER

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Rav Kook: Healthy Fear of the Almighty

“The concept of *yir’ah* (fear) of God lends strength to the person who understands its purity. It endows life with depth and great aspirations, and with a high level of spirituality, which refines the potentialities of the soul with the light of holiness. But to fools, it appears as a sign of confusion that engenders weakness and despair...” (*Midot HaRa’ayah*, *Yir’ah* §3)

In the teaching above, Rav Kook addresses those who undervalue the role of *yir’at Hashem* in a Jew’s relationship with the Almighty. Such a view is fundamentally mistaken, for it fails to recognize that a healthy fear of God is not a spiritual weakness but rather a necessary foundation for growth. Properly understood, *yir’ah* strengthens a person and brings forth their finest inner qualities.

The most elementary function of *yir’at Hashem*, according to Rav Kook, is its ability to

restrain a person from sin. “Fear weakens evil inclinations, and thereby returns wrongdoers to the right course” (*ibid.*). At this basic level, one must remain conscious of reward and punishment and recognize that sinful behavior carries serious spiritual consequences.

As a person matures spiritually, however, they transcend a fear rooted solely in punishment and arrive at a more elevated understanding of *yir’ah*—one defined by awe. At this level, a person is drawn to mitzvot and repelled from sin not out of dread, but out of reverence for God’s greatness and a sense of privilege in serving the Master of the World. Rav Kook describes this higher form of fear as follows: those who come close to God through Torah study and the pursuit of moral excellence “must understand the concept of the fear of God in terms that elevate and vitalize all the potentialities of the soul” (*ibid.*).

AVRAHAM’S FEAR OF GOD

The first appearance of *fear of God* in the Torah occurs in the narrative of Avraham and Sarah in Gerar. Concerned for his life, Avraham asks Sarah to present herself as his sister. When Avimelech later discovers the truth, he confronts Avraham, insisting that no harm would have come to him. Avraham responds: “I said, surely there is no fear of God (*yirat Elokim*) in this place, and they will kill me because of my

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wife" (Bereishit 20:11).

Rashi explains that Avraham discerned their lack of *yir'at Hashem* from the fact that they questioned him only about Sarah, not about moral propriety. This absence of fear of God indicated a lack of ethical restraint.

Just a few chapters later, the term *yir'ah* reappears at the climax of the Akeidah. After Avraham withstands this supreme test, God declares: "Now I know that you are a God-fearing man (*yerei Elokim*)" (Bereishit 22:12). At this moment, Avraham's ultimate devotion and submission to God's will earns him the highest spiritual accolade.

Significantly, Avraham then names the site of the Akeidah *Hashem Yireh*—"God will see" (Bereishit 22:14). Rav Hirsch explains that this name conveys the idea that God always sees our actions and that we are obligated to subordinate our judgment to His will (Artscroll Tanach, Bereishit, p. 807).

YIR'AH IN YERUSHALAYIM

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in *Meshech Chochmah*, highlights the profound symbolism behind the name *Yerushalayim*, formed from *Yireh* and *Shalem*. According to the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 56:17), Shem called the place *Shalem*, emphasizing ethical conduct and the perfection of human character, while Avraham called it *Yireh*, emphasizing divine awareness and submission to God.

The fusion of these names into *Yerushalayim* teaches that true spiritual wholeness requires both dimensions: a deep relationship with God (*bein adam laMakom*) and a commitment to moral integrity and peaceful coexistence (*bein adam lachaveiro*). Only the synthesis of both creates a complete Jewish life.

COOLING OFF GEHENIM

The Talmud states that one who recites the *Shema* with meticulous attention to every letter

will have *Geheim* "cooled" for them (Berachot 15a). Rav Kook explains that such care reflects a general seriousness in mitzvah observance. *Geheim*, he clarifies, is not a place of retribution but a corrective process designed to purify the soul.

For one who has lived with dedication to Torah and mitzvot—symbolized by careful recitation of the *Shema*—this purification is gentle. For one who lived with spiritual neglect, the process is more intense. The message is clear: there are consequences for every spiritual action, and *yir'at Hashem* demands awareness of that reality (*Ain Ayah*, Berachot ch. 2 §13).

YIRAT SHAMAYIM IN THE BRISK TRADITION

The Brisker Rav related a tradition dating back to Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin. Two women, including the Vilna Gaon's wife, collected charity together and agreed that whoever died first would report back in a dream about Heavenly judgment. When one woman passed away, she revealed that every shared effort was credited equally—but a single gesture, the raising of an arm to signal a donor, was credited eternally to the Gaon's wife alone.

This story illustrates a central element of *yirat Shamayim*: the awareness that every detail of human action is weighed and valued. This meticulous consciousness profoundly shaped the Brisker emphasis on precision in



halachic observance.

PRAYING FOR FEAR

As Shabbat departs, we add *Ata Chonantanu* to the Amidah, praying that the coming days bring peace and that we "hold fast to Your fear." Leaving the spiritual shelter of Shabbat, we recognize the moral challenges of the week ahead and therefore pray specifically for *yirat Shamayim*.

The phrase *chasuchim me'kol chet* ("restrained from all sin") echoes God's words at the Akeidah—that Avraham did not "withhold" his son. Each week, we invoke Avraham's total surrender as a model for living with reverent fear.

LIFE LESSONS

- The Talmud teaches that one must bless God for hardship as well as joy. Reflect on the divine purpose behind every event.
- Say *be'ezrat Hashem* when making plans, affirming God's role in your life.
- Recite the blessing *Asher bachar banu* with focused intention, recognizing the responsibility inherent in being chosen. ■

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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Yoni thanks Hashem for having the opportunity of having Tziporah in his life, to learn of her caring, patience and happiness, to overcome her challenges. May Tziporah's Neshama be a light onto the world, in a time of darkness, and may her Neshama shine to Gan Eden. Yoni misses Tziporah with tears in his eyes, as Hashem gave him a gift, a crown jewel, now he returns her to Hashem.

With thanks and Toda. Love, Yoni

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לעילו נשמת
יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל ולצמן ז"ל

The Power of Rabbis in Berachot

Question: If one can fulfill the Torah-level mitzva of *Birkat Hamazon* by saying *Al Hamichya*, wouldn't the extra *berachot* in our present *Birkat Hamazon* be considered *berachot she'einan tzrichot* (extra/unwarranted *berachot*)?

Answer: There is indeed a respected, far from unanimous, opinion (see *Beit Yosef*, *Orach Chayim* 191) that the fact that *Birkat Hamazon* requires three *berachot* (unlike similar content in *Al Hamichya*'s one *beracha*) is Rabbinic. This response follows your assumption that it is correct.

Almost all of our *berachot* are of Rabbinic origin, with *Birkat Hamazon* and likely *Birkat Hatorah* (see *Mishna Berura* 47:1) being exceptions. Thus, *Chazal* certainly thought that it was justifiable for the appropriate Rabbinic leadership to initiate *berachot*, and if you can create a need and a text, you can turn one *beracha* into three!

One might think that a *gemara* (*Shabbat* 23a) questioned *Chazal*'s ability to create *berachot*. It wondered about the *beracha* on Chanuka

lights, a Rabbinic *mitzva*, and supplied *p'sukim* indicating Rabbinic authority. However, the *gemara* was only surprised about the **wording** of the *beracha*, which praises Hashem for commanding us to fulfill this Rabbinic *mitzva*, which ostensibly He did not do. The *gemara* answers that since Hashem required us to adhere to the Rabbis' dictates, He, in effect, commanded us to fulfill Rabbinic *mitzvot*. The ability to create *mitzvot* and *berachot* was not questioned.

The *Rambam*, as generally understood, has consistent opinions on these abilities. The *Rambam* (*Berachot* 1:15) posits that one who makes an unwarranted *beracha* (called a *beracha she'eina tzricha* (=bsetz) or a *berecha l'vatala*) violates a Torah-level prohibition. One can fully appreciate your question: how can *Chazal* make a *beracha*, as a Rabbinic preference in such a matter should ostensibly not uproot the Torah-level prohibition? One answer is based on another opinion of the *Rambam* (*Mamrim* 1:2) – the Rabbis “legislate” with the Torah's authorization, which gives a Torah-level standing to their laws. So, Rabbinic originated *berachot*, recited according to *Chazal*'s rules, have Torah-level recognition, which obviates any potential of being a *bsetz*.

Another answer is based on *Tosafot* (*Rosh Hashana* 33a), who posits that making a *beracha l'vatala* (and certainly a *bsetz*) is only a Rabbinic prohibition. The logic is that the prohibition of uttering Hashem's Name in vain (*Shemot* 2:7) cannot apply to a **sincere praise** of Hashem, even if not in line with the rules of *Halacha*. If the whole problem is Rabbinic,

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then if the Rabbis preferred an expansive *Birkat Hamazon*, who can stop them?!

Another possibility is a concept found in various areas of Halacha – *masra Torah lachachamim* (=*mtlch*). This refers to a halachic precept that is binding by Torah law, but whose details were left for the Rabbis to set. For example, some (see Beit Yosef, OC 530) use this regarding the laws of Chol Hamoed, which the Torah may allude to as having Torah-level prohibitions that are more relaxed than Yom Tov. *Chazal* were authorized to **determine** the parameters of permitted and forbidden actions. We can explain here too, that the Rabbis decided the parameters of the rules of *berachot*, which if violated, might be using Hashem's Name in vain. If the Rabbis endorsed a certain text of *Birkat Hamazon*, as they created so many *berachot*, then, if *mtlch* is in play, it could not be forbidden as in vain.

Actually, even if one does not employ *mtlch* broadly, it seems unlikely that following the Rabbis lead in *berachot* could be considered “in vain.” This idea is similar to the concept that if one has a good reason to knock down a fruit tree, he does not violate “do not destroy its trees” (see Bava Kama 91b). Notice that although it is forbidden to instruct a child to do a prohibition (Yevamot 114a), one may have children make *berachot* even at a time that it is nothing but for practice (Rambam, Berachot ibid.).

So, whatever the spiritual gains *Chazal* envisioned in forming *Birkat Hamazon*'s text, any number of mechanisms can justify their ability to do so. ■

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MRS. LEAH FEINBERG

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Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

ת"ס

Yehoshaphat and Jewish Justice

In Sefer Melachim, we encountered King Yehoshaphat of the Judean kingdom in the space of one chapter, in which he serves as a foil for his *mechutan*, King Achav of the northern kingdom. In Sefer Melachim, Yehoshaphat allies himself with Achav to fight against the menace of Aram, who had been at war with the northern kingdom for three years. In what seems to be a personal encounter between the *mechutanim*, Achav asks Yehoshaphat if he would join him in battle against Aram, and Yehoshaphat consents, but requests that before going out to engage in battle, they consult with a prophet of God. Achav responds by assembling his team of four hundred false prophets, who jubilantly predict his victory. When Yehoshaphat wonders aloud, "Is there yet a prophet of God remaining here, with whom we might consult?" Achav initially resists, saying, "There is one prophet of God here, named Michayhu ben Yimlah, but I hate him, for he never says anything good about me, only bad."

When Yehoshaphat objects on principle to such thinking, Achav has Michayhu brought in. A dramatic scene ensues in which Michayhu ultimately predicts Achav's death in the forthcoming battle. The chapter ends with the death

of Achav and Yehoshaphat's return to his own kingdom, having narrowly escaped the death that may well have befallen him thanks to his alliance, both personal and political, with his rival king.



Rav Eliyahu Dessler zt'l

In stark contrast to this concise portrait of Yehoshaphat as a secondary character to Achav, around whom the real drama centered, in Divrei HaYamim we find a very different scenario. Achav is barely mentioned, and Yehoshaphat's exploits fill slightly more than four full chapters. In Chapter 17, Yehoshaphat is introduced as a strong monarch, who solidifies his kingdom politically, economically and spiritually. Chapter 18 reviews the story told in Sefer Melachim, and Chapter 19 adds new details of Yehoshaphat's achievements, notably appointing judges and reinforcing a judicial system that would function in complete accordance with Torah law. In Chapter 20 Yehoshaphat faces a threat from the neighboring countries of Moav and Ammon. In response, he offers a heartrending prayer that echoes the prayer of Shlomo HaMelech upon the inauguration of the Beit HaMikdash. His prayer effects a miraculous victory.

The nation bursts forth in celebration,

praising Hashem for their salvation, and the surrounding nations are intimidated by the recognition that Hashem defeats the enemies of Israel. In a brief epilogue we are informed of Yehoshaphat's single unsuccessful venture, in which he allied himself once again with Achazyah, king of Israel, and attempted to send a fleet of merchant ships to Tarshish, and Yehoshaphat is informed prophetically that the venture failed due to the evildoing of his partner. Yehoshaphat's epitaph categorically places him among the righteous kings of Yehudah.

One of the outstanding phrases in this expanded picture of Yehoshaphat is found in Chapter 17, verse 6: “**וְגַבְהָהּ לְפָנֶיךָ יְקֹנֵן** - *And his heart was uplifted in the ways of Hashem.*” The expression **גַבְהָהּ** is generally associated with arrogance, yet in this context it is included in a description of Yehoshaphat's positive qualities. The midrash sees this as Yehoshaphat's defining quality, one that empowered him to reform the judicial system in Israel at the time.¹

Rav Dessler in *Michtav M'Eliyahu* teaches that Yehoshaphat achieved perfect harmony between arrogance and humility. This balance results in a sense of pride that is completely for the sake of Heaven, in which one realizes his own potential greatness in the service of Hashem. Yehoshaphat recognized his own strengths, enabling him to stand up to societal pressure and effect positive change. He stands in contrast to Shaul, who lost the kingship because he lacked this precise quality.²

The text records two campaigns initiated by Yehoshaphat - the appointment of teachers who circulated throughout the nations teaching Torah, and the appointment of judges. It's interesting that Ezra HaSofer, the

author of *Divrei HaYamim*, highlights these two efforts. Ezra was a member of the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*, the religious leadership at the beginning of the Second Temple Era. The *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah* are recorded as having emphasized three pillars of Jewish society: Justice, education and legislating fences to protect the integrity of Torah.³ Yehoshaphat's campaign to reinforce at least two of these three values would certainly have resonated with Ezra. They are essential to the foundation of a successful Jewish state.

Yehoshaphat's commitment to justice resonated with at least one other prophet. In *Sefer Yoel*, the Navi prophesies that at the end of days, the nations of the world will be brought to justice in the Valley of Yehoshaphat, where they will be punished for their persecution of the Jewish nation. The commentators explain that this is either a valley adjacent to Yerushalayim in which Yehoshaphat was known to have figured significantly, or a metaphor for a place of justice, which lies at the core of Yehoshaphat's name and character. May we merit to see the justice of Yehoshaphat implemented both within Jewish society and through the punishment served to the enemies of Israel. ■

3. אבות א:ב

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative *Nach Yomi* program

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When Dating Fatigue Turns Into Resistance: How Do You Help Someone Re-Engage?

לעילי נשמה
מאיר יצחק בן יוסף אקליהו הכהן ז"ל

Dvir asks:

I represent a candidate who is completely exhausted from dating. He says he's no longer willing to travel far or pay for dates unless the woman already wants to continue after a first date. In practice, this means he asks to split expenses early on. Many women are turned off by this, and I'm struggling to help him see it differently. How do I shift his mindset?

Aleeza answers:

After enough disappointing experiences, people stop feeling generous and start protecting themselves. The problem is that what feels like "self-protection" often comes across as emotional withdrawal and lack of interest. Early on in dating is exactly when generosity

matters most. As we know, you never get a second chance to make a first impression.

When someone says, "I'm tired of investing unless I know it's worth it," what they're really saying is, "I don't trust the process anymore." That's understandable but it's also the very thing blocking connection.

Paying, making the effort to travel, and showing up fully are simply about being ready to be a giver and be in a relationship. I always remind people, splitting the bill splits the connection. I prefer one side pays. And early in dating, the man pays. Later on she can plan a date and treat him.

That said, forcing someone to "just try harder" when they're depleted won't work.

If the exhaustion feels overwhelming, I often recommend a brief, intentional dating detox, a defined break with a return date, so dating stops feeling like a drain and starts feeling like a positive effort being made to find the one. I actually have a dating detox program starting Feb 1 if that's of interest.

A detox is simply a reset so he can go back to dating with hope, curiosity and energy for the process.

Once he's rested, the conversation shifts. Help him see that dating effort is not about the woman earning him, it's about who he wants to be while dating. Is he showing up as someone



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open, curious, and generous? Or guarded and calculating?

You can also help him set smarter boundaries that don't punish the other person: limit distance reasonably, choose simpler date formats, or cap the number of dates per month, without outsourcing emotional risk to the woman across the table.

Remind him: the right person won't need convincing, but she will need to feel wanted.

Dating requires showing up with intention and energy. And if he can't do that right now, the most honest move is to pause, take a break and come back when he feels more positive and ready to step it up.

May he take the time he needs to reset and find the process more tolerable moving forward.

Blessings, Aleeza ■



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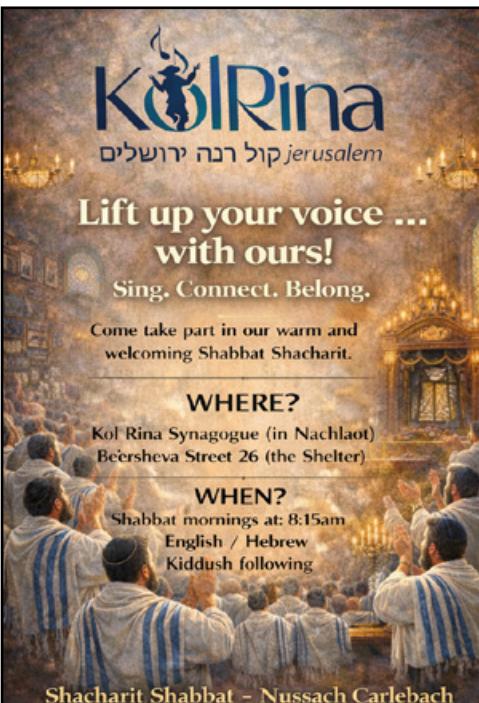
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MOSHE! AHARON! WHERE ARE THEY?!

THERE'S NO ONE IN THE STREETS! EXCEPT...

WHAT AN EYESORE!
WHO CONSTRUCTED THAT IN MY ROYAL COURTYARD?!

NEVER MIND THAT, NOW...

HEY! ANYONE HERE KNOW WHERE...?

THAT WAS TOTALLY IRRESPONSIBLE, DUDE...

...NEXT TIME WE LAND SOMEWHERE TWO MINUTES BEFORE AN UNCONTROLLABLE DEATH PLAGUE STRIKES DOWN ANYONE IN THE STREETS, MAYBE LISTEN TO THE HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDELINES AND GET INDOORS A.S.A.P., DUDE?

TWO MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT IN EGYPT IS NO TIME TO STOP AND ADMIRE THE ARCHITECTURE...

OH, SHUSH, KID, YOU'RE JUST JEALOUS BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T GET A SELFIE WITH A CROCODILE-HEADED OX FOUNTAIN!

EXCUSE ME! I'M LOOKING FOR MOSHE RABBEINU'S RESIDENCE!!!

OOH, WOW! IT'S HIM!
QUICK, KID, PUT THE CAMERA TO THE KEYHOLE!

AHEM...
I'LL HANDLE THIS...

HELLOOOO?!
KNOCK KNOCK?!

WHO'S THERE?

THE PHARAOH OF THIS BLOOMIN' EMPIRE, IF YOU DON'T MIND, SO GET ME TO MOSHE OR I'LL...

THE PHARAOH OF THIS BLOOMIN' EMPIRE, IF YOU DON'T MIND, SO GET ME TO MOSHE OR I'LL... WHO?

THIS IS NO JOKE! I'VE BEEN RUNNING AROUND KNOCKING ON EVERY DOOR IN TOWN, TRYING TO...

SHAME ON YOU, SIR, "TRICK-OR-TREAT"ING AT YOUR AGE!

HEY, CAN YOU DO YOUR ELVIS IMPRESSION?

Y'WHAT?!

Y'KNOW...

"WELL, I WAS WAND'RING ALONG BY THE BANKS OF THE RIVER, WHEN SEVEN FAT COWS..."

THAT WASN'T ME!!!

THIS IS RATHER AN EMERGENCY!!!
A LIFE-AND-DEATH SITUATION!

OHHHHH,
TERRIBLY SORRY...

AW, THE POOR, HELPLESS TYRANNICAL MASS-MURDERER IS SUDDENLY ALL CONCERNED ABOUT LIFE EXPECTANCY... GOT A TISSUE, KID?





ALYSSA GREENBERG
GUSH ETZION CHAPTER
DIRECTOR

PLAGUES – TAKE TWO

Parshat Bo begins with the eighth plague and continues until (spoiler) Pharaoh lets the Jews go free, in what will become one of the most celebrated and remembered moments of our collective national history. It is interesting to note that the parsha begins in the middle of the series of plagues, as opposed to presenting all ten together. Clearly, there must be significance to this separation.



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A possible understanding is taught by Rav Moshe Lichtenstein: the objective of the first seven plagues was for the Egyptians to recognize Hashem, and this is fulfilled by Pharaoh saying, “חטאתי הפעם ה' הצדיק ואני ועמי הרשעים” (Shemot 9:27). The final three plagues serve to destroy Egypt and its economy, thus forcing Pharaoh to let the Jews go immediately. The locusts finish off all grains and crops, the darkness brings the people to a complete standstill, and the plague of the firstborn is the ultimate destruction and ruin.

Another understanding is that of Rav Ezra Bick. According to Rav Bick, in Parshat Va'era the goal of the plagues was for the Egyptians to recognize Hashem's power. However, for the final three plagues, the purpose is that the Jews recognize Hashem's power. Hashem tells Moshe at the start of the parsha, “ולמען תספר בՁני בנים בנים... וידעתם כי אני ה'” (Shemot 10:2).

In the final plague, the Jews for the first time must take action in order not to be part of the Egyptian punishment. The Egyptians have already acknowledged Hashem's sovereignty in the previous parsha, and now the Jews must stand up and do the same. Marking the doorposts was more than acknowledging Hashem; it was acting on those beliefs. The difference between the Egyptian acknowledgment of Hashem and ours is that we took a step forward and actualized our beliefs with blood. Only once we have the courage to mark our doorposts will we be able to step through the doorway and become Hashem's nation once and for all.

Shabbat Shalom!



YOAV GLICK
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CHOOSING FREEDOM

Freedom is more than just leaving slavery; it is the freedom to be ourselves and the power to choose our own actions. It is deciding who we listen to and whom we ultimately serve. Throughout the parsha, we see that freedom is not just something you get; it is something you have to keep.

Indeed, just as quickly as Pharaoh kicked us out of Egypt, he ran after us to re-enslave us. Pharaoh was free to do the right thing, but he easily re-enslaved himself by returning to his old ways.

When the Jewish people left Egypt, they did more than just escape a bad situation; they chose to take responsibility for their own lives and their own identity. That choice is the reason we exist as a free nation today.

The Maharal of Prague explained this idea beautifully. He taught that freedom is not just about where you are standing, but about who you are on the inside. A slave is someone who has no “center” of their own; they simply do what others tell them. A free person is someone who owns their own soul.

“A slave who is released is just a ‘former slave.’ But a person who connects to their soul becomes a ‘free being.’ One is a change in your situation; the other is a change in who you are.”

Even today, thousands of years later, there are still people who do not want the Jewish people to be free. Yet we continue to choose freedom every single day-through our values, our good deeds, and our connection to Hashem. Every time we choose to do what is right instead of what is easy, we are leaving Egypt all over again. ■

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Which takes precedence when there
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