

BS"D



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON BO - 5765

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From: TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org] Sent: Jan. 12, 2005
Subject: Rabbi Mayer Twersky - Having the Time of Your Life to subscribe, email weekly@torahweb.org for anything else, email: torahweb@torahweb.org <http://www.torahweb.org/>

RABBI MAYER TWERSKY
HAVING THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE

"This month shall be to you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Shemos 12:2).

Seforno explains that Nissan ranks as the first month because our moral-spiritual existence began in Nissan. A slave's time is not his own, thus he can not live as he sees fit. Bondage is not merely a physical blight, but a spiritual one as well.

We thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu daily for the gift of freedom ("shelo asani aved - that You didn't create me as a slave") because the gift of freedom is the gift of life. The equation is threefold: freedom = time = life. On the one hand, the truth of this equation is so much so that it seems almost superfluous to mention it. And yet, we lose sight of the practical corollaries to this existential equation. Since we correctly, instinctively, cherish life and freedom, then we ought to equally cherish time. Since we appropriately zealously safeguard life and freedom, then we ought to be equally zealous in safeguarding time. Since we accurately experience loss of life as tragic, now can we be so complacent, at times even sanguine, about waste of time?

In a much quoted passage the Zohar Hakadosh explains "Avraham zakein bo bayamim" - conventionally understood to mean that Avraham was elderly, getting along in days - that Avraham was elderly, coming with days, that he had not squandered a single day of his life. In a similar vein the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh quotes the Arizal that our neshamas are an aggregate of many nitzotzos (sparks), the number of nitzotzos corresponding to the number of days apportioned to us. Every day is a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to perfect the corresponding nitzot of our neshama. A day well spent perfects a part of our neshama, a day squandered means that the corresponding nitzot of our neshama remains unperfected.

The great Reb Yisroel Salanter drew inspiration from the shoemaker in Vilna who, to candlelight, worked well into the night. And even when the candle, almost totally spent, flickered on the verge of becoming extinguished, he relentlessly tried to accomplish a little more. So too, said Reb Yisroel, our neshama is likened to a candle ("ner Hashem nishmas adam"). As long as the candle, albeit on the verge of becoming extinguished in this world, yet flickers, we have to persist in our avodas Hashem.

Yakrus hazeman (the valuableness of time) is a fundamental concept in Yahadus. By contrast, Western society values "free time". Free time is when one is not beholden to another (an employer, et al.), and hence one is free to do anything he/she pleases. Or, one is free to do nothing as he

pleases - to lounge around, to sleep endlessly, to banter pointlessly, etc. Yakrus, on the other hand, teaches a credo of "hayom katser v'hamelacha meruba." One's avodas Hashem is never complete, there is always more to do, and, accordingly, time is forever a scarce commodity. Surely we rest and relax as needed to rejuvenate ourselves, but "free time", in the Western society sense, does not exist.

The forum of a weekly dvar Torah does not accommodate a lengthy cheshbon hanefesh concerning how we use our time. Instead with your permission I would like to focus on a single instance wherein our Torah society has institutionalized the waste of time. I refer to the manner in which we celebrate semachot. Undoubtedly, celebrating a simcha is a mitzva, and, as such, excellent use of time. It is, for instance, a great mitzva to be misameach chassan v'kalah. The two hours or so, however, that often elapse between the scheduled start of the kabbalas panim and the late start of the chuppah do not contribute to simchas chassan v'kalah. These long stretches of down time are simply bitul zman (waste of time) - no more, no less. As such these long stretches also foster a sense of bitul (disregard, contempt) for zman (time). When hundreds of guests wait interminably for chassan and kallah to enter the dining hall after the chuppah, this is both bitul zman and bitul for people's zman. Taking pictures, thereby generating momentos of a simcha, is worthwhile, but it does not justify bitul zman for hundreds of people.

An appropriate auspicious celebration of a simcha must reflect the Torah's teachings regarding yakrus hazman. There are many eitzos tovot that can be implemented: schedule the chuppah at a realistic time and keep to the schedule, take pictures after the wedding when the guests have departed, etc. Whatever combination of strategies we choose, we must ensure that we do not compromise on our simcha by institutionalizing bitul zman.

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[from 2 years ago]

Bo Freedom's Defense

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. G-d 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 mankind.

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, 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 somber 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 . . . (Exodus 12:26-27)

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

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

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 his 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 when 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, Hilkhot Talmud Torah 2:1.)

Rabbi Judah the Prince sent R. Chiyya and R. Issi and R. Ami on a mission through the 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 Hagigah 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 epitomized in a remarkable exegesis given by the sages. They based it on the following verse about the tablets Moses received at Sinai:

The tablets were the work of G-d; the writing was the writing of G-d, engraved [charut] on the tablets. (Exodus.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 accepting voluntarily 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 endeavor, 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 matzah, 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 by 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 honor, it did not call him 'our hero', 'our prophet' or 'our king'. It called him, simply, Moshe Rabbenu, Moses our teacher. For it is in the arena of education that the battle for the good society is lost or won.

From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com]
Sent: Jan. 13, 2005

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM - Parshas Bo

There was a mistake in the author's name on the subject line of the previous email. PARSHAS BO Please speak in the ears of the people: let each man request of his fellow and each woman of her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels... the people picked up its dough before it became leavened... and Bnei Yisrael carried out the word of Moshe... Hashem gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. (11:2) (12:34,35)

Rashi tells us that Hashem asked Moshe Rabbeinu to make a special effort to convince the Jews to request valuables from their Egyptian neighbors, so that the soul of Avraham Avinu would not have a grievance against Hashem for not providing them with wealth as great as He had promised him. We must endeavor to understand this statement. If Hashem made a promise to Avraham that, after Klal Yisrael's many years of captivity, they would not leave empty-handed, then Hashem will keep His word simply because He gave it - not because of what Avraham might say. Rashi seems to imply that the only motivating factor for requesting that the Jews ask for gold and silver was to allay Avraham's potential complaint.

In response to this question, Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita, cites the pesukim later on in the parsha that detail Klal Yisrael's exodus with their matzah on their shoulders, mentioning, as well, the fact that the Egyptians gladly parted with their gold and silver. The two pesukim seem to create a contradiction in the text. The pasuk begins by referring to the Jews who carried the unleavened dough as the "Am," people. The next pasuk begins by calling them Bnei Yisrael and closes by once again referring to them as "Am." The Torah commentators distinguish between Am, people, denoting the simple, common folk, and Bnei Yisrael,

referring to the nobility, those who served Hashem on a deeper, more intellectually passionate level. Why does the Torah change its description of the Jews? Rav Schorr cites the Haflaah at the end of Meseches Kesubos, who renders a fascinating explanation for Hashem's use of the word, na, please, in requesting that the Jews appeal to the Egyptians for their gold and silver. Regarding Avraham's wealth, the Torah writes that Avraham was kaved me'od, very heavy, with cattle, silver and gold. The word kaved, heavy, implies that all this material wealth comprised a heavy load for Avraham. It is as if the Torah was telling us that Avraham was uncomfortable with the added wealth. Is this true? The Haflaah explains that, indeed, Avraham Avinu, as Patriarch, was transmitting an important lesson to his future descendants. They were to view material wealth as an added weight. Not only should they learn to be satisfied with what they have, but they should also eschew wealth. This would serve as a portent to his descendants, so that when they leave Egypt laden with gold and silver, they would view this material abundance as kaved, heavy, an added weight that they were obligated to take along with them. This would ensure that the wealth would be used properly, channeled to the appropriate outlets.

Hashem asked Moshe to "please" ask the emerging Jewish nation to request the Egyptian's valuables. He wanted the Jews to view this as a special favor, a unique request. If they would approach the gathering of Egyptian wealth in this manner, Avraham Avinu's soul would be at rest, because he was concerned about their attitude towards wealth.

Now, there were two types of Jews. The first, the Am, common people, did not want to partake of the Egyptian wealth for fear that they were not up to handling material abundance. They were not yet ready to deal with the opportunities and possible dangers that wealth would present for them. The Chasam Sofer adds that if they had at least one mitzvah that would provide them with a reminder of Hashem's Presence over them, they could risk the wealth. Without any protective mitzvah, however, they feared that the wealth would lead to arrogance and, ultimately, to forgetting about G-d.

Consequently, the Am, common people, decided on their own to take along a remembrance. The Matzah and Marror, symbolizing Hashem's Presence over them, were to serve as a constant testimonial of who they were and their purpose in life. "Bnei Yisrael," on the other hand, did not need this indicator of their relationship with Hashem. They were able to proceed - unhindered by feelings of inadequacy and fear - and request silver and gold from the Egyptians. Bnei Yisrael went on their own. They did not need Hashem's support. They asked the Egyptians outright for their wealth. In contrast, the Am, common people, needed Hashem to help them find favor in the eyes of the Egyptians.

Every Jew should view his G-d-given material abundance as Daber na, "please speak," as if Hashem is asking him to accept it for a purpose. This will engender restraint in regard to one's possessions. He will then remember that he is only a shomer, guardian, for a gift that Hashem has bequeathed to him for a specific purpose: to share it with others.

Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die... to the firstborn of the maidservant who is behind the millstone. (11:5)

The firstborn children of the lowly Egyptian maidservants also died during the tenth plague, because they, too, enjoyed the suffering of the Jews. They suffered on their own account; yet, they took pleasure in the fact that there were those who suffered worse than they did. How often does it happen that one is involved in a business, and someone comes along and opens a similar business not far from him? He would love to do something to prevent his competitor's success, but he is afraid of getting into trouble with the authorities. Therefore, he waits and stewes, hoping that something will happen that will prevent the other business from succeeding.

One day, a fire breaks out and destroys his competitor's store. He is overjoyed. Of course, he would not dare publicize his joy over his competitor's downfall. Indeed, he might even do everything to help him, so that he appears to be a fine and wonderful human being. Deep down, however, in the inner recesses of his heart, he gloats.

Horav Yitzchak Aizik Sher, zl, posits that such a miscreant, who is happy at the expense of his competitor's anguish, is considered more than "a not nice" person; it is considered as if he had burned down the store! The lowly maidservants took pleasure in the Jewish pain. Hashem viewed them as oppressors because of their covert, subtle support for the Egyptian tyranny. Thus, they paid for their behavior in the same manner as the Egyptian taskmasters. Taking enjoyment from another's pain is tantamount to causing it!

This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year. (12:2)

Rashi comments that we derive from this pasuk that the month of Nissan, the month during which the Exodus took place, is to be counted as the first month of the year, followed by Iyar as the second month, and so on. This is enigmatic. Why should Nissan take precedence over the other months? True, the Exodus was a seminal event for our People. What about Tishrei, the month in which the world was created, or Sivan, the month in which the Torah was given? Perhaps Tishrei should not be the first month, since the creation of the world is not a uniquely Jewish experience. Why, however, should Nissan precede Sivan? Indeed, are we not taught that the entire continuity of the world was dependent upon our acceptance of the Torah at Har Sinai? This event should certainly grant Sivan pre-eminence over Nissan.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains that we must not view the Giving of the Torah, which occurred in the month of Sivan, as an independent experience. Klal Yisrael could not possibly have reached the level of dedication necessary to be capable of receiving the Torah with a lasting commitment, until they had first undergone great preparation. Their faith and other character traits had to undergo a complete metamorphosis prior to the Revelation at Sinai. In addition to their personal refinement, they needed to divest themselves of the gentile influence which permeated their lifestyle. They were the products of two hundred and ten years of assimilation. This all had to change. It did. During the forty-nine day period between Pesach and Shavuos, between the Exodus and the Revelation, Klal Yisrael elevated themselves as they matured spiritually. How was this possible? How could a nation that was subject to so much persecution and pain, a nation that had in a sense "bottomed out," that had descended to the nadir of depravity, turn around and accept the Torah. True, it took forty-nine days of intense and incessant preparation to achieve this goal, but what catalyzed this change?

The miracles of the Exodus, with the powerful lessons that they inspired, brought about this overwhelming change in Klal Yisrael's attitude. Thus, the Exodus symbolized more than Klal Yisrael's liberation from bondage. It was the genesis of the acceptance of the Torah. The Torah, therefore, deems it appropriate that the first month of the year be Nissan.

Rav Moshe adds that this idea applies equally to the proper method of raising children. The teaching of proper character traits and emunah, faith in the Almighty, cannot wait until a child is ready, willing and able to understand Torah. A child must be prepared for Torah study. Therefore, it is important that we strive to imbue our children with these all-important ideals from birth, so that when the time comes, they will be prepared for a life of Torah and mitzvos.

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I'zchor nishmas Yaakov Shimon ben Yisrael Tzvi z"l Mrs. Helen Pollack Mrs. Patti Pollack Rivki & Yossi Kornfeld Mendy & Raizy Pollack Yoni & Bumie Goldstein Avi Pollack Pnina & Stephen Glassman Motti & Evy Pollack Peninim@shemayisrael.com <http://mail.shemayisrael.com/> mailman/listinfo/peninim_shemayisrael.com

From DR. SAM FRIEDMAN <nfried5884@aol.com>

Freedom

In Parshas Bo, the process of the Jewish exodus from Egyptian slavery toward freedom moves forward quickly. Rabbi Moshe Green, in his book entitled, Impressions on the Heart, which was culled from the thoughts of Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld (1923-1988, beloved teacher and founder of Yeshiva Sh'or Yoshuv), discusses the concept of freedom as it exists in American society, and compares it to the Torah's understanding of freedom.

Freedom in American society is usually defined "as the free reign to do as one pleases...as long as one doesn't hurt anybody." The history of American society has shown that this can lead to all sorts of problems. For instance, "Is a drug addict who has open access to heroin a free man? Is a child allowed to run wild, better off than the child who has parents that do not allow such behavior? License to do whatever one wants, whenever one wants, makes one a slave to his base desires, rather than securing liberty."

"Freedom requires form. One must have definitions of what is positive, decent, and moral; he must know what he wants. Only with principles...to channel behavior...can the benefits of freedom be reaped...The Torah is the 'owner's manual' for life. The sages are teaching us that freedom starts with humbling oneself to the awesome clarity and depth of the Torah. Only within its four walls can the human spirit soar...Without real and concrete guidelines...freedom becomes meaningless... As it states in Pirkei Avos 6:2, 'One cannot be a free man unless he immerses himself in the Torah.'"

To be truly free one needs the framework of the Torah. Freedom requires a framework, and the Torah provides it. "License to do whatever one wants, whenever one wants, makes one a slave to his base desires." Without the framework of the Torah, one is not free at all.

From: ohr@ohr.edu Sent: Jan. 13, 2005 To: weekly@ohr.edu Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Bo

TORAH WEEKLY - For the week ending 15 Jan. 2005 / 5 Shevat 5765 - from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu

-- Parshat Bo <http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/2010>

Written and compiled by RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR
OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned. G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d is going to bring one more plague, the death of the firstborn, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month. The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the firstborn of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating chametz on Pesach. Moshe relays G-d's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the first born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, pidyon haben (redemption of the first born son) and tefillin.

INSIGHTS

Seize The Moment "...And you shall eat it in haste. It is a Pesach to Hashem." (12:12)

There's one big difference between the original Pesach in Egypt and every Pesach that followed it. The original Pesach was one of haste, of immediacy. All the other Pesachim throughout the generations have been conducted slowly and with deliberation. What can we learn from this difference?

When we come to free ourselves from the clutches of our own selfishness, when spiritualizing our lives, eschewing the unrelenting demands of our bodies for more and more pleasure, we must seize that initial moment and guard its inspiration. That first moment of spiritual ignition is so precious, so holy, that we must not let it sink back into the morass of habit and apathy from which it has freed itself. The Pesach in Egypt was the first moment when the Jewish people wrenched themselves away from the fleshpots of Egypt and became the standard bearers of spirituality in a dark world.

After that initial burst of light, however, we must move with deliberation and care, for a person cannot live on moments of explosive inspiration alone. After that first Pesach, there followed the generations of Pesachim which were all conducted slowly and deliberately, solidifying and internalizing inspiration until it becomes second nature. - Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen

The Last House "...And the blood will be for you a sign on the houses." (12:12)

The Torah speaks to all times and all places.

A non-Jew once asked a Torah Sage how it was that the Jews still believed in the rebuilding of the Third Temple. As is their way, the non-Jew sought to prove his point from Scripture itself: "Doesn't it say in Hagai, chapter two, 'Greater will be the honor of the last House - meaning the Temple - than that of the first'? And in that verse the Prophet Hagai is referring to the Second of your Temples - In fact," continued the non-Jew, "I could quote you any number of similar examples of where the Bible calls the Second Temple 'the last House'. Obviously the prophet is saying that the Second Temple will be the last, that there will be no 'Third Temple.'"

The Sage replied: "The word in Hebrew acharon can mean 'last' or it can mean 'second'. Whenever acharon is preceded by the word 'first', as it is in the context you cite, its meaning is 'second' and not 'last.' In Exodus 4:8-9 when the Holy One, Blessed be He, says to Moses, 'And it will be that if they (the Children of Israel) do not believe you and they will not heed the voice of the first sign, they will believe the voice of the second - acharon - sign. And it shall be that if they do not believe even these two signs and do not heed your voice, then you shall take from the water of the River and pour it out on the dry land, and the water...will become blood... Clearly the word acharon does not mean 'the last' but 'the latter.'"

Our Holy Torah speaks to all times and all places. For your challenge - and its answer - were already embedded in the Torah itself. It says in Exodus 12:12: "...And the blood will be for you a sign on the houses." In other words, the fact that the plague of blood is referred to as acharon, and nevertheless is followed by yet a third sign as a "sign on the houses", means it is a witness to the fact that when the Prophet writes bayit acharon, it means the Second House - and not the last one.

- In the name of the Gaon of Vilna

What's Your Name? "...but with My Name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them..." (6:3)

Moshe had ten names: Moshe, Yered, Chaver, Yekutiel, Avigdor, Avi Socho, Avi Zanuach, Tuvia, Shemaya and Halevi. Of all these names,

the only one that Hashem used was Moshe, the name he was given by Pharaoh's daughter, Batya.

Why, of all Moshe's names, did Hashem use the one name given to Moshe by an Egyptian princess? What was so special about this name?

The name Moshe comes from the word meaning 'to be drawn', for Moshe was drawn from the water by Batya. When Batya took Moshe out of the river she was flouting her father's will. Pharaoh's order was to kill all the Jewish male babies to stifle their savior. By rescuing Moshe, Batya was putting her life in grave danger. Because Batya risked her life to save Moshe, that quality was embedded in Moshe's personality and in his soul. It was this quality of self-sacrifice that typified Moshe more than all his other qualities, and for this reason Moshe was the only name that Hashem would call him.

This is what made Moshe the quintessential leader of the Jewish People, for more than any other trait, a leader of the Jewish People needs self-sacrifice to care and worry over each one of his flock.

Another question - but with the same answer:

Of all the places that Moshe's mother, Yocheved, could have chosen to hide Moshe, why did she choose the river? Why not in a tunnel? Why not hide him in a barn or any of the other numerous possible hiding places? Why did Yocheved choose to hide Moshe in the river?

Yocheved hoped that by putting Moshe into the river the astrological signs would show that the savior of the Jews had been cast into the Nile and Pharaoh would abandon the massacre of the baby boys. Yocheved was right. The Egyptian astrologers told Pharaoh the Jewish savior had been dispatched into the Nile and Pharaoh ordered the killing to cease.

It was not an easy thing for Yocheved to put her son into a wicker basket and abandon him to the eddies of the Nile. Before she placed Moshe into the water, Yocheved made a little canopy over the basket and said in sadness "Who knows if I will ever see my son's 'chupa' (marriage canopy)?" Certainly there were safer places for a baby than a makeshift basket adrift in a river. However, Yocheved chose a hiding place that may have not been the safest because it meant that she could save the lives of other Jewish children.

From two sides of the same event the quality of self-sacrifice was instilled into Moshe - by his real mother when she put him into the river and by his adopted mother when she drew him out from the river, for if any quality epitomizes the essence of leadership, it is the ability to forget oneself and give up everything for the good of the people.

Sources: - Based on the Midrash Shemot Rabba 1:24, 1:29 - Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz - Rabbi C. Z. Senter

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From: Kol Torah [koltorah@koltorah.org] Sent: Jan. 13, 2005

Kol Torah Parshat Bo

KOL TORAH A Student Publication of the Torah Academy of Bergen County Parshat Bo 5 Shevat 5765 Jan. 15, 2005 Vol.14 No.18 This week's issue of Kol Torah has been sponsored by Anita & Jack Scharf in honor of Rabbi Jachter's contributions to Kol Torah, the Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Adler, our daughter Donna Hoenig, and the entire TABC faculty. This week's issue has also been dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jachter's grandfather, Reb Chaim Adler zt"l, who helped many

families survive the Great Depression. His Yahrzeit will be observed on 11 Shevat.

TO BELIEVE OR NOT TO BELIEVE

BY RABBI STEVEN FINKELSTEIN

This week's Parsha describes the scene in Pharaoh's palace upon the onset of the tenth plague in fairly clear terms (Shemot 12: 30): "Vayakam Pharaoh Layla Hu," "And Pharaoh rose up at midnight." Yet Rashi feels compelled to explain that Pharaoh got up "Mimitato," from his bed. What additional information is Rashi adding with this comment?

The Siftei Tzaddik explains that Rashi is highlighting for us just how stubborn Pharaoh was in his unwillingness to acknowledge the supremacy of G-d. In the first nine plagues, Moshe warns Pharaoh of terrible things to come, and Moshe's predictions are unflinchingly carried out by the Hand of G-d. On the tenth time around, with the threat of the most horrific of all of the plagues looming over his head, Pharaoh simply goes to sleep, completely indifferent to Moshe's warning. It is only when the firstborn begin to die that Pharaoh is awoken by the screams.

What was it that prevented Pharaoh from believing in Hashem? What motivated him to hide his eyes from the reality of his situation? Was it his ego? Was it his personal struggle with Moshe? Interestingly enough, Pharaoh was not the only one who suffered from an inability to acknowledge the hand of Hashem. In Gemara Rosh Hashanah 11a, we are told that while the redemption was completed on Pesach, it began on the previous Rosh Hashanah when the decrees of hard labor were lifted. The Chatam Sofer explains that Bnei Yisrael did not recognize or acknowledge that the end of the torturous slave labor was a gift that came to them directly from Hashem. It was viewed as a function of the natural course of events, a lucky break. It was simply a political change. Only the plagues, which were open miracles, were able to finally force Bnei Yisrael to acknowledge that their freedom was caused by the Hand of G d. This idea is reflected in the Pesukim from last week's Parsha (Shemot 6:6-7), "Ani Hashem, Vehotzeiti Etchem Mitachat Sivlot Mitzrayim, Vehitzalti Etchem Meivodatam, Vegaalti Etchem Bizroa Netuyah Uvishfatim Gedolim...Viydatem Ki Ani Hashem Elokeichem, Hamotzi Etchem Mitachat Sivlot Mitzrayim," "I am Hashem, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt, and I shall rescue you from their service. And I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments...and you will know that I am Hashem, your G d, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt." Only after the great miracles will Bnei Yisrael fully acknowledge that this was the hand of G d at work.

This Shabbat we study Sipur Yetziat Mitzrayim, the main source for our belief in Hashem's active role in the world and in our lives. It is important for each of us to pause for a moment and consider how often we are able to ignore Divine Providence, Hashgachah Pratit. We must strive to gain a deeper understanding of why we at times choose to hide our eyes from the reality. Once we have considered this, we can raise ourselves to a level where we see that everything that happens to us really does come from Hashem.

From: Kol Torah [<mailto:koltorah@koltorah.org>]

Subject: Kol Torah Parshat Bo Cosmetic Surgery – A Review of Four Classic Teshuvot

[From last week -

COSMETIC SURGERY - A Review of Four Classic Teshuvot - Part 1

by RABBI CHAIM JACHTER

This week, we will begin to our discussion of the range of opinions regarding the Halachic propriety of cosmetic surgery. We will review four classic responsa on this topic from four great late twentieth-century Poskim - Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Yaakov Breisch, Rav Eliezer

Waldenburg, and Rav Yaakov Weisz. These four Rabbanim rank in the first tier of late twentieth-century Poskim and we will carefully examine their rulings on this topic. I am indebted to my cousin Yehuda Brandriss, with whom I studied this topic, for the insights he provided.

Rav Moshe Feinstein Rav Moshe Feinstein was asked in 1964 whether it is permissible for a young woman to undergo plastic surgery in order to improve her chances of finding a suitable marriage partner (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Choshen Mishpat 2:66). Rav Moshe permitted the surgery based on the Rambam's (Hilchot Chovel Umazik 5:1) definition of the prohibition of Chavalah (wounding). In general, the Torah prohibits wounding another person (see Devarim 25:3) and the Gemara (Bava Kama 91a) states that this prohibition applies even to wounding oneself. The Rambam writes that this prohibition applies when it is performed "in a degrading manner." An alternative text reads "in a belligerent manner" (Poskim regard both texts as viable). This is highly significant as the Rambam rules in accordance with the Tannaitic view that an individual is forbidden to wound himself. Rav Moshe infers from the Rambam that if the wounding is done in a beneficial manner the prohibition of Chavalah (to others or oneself) does not apply. An individual may wound himself if it is done for his benefit. Rav Moshe cites four Talmudic sources for the Rambam's ruling. First, the Gemara (Bava Kama 91b) records that when Rav Chisda walked among thorns he would roll up his pants so that his skin would be scratched instead of his clothes. He explained that the skin heals itself and the clothes do not. We see that the prohibition to wound oneself does not apply if it is not done in a degrading or belligerent manner. Second, the Tanach (Melachim 1:20:35-36) and Gemara (Sanhedrin 89) condemn the individual who refused to follow the Navi Michah's order (communicated from Hashem) to the individual to wound the Navi. It was necessary for Michah to appear wounded in order to emphasize a certain point in an exhortation he would deliver to King Achav. We see that wounding for a positive purpose (in this case fulfillment of the Divine command) is permissible since it is not done in a degrading or belligerent manner. One could question this proof, however, since a Divine command would seem to suspend a prohibition. Third, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 84b) states that one is permitted to perform bloodletting on his father. The Gemara cites the celebrated Pasuk "Viahavta Lireiacha Kamocha" (love thy neighbor as thyself) as the source for this ruling. Rashi (s.v. Viahavta) explains, "We are only forbidden to do to others that which we would not want done to ourselves." Rav Moshe explains that beneficial wounding such as bloodletting is something that all [prudent] people want done to themselves if necessary and therefore it is not included in the prohibition of wounding others. We see that wounding for a beneficial purpose is permissible. Fourth, the Mishnah (Bechorot 45a) discusses someone who had an extra finger and removed it. This Mishnah does not add the words "even though one does not enjoy the right to do this." In contrast, earlier Mishnayot in Bechorot (2a and 13a) mention one who sells his cow to a Nochri and indeed comment "even though that one does not enjoy the right to do so." Thus, we may infer that the Mishnah permits removing an extra finger, since it does not condemn one who does this. In light of this considerable evidence, Rav Moshe rules that the girl is permitted to undergo cosmetic surgery since it is done for her benefit and with her consent. Plastic surgery does not violate the prohibition of Chavalah since it is not done in a degrading or belligerent manner.

Interpreting and Applying Rav Moshe's Teshuvah An important question, though, emerges from this Teshuvah of Rav Moshe. Does this Teshuvah constitute a sweeping endorsement of the propriety of cosmetic surgery provided that it benefits the patient and is performed with his/her consent? Or perhaps Rav Moshe's permissible ruling applies only in a situation where the surgery is of great need, such as in the specific case that Rav Moshe adjudicated? Would Rav Moshe permit one to undergo LASIK eye surgery in order to avoid the inconvenience of

wearing eyeglasses or contact lenses? I am unsure how to resolve this question. Rav Moshe's ruling (Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 3:90) regarding the permissibility of attaching an IV to a very sick individual to avoid the necessity for him to eat on Yom Kippur, might be relevant to this question. Among the reasons that Rav Moshe presents for forbidding attaching an IV for this purpose is concern that the Divine license to heal does not apply to such a circumstance. Some background information is necessary to understand this issue. The Gemara (Bava Kama 85a) infers from the fact that the Torah (Shemot 21:1) obligates an individual who injures someone to pay the latter's medical bills that "the Torah permits a physician to heal." Absent such permission, we would have thought, explain Tosafot (ad. loc. s.v. Shenitnah), that we are forbidden to heal because we "appear to be contradicting the King's decree." The Torah teaches, though, that we are not contradicting the Divine Will, because the King who issued the decree for the individual to become ill or injured, also permitted physicians to heal. Rav Moshe suggests that perhaps the Divine license to heal applies only to remedy a malady or injury but not to enable a sick individual to fast on Yom Kippur. Perhaps Rav Moshe also believes that Hashem permits us to perform cosmetic surgery only when it is done in case of great need but not when it is done merely for convenience. I find it difficult to determine what Rav Moshe's opinion is on these matters from his published Teshuvot.

Rav Yaakov Breisch Rav Yaakov Breisch (who lived in Switzerland and died in 1970) was also asked whether it is permissible for a young woman to undergo plastic surgery in order to straighten and reduce the size of her nose, in order to facilitate her finding a suitable marriage partner (Teshuvot Chelkat Yaakov 3:11 and Choshen Mishpat 31 in the new editions of this work). Parenthetically, it seems that Rav Moshe and Rav Breisch were addressing the same case and that the Rav who submitted the question to Rav Moshe also submitted it to Rav Breisch for adjudication (this is conjecture, as Rav Breisch's responsum is not dated and the Igrot Moshe does not identify the questioner). Rav Breisch attacks the question differently than Rav Moshe. Instead of defining the prohibition of Chavalah, he searches for precedents in earlier works for wounding for cosmetic purposes. Rav Hershel Schachter once mentioned (in a talk at Yeshiva University) that the Litvish (Jews from Lithuania) style of resolving Halachic issues is to define the parameters of the prohibition or Mitzvah that is addressed, while the style of Poskim from Galicia is to search for precedents that are comparable to the issue they address. Rav Breisch cites the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 241:3) forbidding one to remove a thorn, or perform bloodletting, or cut a limb of one's father even though he intends to heal him. The Rama (ad. loc.) adds that this is forbidden only if there is no one else available to perform this task. However, if no one else is available and the father is in pain, it is permissible for the son to perform bloodletting or to cut a limb, to the extent that the father consents. Rav Breisch infers from the Rama that a doctor is permitted to cut a limb merely to alleviate pain. Rav Breisch assumes that the Rama addresses even a patient whose life is not in danger. Moreover, the Gemara (Shabbat 50b) states that a man is permitted to remove scabs from his body to eliminate pain but not for beautification purposes. Rashi explains that removing scabs for beautification purposes is forbidden for a male because it is regarded as feminine behavior. Tosafot (ad. loc. s.v. Bishvil) write, "If the only pain that he suffers is that he is embarrassed to walk among people then it is permissible, because there is no greater pain than this." Rav Breisch observes that Tosafot expand the definition of pain to include psychological distress. Accordingly, Rav Breisch permits the young woman to undergo plastic surgery since it is done for the purpose of finding a suitable mate. The inability to find an appropriate marriage partner is certainly most distressing and the prohibition to wound does not apply to cosmetic surgery that is performed to resolve this problem.

In addition, Rav Breisch addresses an issue that is not discussed in Rav Moshe's responsum, the prohibition to place oneself in danger (see Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 116 and C.M. 427). The questioner cited a responsum of the Avnei Neizer (Y.D. 321; the Avnei Neizer lived in the early twentieth century) forbidding a child to undergo surgery to straighten his crooked leg, because of the danger involved. Rav Breisch, in turn, notes that the Gemara in numerous places (such as Yevamot 72a) permits certain activities that involve some danger if people commonly engage in such behavior. The Gemara teaches that if society deems an activity to constitute a tolerable risk, one is permitted to engage in such activity. Accordingly, Rav Breisch writes, we are permitted to travel in an automobile and airplane despite the risks. Similarly, Rav Breisch explains that the risks associated with surgery have lowered dramatically since the times of the Avnei Neizer. He notes that today society regards surgery as a tolerable risk and thus is permissible in our times. Rav Breisch's explicit permission to undergo plastic surgery applies only to a situation where there is a great need for it. The precedents cited by Rav Breisch sanction Chavalah only when the individual is suffering physically or psychologically. Indeed, this is the position that Rav J. David Bleich (Judaism and Healing pp.126-129) adopts as normative. However, Rav Breisch also does not explicitly forbid cosmetic surgery done for reasons of convenience. He simply does not address this issue. Conclusion Next week, IY"ח and Bli Neder, we will present the opinions of Rav Eliezer Waldenburg and Dayan Yitzchak Weisz and conclude our discussion of cosmetic surgery.]

COSMETIC SURGERY – A Review of Four Classic Teshuvot- Part 2

BY RABBI CHAIM JACHTER

Introduction Last week we introduced the question as to whether Halacha permits cosmetic surgery. We cited rulings by Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Yaakov Breisch who permitted a young woman who was experiencing difficulty finding an appropriate Shiduch to undergo cosmetic surgery to improve her appearance. This week we shall explore two other classic responsum authored by two major twentieth century Poskim, Rav Eliezer Waldenburg and Rav Yitzchak Weisz (commonly referred to as Dayan Weisz). If you missed last week's article it is available on our website, www.koltorah.org.

Rav Eliezer Waldenburg Rav Waldenburg (Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer 11:41) presents a radically different approach from Rav Moshe and Rav Breisch (Rav Waldenburg lives in Jerusalem and many of his Teshuvot are devoted to issues in Medical Halacha; he played a major role at Jerusalem's Sha'arei Zedek hospital and the State of Israel's Supreme Rabbinic Court). He seems to categorically forbid all cosmetic surgeries.

He forbids a doctor to perform and patients to undergo plastic surgery. He forcefully argues that the aforementioned Divine license to heal applies only to curing an illness and not to altering one's appearance. Rav Waldenburg even states that cosmetic surgery constitutes an insult to our Creator because it implies that His work as inadequate.

Rav Waldenburg cites the Gemara (Taanit 20b) that relates that Rabi Elazar ben Shimon met an exceptionally homely individual. Rabi Elazar asked the man whether all the people in his town are as ugly as he. The man responded that Rabi Elazar had insulted Hashem by implying, "What an ugly vessel You have made." Rabi Elazar sought forgiveness and the man refused to extend it until the townspeople convinced him to relent. Tosafot cite Masechet Derech Eretz that states that the ugly person was none other than Eliyahu HaNavi in disguise.

Rav Waldenburg adds that it is certainly forbidden to risk one's life in order to undergo cosmetic surgery, even though the risk is not great. In another responsum (Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer 12:43) Rav Waldenburg addresses the question of whether it is permissible to undergo elective surgery on a Thursday or a Friday (due to concern that

it may potentially interfere with Shabbat observance). Rav Waldenburg simply responds that Halacha never condones elective surgery. If a surgery is not necessary one may never undergo such a surgery.

Rav Waldenburg's strict stance is difficult to abide by. In fact, my cousin Rhoda Brandriss (who has worked at Jerusalem's Shaarei Zedek hospital for many years) informs me that Shaarei Zedek hospital maintains a plastic surgery department. This is noteworthy because I have heard that Shaarei Zedek strictly adheres to Halachic norms. The hospital seems to be following the approach of either Rav Moshe or Rav Breisch. Finally, regarding the ruling of Rav Waldenburg, see the observations of Rav Immanuel Jacobowitz, Noam 6:273 and Dr. Abraham S. Abraham, Nishmat Avraham 2:49.

Rav Yitzchak Weisz Dayan Weisz (who served as the Av Beit Din of the Eidah HaChareidit in Jerusalem and died in 1989) focuses on two issues, Chavalah and Sakanah (the prohibition to enter into a dangerous situation), regarding cosmetic surgery in a very brief responsum (Teshuvot Minchat Yitzchak 6:105:2). Dayan Weisz adopts the identical approach to Rav Moshe regarding the issue of Chavalah, namely, that it is not forbidden unless it is done in a belligerent or degrading manner. Thus the prohibition of Chavalah does not constitute an impediment to undergoing plastic surgery. However, Dayan Weisz believes that the danger (even though it is only a small risk) involved in any surgery is of major concern. Dayan Weisz refers to an earlier responsum (Teshuvot Minchat Yitzchak 1:28:2) where he forbids undergoing any surgery unless it is necessary to save the patient's life.

Accordingly, he rules that one may not undergo surgery to remedy a problem that is not life-threatening. In fact, Dayan Weisz (unlike his Mechutan, Rav Breisch) interprets the aforementioned Rama, who speaks of "cutting a limb," to be referring only to a case of danger to life (this appears to be a difficult reading, as had the Rama intended this, it seems that he would have stated so explicitly). Accordingly, although Dayan Weisz acknowledges that in some cases the people who wish to undergo plastic surgery are defined as a Choleh (as Rav Breisch argues), nevertheless he hesitates to permit plastic surgery since they are not a Choleh Sheyeish Bo Sakanah (a sick individual whose life is endangered). Dayan Weisz concludes that he is unsure of this matter and remarks that with G-d's help he might look into the matter further in the future. He does acknowledge, though, that Rav Breisch's argument is a "Svara Gedolah" (a cogent argument), but he stops short of endorsing it.

I find it illuminating, though, that Dayan Weisz does not raise any of the theological issues that Rav Waldenburg raises concerning plastic surgery. It seems that Dayan Weisz as well as Rav Moshe and Rav Breisch do not share Rav Waldenburg's fundamental theological concerns about plastic surgery. One could argue that perhaps plastic surgery does not insult the work of the "Craftsman" because He also revealed to mankind the knowledge and ability to perform cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery might be viewed as part of our role as "junior partners" with Hashem in the ongoing creation of the world (see Shabbat 10a and Ramban to Bereshit 1:28).

Conclusion The four classic Teshuvot that treat the topic of cosmetic surgery present significantly different approaches to this topic.

Rav J. David Bleich (Judaism and Healing pp.126-128) concludes that it is permissible in case of great need. However, there appears to be no published ruling from a major Halachic authority that explicitly permits cosmetic surgery that is conducted purely for reasons of convenience. One who is contemplating cosmetic surgery should consult his Rav for a ruling on its permissibility. Next week, Bli Neder and with Hashem's help, we shall discuss the issue of permanent and semi-permanent makeup.

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This publication contains Torah matter and should be treated accordingly

From: RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN'S SHABBAT SHALOM Parsha Column [parshat_hashavua@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: Jan. 12, 2005 To: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column Subject: Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Bo by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Bo (Exodus 10:1-13:16) By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel - "And Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said to him, 'So says the Lord G-d of the Hebrews...If you refuse to let My people go I shall tomorrow bring locusts upon your borders.'" (Exodus 10:3,4)

This week's Torah portion of Bo brings the Ten Plagues to their zenith, ultimately convincing Pharaoh to give the Jews their freedom after the plague of the slaying of the first born of the Egyptians. Included in the list of ten are natural disasters as well, such as the plague of locusts and hail and total darkness. Emerging from these plagues as well as from the story of the flood is the prevalent notion – even logical to most religionists – that natural disasters are a special sign of Divine displeasure with human conduct, a punishment from the Almighty for our sins on earth. This notion becomes even more relevant just a few weeks after the tragedy of the Tsunami which claimed close to 150,000 lives and leaving many more wounded, homeless and bereft of material possessions off the shores of Asia. When we realize that many of the victims of the Tsunami were innocent children and very ethical and upstanding adults, it becomes difficult to understand how a beneficent G-d of compassion and loving-kindness could cause such punishment to blameless individuals.

When we examine the Talmudic sources which discuss natural disasters, a very different theological picture may well emerge. Although there certainly are statements in the Talmud suggesting a cause and effect relationship of sin and punishment regarding such phenomena (J.T. Berachot 9,2), there is a major source which bears further study. The Mishna teaches, "... upon witnessing an earthquake (zvaot) ... one recites the blessing, 'Blessed art Thou... whose strength and power fills the world' (Mishna Berachot 9,2)." Rabbenu Ovadia Bartenura, probably the most well known of classical Mishna commentaries, offers an alternate blessing, "Blessed art Thou... the Creator of the world", based upon an alternate reading of the Mishna. Our legal code enables the individual to choose whichever blessing he prefers (Shulchan Aruch Orah Haim siman 227, seif 1). What is the difference between these two blessings conceptually and theologically? Moreover when the Talmud attempts to explain the earthquake phenomenon, one reason given is, "When the Holy One blessed be He is reminded of the great pain of His children suffering under the heels of their Gentile oppressors, He sheds two tears into the Mediterranean Sea whose sound is heard from one end of the world to the other. That is what we call an earthquake" (B.T. Berachot 59a) This too seems like a strange comment.

Let us return once again to this morning's Torah reading and the very first commandment given to the Jewish People: "This renewal of the moon shall be for you (the festival of) the New Moons..." (Exodus 12:2). We are commanded to mark the New Moon, witnesses must peer the black in the sky until they see it's first glimmering light and must even transgress the Sabbath to quickly arrive at the Sanhedrin and report on their sight, and we even have a monthly ritual in which we sing songs of praise and dance in a circle while gazing up at the New Moon. Why such moon fascination?

The beginning of the answer stems from the midrash, which sees the emergence and subsequent waxing of the moon as the ultimate symbol of world redemption. This harks back to a verse which describes the original creation of the orbs of the sky: "And G-d made two great lights: the great light to rule by day and the small light to rule by night" (Genesis 1:16). Why does the verse begin with two great lights and conclude with one which is great and one which is small? Rashi ad loc cites the Midrash: "They were created equal, but G-d lessened the moon (cut her down to size) because she was critical and said that it was impossible for two kings to wear one crown. The moon was jealous of the sun; since she wanted to be the major light, G-d made the sun the major light.

I believe that this midrash is teaching that G-d built jealousy – the source for all sin – into the very fabric of the creation. He punishes the moon, but allows her – as well as all of the subsequent creations, especially the human being – the ability to choose evil. It is our hope that eventually all of creation will return to G-d, perfect itself and perfect the world. In effect, nature reflects human beings; as long as

human beings sinned with the fruit of good and evil, as long as human society remains imperfect and undisciplined, nature will likewise be undisciplined and imperfect. The prophet Isaiah expresses this very well: "I create light and I make darkness, I make peace and create evil; I am G-d who does all these things..." (Isaiah 45:7). The picture of the prophet is of a world with darkness not only light, with chaos not only order. G-d has chosen human beings to be his partners – not his puppets – with the freedom of choice to perfect the world under the Kingship of G-d and to help bring about world redemption. G-d guarantees that this will eventually happen; but when and precisely how depends on us as much as it depends on Him. G-d is not always pictured as being happy with the nature of the world that He has created. Indeed the great talmudic sage Reish Lakish suggests that G-d even brings His own sin offering on the day of the New Moon for having created an imperfect world of free choice and tragedy, of good things that happen to bad people and bad things that happen to good people. (B.T. Shevuot 9a). I believe that this is why the Almighty weeps and it is His tears – not his might which produces earthquakes and Tsunamis. From this perspective the more appropriate blessing upon seeing such a disaster is praise to the G-d of Creation rather than to the G-d of power. And we are certainly heartened by the ultimate vision of Isaiah, who promises us that when humanity perfects itself G-d will perfect all of nature. At that time, "When the wolf and the lamb live together.... and when there is no evil or destruction in the mountain of My holiness" there will be no more earthquakes and no more Tsunamis. But we cannot escape our responsibility; at the end of the day it depends on us.

Shabbat Shalom

From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: Jan. 12, 2005 To: yhe-parsha@etzion.org.il Subject: PARSHA65 -15: Parashat Bo Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Parashat Hashavua
This parasha series is dedicated in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l.

vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha65/15-65bo.htm This shiur is dedicated in memory of Max (Chaim Meir ben Benyamin) Fuchs z"l, whose yahrzeit will be observed on the seventh of Shevat. Please pray for a refuah sheleimah for Chaya Chanina bat Marcel. Please pray for a refuah sheleimah for Abraham ben Orah Yittel, critically injured in a car accident this week.

"THIS MONTH SHALL BE FOR YOU..." – JEWISH DATES
BY RAV YAAKOV MEDAN

A. "REMEMBER THE SHABBAT DAY TO SANCTIFY IT"

How are we to fulfill the commandment of "remembering the Shabbat day?" The Gemara (Beitza 16a) tells of Shammai the Elder, who would go out every day to buy delicacies for Shabbat, but this appears to be a trait of special piety; it is difficult to imagine that this is the way in which the commandment must be fulfilled. Elsewhere (Pesachim 106a) the Gemara deduces from the commandment to "Remember..." the requirement to recite Kiddush – "Remember Shabbat over wine"; but it would seem that the main task of "remembering" the Shabbat day must take place before Shabbat, not during the course of it.

Perhaps we may propose that this commandment is fulfilled by the way in which we count the days of the week. The gentile world refers to the days of the week by names derived from celestial bodies: "Sunday" is, of course, the "day of the sun"; "Monday" honors the moon; "Saturday" is named after the planet Saturn. If we want to calculate how many days there are between Monday and Saturday, we must count them on our fingers – or otherwise convert the English names into their Hebrew equivalents. From "yom sheni" (the "second day" – Monday) until Shabbat – a person knows right away that there are five days. The simple calculation of the difference between seven and two produces an immediate result in our head. This is the Torah's intention. On every day of the week a person should remember how many days are left to prepare for Shabbat. Shabbat is the only day that is not counted towards something else, and therefore has its own name. The auxiliary benefit of this system is the convenience of knowing "where we're up to" in the week. Not only Shabbat 'benefits,' as it were, but we ourselves know immediately how many days there are between "yom sheni" (Monday) and "yom chamishi" (Thursday), without having to calculate [1].

In summary - there are three advantages to the Jewish system of counting the days of the week:

- i. It avoids the taint of idolatry that is inherent in a system that names after the sun, the moon, and the stars, thereby memorializing ancient paganism.
- ii. It makes it easier to calculate the space between different days of the same week.

iii. Most importantly – we are constantly reminded of Shabbat, and how many days remain until Shabbat comes. We thereby fulfill one of the Ten Commandments.

B. "REMEMBER THIS DAY, WHEN YOU CAME OUT OF EGYPT"

In the same way that we count the days of the week, we also count the months of the year. Here we encounter the same problems – perhaps even more severe ones – but surprisingly enough, the situation is reversed.

The original Gregorian (Christian) system for counting months is certainly to be ruled out; it offers no advantage. The names of these months commemorate such anti-Semitic Caesars as Julius and Augustus – whom we have no wish to honor – as well as clearly idolatrous allusions (March = Mars, the Greek god of war). But in truth, the accepted Jewish names for the months do not appear to be much better: in what way is Mars, the Greek god of war, any worse than Tammuz – the Babylonian god of fertility (see, for example, Yechezkel 8:14)? We may assume that other names of months in the Hebrew calendar are similarly associated with idolatry.

Admittedly, chassidic tradition has made valiant attempts to "Judaize" the accepted names of the months. "Elul" represents various acronyms, such as "ani le-dodi ve-dodi li" ("I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine" – from Shir Hashirim); "Nissan" is called so because of the miracle ("nes") that took place during that month (the Exodus from Egypt); "Adar" is interpreted as arising from the expression, "Give me a ladle and I shall dwell (adur) among you," as the Midrash teaches on Parashat Teruma, which is read at the beginning of the month of Adar; etc. But these interpretations seem far-fetched, and anyway do not cancel the literal meanings of the Babylonian names, which – as stated – commemorate forms of idolatry.

The Ramban (in his sermon on Rosh Ha-shana) raises a different question related to our counting of the months: what ever happened to the commandment, "This month shall be for you the beginning of the months; it is the first [month] for you of the months of the year?" Is this not a commandment from the Torah to count the months starting from Nissan, in order to remind us of the month in which G-d brought us out of slavery to freedom?! And Rashi has already commented on this mitzva as follows: "This month..." – G-d said this to him concerning the month of Nissan: this should be the first in the order of counting the months; such that Iyar is the second month, and Sivan the third." (Rashi 12:2)

Indeed, this reflects the dating system used throughout the Torah. The months are noted by number, rather than by name. Why, then, do we not continue this practice? The Ramban explains that since the return of the Babylonian exiles to Israel, the Babylonian-Persian names have been preserved in order to fulfill the prophecy of Yirmiyahu, "Therefore behold: days are coming, promises G-d, when they shall say no more 'As the Lord lives, Who brought up Benei Yisrael from the land of Egypt,' but rather 'As the Lord lives, Who brought up and led the seed of the House of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands to which I have driven them, and they shall dwell on their own land.'" (Yirmiyahu 23:7-8)

If the Ramban is declaring this to be an important principle, we can certainly accept it. But if he is positing that this is law, we may answer: nowhere does the Torah suggest that we are commanded to use the Egyptian names of months forever more in order to commemorate the Exodus. On the contrary – the Exodus and liberation should be expressed, inter alia, in a complete abandonment of Egyptian culture and idolatrous beliefs. Similarly, we may ask: does the use of the Persian names of months express our return to the Land from Persian exile? Does the use of their names not testify, in fact, that we have adopted something of the exile for ourselves, bringing it with us to our land, with no desire to liberate ourselves from it!? Rather, this is perfectly parallel to someone who comes from the Diaspora to Jerusalem, and then calls his neighborhood "Ramat Polin" or "Battei Ungarin." This person is not expressing his thanks to G-d for bringing him out of those defiled lands; rather, he is demonstrating that although he is physically located in Eretz Yisrael, his consciousness remains in Poland, where the observance of Torah seems more proper to him... Let us add to this question the additional side-benefit of counting the months by number as opposed to name. The Christians have liberated themselves from the names of the months, which make daily activities more complicated and awkward, and have begun referring to the months by number. What was previously a difficult question (how many months are there between March and October) now becomes much easier to deal with (how many months are there between the third month and the tenth month). We, on the other hand, are still struggling with our calculation of the months: can the reader quickly answer how many months there are between Sivan and Shevat? Now try to calculate how many months there are between the third month and the eleventh. Surely this is a much quicker system!

If the only disadvantage to the Persian names of the months was the inconvenience involved in these calculations, we would not raise such a strong

argument against them. But in reality, we are not merely complicating our calculations of months – a task with which we are frequently confronted. And since we are so certain that the Persian names of the months were given at Sinai – after all, our grandfather's grandfather used them! – and since "innovation is prohibited from the Torah – chadash assur min ha-Torah," we dare not replace these names with numbers, as the Christian world has so efficiently done. Therefore, the simplest solution would seem to be to leave the "traditional" Persian names, but to calculate dates with the help of the convenient and useful Christian calendar which, instead of being based on the date when the Lord our G-d brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery, is based on the birthday of Jesus. Woe to such shame and reproach!

Let us summarize this section as follows. We have listed three advantages to counting the months as the Torah does, rather than relying on the "Persian" system upon which the Hebrew calendar is based:

- i. The numbers free us of any connection with foreign idolatry.
- ii. The numerical dating system is far more convenient for everyday use, and we are not required to pander to Christian culture in order to enjoy this convenience.
- iii. The Torah's system of counting reminds us of the day when we left Egypt, and counts all the months accordingly.

C. COUNTING THE YEARS Last week, the Chinese marked the "year of the monkey." Giving names to the years reflects a lack of a sense of history and a lack of need to plan for the long term. We assert all this on the basis of what we said above: it is extremely difficult to calculate how much time has passed from the "year of the dragon" until the "year of the monkey" – especially if that period consists of several decades or even centuries. In contrast to the counting of the days of the week or months of the year, whose manner of counting have been adopted from western culture, when it comes to years both systems rely on counting numerically or with letters that represent numbers.

We customarily count years since the Creation of the world. I have never quite understood the reason for counting back to that date, which bogs down our counting with a lot of extra years and generally complicates matters. Our most reliable source for counting since Creation is from the Middle Ages, around the time of the Rambam. It appears that at that time there was a transition from the counting system that had been accepted among Chazal and during the period of the Geonim – "minyan shetarot" (the system of counting used in documents which we shall discuss further on), to the system of counting back to Creation. This transition finds expression, for example, in the following law in the Rambam, dealing with the counting of Shemitta years: "According to this calculation, this year – 1,107 years since the Destruction, which is the year 1,489 according to "minyan shetarot" which is the year 4,936 since the Creation – is a Shemitta year, and it is the twenty-first year of the Jubilee cycle" (Laws of Shemitta and Yovel, 10:4)

The system for counting years in Tanakh is generally based on the years of a king's rule: "In the fifty-second year of Azarya, King of Yehuda (Melakhim II 15:27), etc. This system is convenient for counting short periods, but is neither convenient nor practical for calculating longer periods. How is a person to calculate how much time passes between the thirty-third year of Yo'ash and the twenty-seventh year of Azarya? But the "royal" dating system remains. The Christian count of years since Jesus is, in fact, the counting of the kingdom of "new Israel," of the "true nation of Israel," which has accepted upon itself the utterances of "that man" with no connection to the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The Moslem counting of years back to Mohammed – "the crazy one," as the Rambam refers to him – is the counting from the vision of the universal Arab empire that Mohammed's followers establish wherever they can. Not one of them ever thought to count from the Creation of the world.

An alternative system of counting is found in the Tanakh in the noting of the year of construction of the palace of G-d's kingdom, the Temple: "And it was, in the 480th year since the Exodus of Benei Yisrael from Egypt, in the fourth year, in this month – the second month of King Shelomo's reign over Israel, that he built a house for G-d." (Melakhim I 6:1) This count is also based on royalty, not mortal royalty, not the royalty of idolatry, but the kingship of G-d. G-d's kingship became manifest in the world with the declaration concluding the Exodus from Egypt, at the end of the Song of the Sea:

"G-d will reign for ever and ever" (15:18) It would seem logical that the years should be counted from that point. For if the Torah commands us to remember the Exodus from Egypt through our counting of the months, why should we not commemorate the greatest event in our nation's history in our counting of years as well? This is the true counting based on royalty – the kingship of G-d! Moreover, we calculate the reign of all the kings of Israel

starting from the month of Nissan (Mishna Rosh Ha-shana 2a), because of the kingship of G-d which begins with the Exodus. Why should we count only the years of mortal kings and not the years of G-d's kingship, from the Exodus [3]?

As mentioned, our sources reveal another way of counting years, and this is known as "minyan shetarot." This system was used in Sefer ha-Makkabim, in the period of Chazal, and in the period of the Geonim. In the Responsa of the Rif, too, this system is the dominant one; it is even to be found among the Sages of Eretz Yisrael in the generation following the Spanish Expulsion, and the Yemenites follow this custom of counting to this day.

It is generally agreed that this system dates back to the kingdom of Seleucid I, who inherited part of the kingdom of Alexander the Great, including Eretz Yisrael. The first year of Seleucid I's reign was 3448 years after the Creation (312 C.E.). This custom is most surprising. For what reason did Chazal, the Geonim (especially in the letter of Rav Sherira Gaon) and those who followed, decide to count years according to such an archaic and irrelevant system, thereby memorializing a gentile king so many years after both he and his kingdom had disappeared? Rav Reuven Margaliyot provides a simple and accurate answer: the Exodus from Egypt took place in the year 2448 after the Creation of the world, as we may calculate on the basis of the years listed in Sefer Bereishit up until the birth of Yitzchak (2048 years), together with another 400 years of slavery, as mentioned in the Berit Bein Ha-betarim. Hence, Seleucid I ascended the throne exactly one thousand years after the Exodus – as the author of "Seder Olam" notes explicitly.

The counting of years based on "minyan shetarot" is therefore meant as a system of counting back to the Exodus, as arising from the sources and from the spirit of the commandment to "remember the Exodus from Egypt." The Geonim – who counted according to "minyan shetarot" – adopted the technical counting of from Seleucid I since they were in fact counting years since the Exodus, with the omission of the "thousands" – just as we count today back to Creation with the omission of the "thousands." Let us summarize this section as follows: the essence of our counting should be the commemoration of the Exodus and of G-d's kingship. This is how Tanakh counts years, and it is possibly the same idea that lies behind the counting of Chazal and the Geonim.

D. LETTERS AND NUMBERS Putting aside the question of what we're counting from – Creation or the Exodus – there is another difference between the Hebrew counting system and the Christian one, both in days of the month and in counting the years. The count is numerical, while the accepted Hebrew notation is in letters. This is appropriate and reflects the custom dating back to our most ancient sources. The language of numbers (in written notation!) as opposed to the language of letters is not a custom of Jewish origin; why, then, should we adopt a foreign language?

On second thoughts, though, let us address the question of how useful the language of letters really is. I was recently involved in the last chapters of Massekhet Ketuvot including, inter alia, the commentary of Rabbi Betzalel Ashkenazi – the "Shita Mekubetzet" – on these chapters. Let us investigate how many printed pages comprise his commentary on these chapters. In my printed edition (Ministry of Education, Tel Aviv 5725) the commentary of the "Shita Mekubetzet" on the ninth chapter of Ketuvot begins on page tav-tav-tav-resh-nun-heh, and concludes, at the end of chapter thirteen, on page tav-tav-tav-tav-kuf-peh. The indulgent reader is invited to try and calculate the total number of pages. Had the page numbers been noted in numerical form, we would know that we're trying to find the difference between 1455 and 1780 – a far easier and more practical calculation.

A similar problem arises in the calculation of years. How many years have passed since the year four thousand and tav-tav-kuf-ayin-alef (the year when 300 Ba'alei ha-Tosafot arrived in Eretz Yisrael) until today? And how long would it take us to work this out if we were to refer to the years numerically? The same point can be made concerning the days of the month. How many days are there between "tet-zayin" of a month and "khaf-gimel" of the same month? Now, how many days are there between the sixteenth and the twenty-third? Let us emphasize once again: the price of using letters is not the convenience of the calculation, since we should never forego that convenience. The price is the practicality and usefulness. Our brains are used to a decimal, digital system, while the system of letters – especially from the letter 'tav' onwards – is not suited to that way of thinking [2]. As a result, counting by letters has remained a "religious," ceremonial system used for ketuvot and divorce documents. And because the Hebrew date of the month is not noted numerically, we end up using the Christian calendar for all of our everyday purposes; our consciousness regulates the order of our lives and our historical awareness with reference to the birth of Jesus. Thus we have a Torah that is infinitely punctilious with regard to the laws pertaining to recitation of blessings and to the mention of G-d's Name during Torah study and prayer, but quite lackadaisical in this aspect of the laws of idolatry! Woe to us

when it comes to the Day of Judgment, when we must answer to He Who commanded, at Sinai, "I am the Lord your G-d Who took you out of the land of Egypt" for the sin of omitting any mention of His Kingship from the order of our time and calendar, commemorating instead the Nazerene.

Our historical consciousness, too, suffers to no small extent as a result of our reliance on foreign dates. Let us consider two examples. According to the Gemara in Bava Batra (3a) and according to Rashi in his commentary on Vayikra 16:3, we all know that the First Temple stood for 410 (tav-yud) years. We think of these years as lasting from 961 B.C.E. until 586 B.C.E. According to those same sources, the Second Temple stood for 420 years – and we generally think of these years as lasting from 521 B.C.E. until 70 C.E. A quick calculation illustrates the absurdity and contradiction between the two counting systems. The reason is quite simple: we think in terms of Christian research, because it uses numbers; we do not think in the chronological terms bequeathed to us by Chazal because we have translated them into numbers. And so we are forced to resolve the contradiction in favor of the system utilized by Christian research.

E. THEORY VS. PRACTICE A transition to counting the days of the month, the names of the months, and the years in numerical terms, and a simultaneous transition to a system that counts years and months back to the Exodus is not wildly unrealistic and impractical. It is possible to do. In this way we could educate our children and students towards a faith-based, Jewish historical consciousness, and restore the trampled glory of the commemoration of G-d's Kingdom and the Exodus from Egypt.

The author of this article uses the following system of dating. The date of the writing of this article, for example – 5.11.315 – commemorates the death of the 35 heroes who died in the convoy to Gush Etzion. We are now in the year 3315 since the Exodus, but I omit the "thousands" figure for the sake of convenience as well as to preserve the system used by the Geonim, who omitted the "thousands" from their counting based on "minyan shetarot" – which also commemorated the Exodus from Egypt. The author uses the same system for dating in memoranda that he sends to academics, legalists and government officials with whom he comes into contact, and never has any one of them raised any objection. But to date the author remains alone in this campaign. Dear readers: "If you wish it – it is no dream!" The date can begin with the blackboard at school. One day it will reach the computers of the Central Bank of Israel...

Notes: [1] We may compare the difference between the ways of counting days to the difference between the systems for naming streets in different cities. In Israel, street names usually commemorate political bigwigs, names of flowers, etc. A person who finds himself in a certain city on Rabin Boulevard, for example, will have considerable trouble knowing how far he must walk, and in which direction, in order to get to Democracy Avenue, and from there to Peace Square. In Manhattan, longitudinal streets are numbered, while latitudinal streets are noted by name. A person has little trouble finding his way from 77th street to 71st. [2] In the past there was an unsuccessful attempt to adjust the letters to a decimal system by adding "final" letters: 'kaf-sofit' = 500; 'mem-sofit' = 600; 'nun-sofit' = 700; 'feh-sofit' = 800; 'tzaddi-sofit' = 900. As stated, this endeavor did not work out.

Translated by Kaeren Fish