



INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **VAEIRA** - 5779

BS"D

To: parsha@parsha.net
From: cshulman@gmail.com

In our 24th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to parsha-subscribe@yahoogroups.com Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net> It is also fully searchable.

Sponsored anonymously in memory of
Chaim Yissachar z"l ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov

To sponsor a parsha sheet (proceeds to tzedaka) contact
cshulman@parsha.net

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>
to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Jan 4, 2019, 12:02 AM
subject: **Rav Frand** - Instant Gratification vs Strategic Thought and Planning
Parshas Vaera

Instant Gratification vs Strategic Thought and Planning
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #1060 – Bentching on a Kos; Making Brochos with Children. Good Shabbos!
"I'll Have My Steak from the Jews' Cattle"

Prior to the plague of Dever [Pestilence], Moshe Rabbeinu warns Pharaoh in the name of the Master of the Universe: "For if you refuse to send out, and you continue to hold them, behold the Hand of Hashem is on your livestock that are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the cattle, and on the flock – a very severe epidemic. And Hashem shall distinguish between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, and not a thing that belongs to the Children of Israel will die." [Shemos 9:2-4]

The Jewish people were shepherds. They had large flocks. However, Hashem promises that the Dever-epidemic will not affect their sheep and cattle. In fact, it occurred exactly as Moshe warned: "Hashem carried out this word the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died, and of the livestock of the Children of Israel not one died." [Shemos 9:6]

The very next pasuk is noteworthy: "Pharaoh sent and behold, of the livestock of Israel not even one had died..." [Shemos 9:7]. Lo and behold, Pharaoh discovered that Hashem was right! Not one Jewish animal died! What was his reaction? "...and Pharaoh's heart became stubborn and he did not send out the people." [ibid.] On the face of it, this is totally counterintuitive and illogical. Everything happened exactly as Hashem had foretold; Pharaoh verified that this was the case; and so he decided "You know what? I am not going to send them out!" What sense is there to this? How do we understand this pasuk?

The answer is that Pharaoh is exhibiting the classic response of a wicked person, a person who consciously decides, "I am not going to recognize the Hand of G-d." Pharaoh says to himself: "Okay, my entire flock died out. There is nothing to eat! So where am I going to get supper tonight? What are we going to serve? No problem. The Jews still have meat. Aha! If the Jews still have meat, there is no problem. I have a way out!"

I do not know exactly what terminology to use to define this type of behavior. It is either myopia, shortsightedness, live-for-the-here-and-now, or eat-drink-

and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-you-die. No matter how we describe it, the idea is that I am just going to look at the here and now in front of me, and as long as I still have the ability to have my steak for supper, why should I give in? This is an attitude that we find not only by Pharaoh – as we will demonstrate shortly – but it is an attitude that we find by all wicked people. It is akin to that which we noticed by Eisav. Eisav came in from the field and he was hungry and immediately took up Yaakov's offer to trade his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. Yaakov had said "...sell me like this day, your birthright as first-born" [Bereshis 25:31]. What is the meaning of the word "like this day" (ka'yom)? The Soforno writes that a person whose whole purpose of living is just for "today" (i.e., the moment) is willing to sell a birthright for a bowl of soup. All he worries about is "I need to eat. I am hungry." Instant gratification! The future? What is going to be? The long-term picture? Strategic thinking? None of that exists for such a person. This is true by the wicked when it comes to their stomach or to their kavod [honor], or to their power. They do not think strategically. They think for the here and now.

The Kli Yakar points out that we see the same phenomenon by the Plague of Frogs. Hashem promised that the frogs would descend upon Egypt. They came. Life became miserable for the Egyptians. Following cessation of that plague, the pasuk states "And Pharaoh saw that there was relief..." (va'yar Pharo ki hayesa harvacha) [Shemos 8:11]. What does it mean that there was revach? The Kli Yakar notes that we do not find such an expression by any of the other plagues. The reason, he writes, is that by all other plagues, after the plague ended, it was gone. When the hail stopped, the hail stopped; when the wild animals went away, they were gone. However, by the frogs, even though the ascent of the frogs from the Nile ceased, the plague was not over because they all died in place and the dead frogs began to rot and decay and Egypt stank from their stench.

So what was Pharaoh going to do? Where was he going to live? "I can't take this!"

The pasuk says that he saw that there was harvacha. Egypt was a big country. There was plenty of space in the Land of Egypt. Parts of Egypt were far away from the rivers and therefore did not have frogs. Therefore, it did not smell there. Pharaoh did not have a problem – he could escape to the "temporary White House." He went to places in Egypt where there were no rotting frogs. Ay – the rest of your country is going down the tube? Ay – it is unbearable everywhere else? "It is not my problem! I have a way out. I have wiggle room."

This is the same phenomenon by the plague of Dever. He saw that the plague did not affect the Jewish cattle, so he had an escape by which to provide himself with tonight's steak for supper. With supper for that night covered, Pharaoh decided, "I have time. I am not going to give in."

Wicked people like Pharaoh have no foresight. They are not trained to look beyond the here and now. They are incapable of strategic thought and strategic planning. If they can last another week or even another day, then "Why do teshuva now? I can always do teshuva later!" This is the path of the wicked, not the path of the righteous.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org
This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. ... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha Vaeira

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

When the hardships imposed upon the Israelites became oppressive, Moses complains to heaven that the promises made to him have not been fulfilled. He has come to Pharaoh to ask him to free the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage, and Pharaoh laughs at him and tells him to forget it. In addition, the Jewish people themselves are not really believers in Moses, or in the fact that they will be freed. They too complain that since Moses has come on the scene, the situation has worsened.

Moses, as a result, complains back to Heaven, in the form of a demand, so to speak, that an explanation is warranted. Why is this happening? At the burning bush, he was promised that the Jewish people would be freed and that he would be able to raise them to a great level of spirituality when they would accept The Torah and become an eternal people. These promises apparently remain unfulfilled. This is the problem he raises. It is this complaint that results in the answer that heaven gives to Moses in this week's reading.

It is interesting to note that heaven does not respond to Moses' specific complaints. Rather, Heaven, so to speak, says, "There were great people before you, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who I was able to deal with. They never complained. They never asked why. They never pursued the question. Yet, you lack patience right at the start of your mission." This is an absolute non-sequitur to the questions and complaints that Moses has raised.

We find that this is a pattern that exists throughout the Holy writings of the Bible. In the Great Book of Job, part of the canon of the Bible, Job complains to God about his treatment. Why is he made to suffer? What is his sin? Why should he be subject to so much disaster? It is interesting that again the response from Heaven is that, so to speak, this is not his business. Again, it's a non sequitur. God describes how he created the world, how the universe is maintained, the wonders of nature, the intricacies of science and of medicine and of the human body. None of this answer his questions and God says, so to speak, "You're never going to understand, you're never going to know. You weren't here at the beginning and you're not going to be here at the end, so your question really has no basis. I will not respond."

There's a great lesson in this. Throughout human life, personal, and national, things happen to us that have absolutely no rational or even justified cause. Why do these things happen? What is the judgment that is leveled against people and against nations? We would like to understand it. Moses himself will say, "God, tell me about you. Show me you." Heaven does not respond that way. Heaven remains mysterious. Heaven answers always with a non-sequitur.

Heaven does always deal with us but only by saying that we are the created, that Heaven is the creator, and there isn't a basis of mutual understanding and rationality. The questions are better left unasked. It is difficult for people to deal with this because everyone wants to know and understand everything. We want it all to make sense, but as the Prophet says, "My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts. You will never understand me." This is the basic lesson that we learn from the incident of Moses returning to fulfill his mission to deliver the Jewish people from Egypt and grant them The Torah. Moses now understands the difference between understanding Heaven and obeying Heaven. Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

<http://rabbisacks.org/the-god-who-acts-in-history-vaera-5779/>

The God Who Acts in History (Vaera 5779)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The Israelites were at their lowest ebb. They had been enslaved. A decree had been issued that every male child was to be killed. Moses had been sent to liberate them, but the first effect of his intervention was to make matters worse, not better. Their quota of brick-making remained unchanged, but now they also had to provide their own straw. Initially they had believed Moses when he performed the signs God had given him and told them that God was about to rescue them. Now they turned against Moses and Aaron, accusing them:

"May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us." (Exodus 5:20-21)

At this point Moses – who had been so reluctant to take on the mission – turned to God in protest and anguish:

"O Lord, why have You brought trouble upon this people? Is this why You sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and You have not rescued Your people at all." (Exodus 5:22)

None of this, however, was accidental. The Torah is preparing the ground for one of its most monumental propositions: In the darkest night, Israel was about to have its greatest encounter with God. Hope was to be born at the very edge of the abyss of despair. There was nothing natural about this, nothing inevitable. No logic can give rise to hope; no law of history charts a path from slavery to redemption. The entire sequence of events was a prelude to the single most formative moment in the history of Israel: the intervention of God in history – the supreme Power intervening on behalf of the supremely powerless, not (as in every other culture) to endorse the status quo, but to overturn it.

God tells Moses: "I am Hashem, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:6-7). The entire speech is full of interest, but what will concern us – as it has successive generations of interpreters – is what God tells Moses at the outset: "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty [E-l Shaddai], but by My name Hashem I was not known to them" (Ex. 6:3). A fundamental distinction is being made between the experience the patriarchs had of God, and the experience the Israelites were about to have. Something new, unprecedented, was about to happen. What is it?

Clearly it had to do with the names by which God is known. The verse distinguishes between E-l Shaddai ("God Almighty") and the four-letter name of God which, because of its sanctity, Jewish tradition refers to simply as Hashem – "the name" par excellence.

As the classic Jewish commentators point out, the verse must be read with great care. It does not say that the patriarchs "did not know" this name; nor does it say that God did not "make this name known" to them. The name Hashem appears no less than 165 times in the book of Genesis. God Himself uses the phrase "I am Hashem" to both Abraham (Genesis 15:7) and Jacob (28:13). What, then, is new about the revelation of God that was about to happen in the days of Moses that had never happened before?

The Sages give various explanations. A Midrash says that God is known as Elokim when He judges human beings, E-l Shaddai when He suspends judgment and Hashem when He shows mercy.[1] Judah Halevi in The Kuzari, and Ramban in his Commentary, say that Hashem refers to God when He performs miracles that suspend the laws of nature. [2] However, Rashi's explanation is the simplest and most elegant:

It is not written here, "[My name, Hashem] I did not make known to them" but rather "[By the name, Hashem] I was not known to them" – meaning, I was not recognised by them in My attribute of "keeping faith," by reason of which My name is "Hashem," namely that I am faithful to fulfil My word, for I made promises to them but I did not fulfil them [during their lifetime].[3]

The patriarchs had received promises from God. They would multiply and become a nation. They would inherit a land. Neither of these promises were realised in their lifetime. To the contrary, as Genesis reaches its close, the family of the patriarchs numbered a mere seventy souls. They had not yet acquired a land. They were in exile in Egypt. But now the fulfilment was about to begin. Already, in the first chapter of Exodus, we hear, for the first time, the phrase Am Bnei Yisrael, "the people of the children of Israel" (Ex. 1:9). Israel was no longer a family, but a people. Moses at the burning bush was told by God that He was about to bring the people to "a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8). Hashem therefore means the God who acts in history to fulfil His promises.

This was something radically new – not just to Israel but to humanity as a whole. Until then, God (or the gods) was known through nature. God was in the sun, the stars, the rain, the storm, the fertility of the fields and the sequence of the seasons. When there was drought and famine, the gods were being angry. When there was produce in plenty, the gods were showing favour. The gods were nature personified. Never before had God intervened in history, to rescue a

people from slavery and set them on the path to freedom. This was a revolution, at once political and intellectual.

To most humans at most times, there seems to be no meaning in history. We live, we die, and it is as if we had never been. The universe gives no sign of any interest in our existence. If that was so in ancient times, when people believed in the existence of gods, how much more so is it true today for the neo-Darwinians who see life as no more than the operation of “chance and necessity” (Jacques Monod) or “the blind watchmaker” (Richard Dawkins).[4] Time seems to obliterate all meaning. Nothing lasts. Nothing endures.[5]

In ancient Israel, by contrast, “for the first time, the prophets placed a value on history...For the first time, we find affirmed and increasingly accepted the idea that historical events have a value in themselves, insofar as they are determined by the will of God...Historical facts thus become situations of man in respect to God, and as such they acquire a religious value that nothing had previously been able to confer on them. It may, then, be said with truth that the Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of God.”[6] Judaism is humanity’s first glimpse of history as more than a mere succession of happenings – as nothing less than a drama of redemption in which the fate of a nation reflects its loyalty or otherwise to a covenant with God.

It is hard to recapture this turning point in the human imagination, just as it is hard for us to imagine what it was like for people first to encounter Copernicus’ discovery that the earth went round the sun. It must have been a terrifying threat to all who believed that the earth did not move; that it was the one stable point in a shifting universe. So it was with time. The ancients believed that nothing really changed. Time was, in Plato’s phrase, no more than the “moving image of eternity.” That was the certainty that gave people solace. The times may be out of joint, but eventually things will return to the way they were.

To think of history as an arena of change is terrifying likewise. It means that what happened once may never happen again; that we are embarked on a journey with no assurance that we will ever return to where we began. It is what Milan Kundera meant in his phrase, “the unbearable lightness of being.”[7] Only profound faith – a new kind of faith, breaking with the entire world of ancient mythology – could give people the courage to set out on a journey to the unknown.

That is the meaning of Hashem: the God who intervenes in history. As Judah Halevi points out, the Ten Commandments begin not with the words “I am the Lord your God who created heaven and earth,” but “I am the Lord your God who brought you out from Egypt, from the house of slavery.” Elokim is God as we encounter Him in nature and creation, but Hashem is God as revealed in history, in the liberation of the Israelites from slavery and Egypt.

I find it moving that this is precisely what many non-Jewish observers have concluded. This, for example, is the verdict of the Russian thinker Nikolai Berdyaev:

I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint...Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history: all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny.[8]

That is what God tells Moses is about to be revealed: Hashem, meaning God as He intervenes in the arena of time, “so that My name may be declared throughout the world” (Ex. 9:16). The script of history would bear the mark of a hand not human, but divine. And it began with these words: “Therefore say to the Israelites: I am Hashem, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.”

Shabbat shalom

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

<https://ots.org.il/shabbat-shalom-vaera-5779/>

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Va’era (Exodus 6:2-9:35)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “And God spoke to Moses and said unto him, I am the Lord, and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as Almighty God [El Shaddai], but My name YHVH [Four-letter Name of God] I have not made known to them.” (Exodus 6:2–3)

What is the secret of Jewish eternity? If medical opinion is beginning to maintain that one of the most important variables in achieving longevity is an optimistic outlook on life, one of the most unique and important messages that Judaism gave to the world is the optimistic notion of world redemption.

Our Western culture is formed by the Greco-Roman civilization and by what is generally known as the “Judeo-Christian” tradition. The Greeks saw the world and life in a cyclical pattern of endless repetition without purpose or end-game: the myth of Sisyphus who is doomed to take the boulder up and down the mountain endlessly; the tragedy of Oedipus who suffers the sins of his parents and whose children are doomed to repeat the very crimes committed by their forbears; Shakespeare’s “tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow beats on this petty pace to the last syllable of recorded time” and “life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Judaism, on the other hand, teaches that world and history are linear rather than cyclical, progressing towards repair and redemption, the prophetic notion of eventual human perfection at a time when “nation will not lift up sword against nation and humanity will not learn war any more” (Is. 2:4).

I would maintain that what has kept us going despite exile, persecution and pogrom is this fundamental belief that what we do counts and that eventually we will succeed in perfecting the world in the Kingship of God.

This revolutionary optimistic concept is built around the name of God revealed at the beginning of this Torah portion: “And God spoke to Moses, and said to him I am the Lord (YHVH)” (Ex. 6:2). The Bible goes on to say that our patriarchs only knew of the name “Almighty God” (El Shaddai), but this generation of Moses will be privileged to know the new name of God, the Lord (YHVH). And it is specifically within the context of this new revelation of the name that God confirms the establishment of the covenant, the entry of Israel the people into Israel the land, and the exodus from slavery and oppression to freedom and redemption.

What does this new revealed name have to do with redemption? In the previous Torah portion we read of the dialogue between God and Moses that is the beginning of the explanation. The Almighty reveals Himself to Moses in a burning bush, and bestows upon him the mission of taking the Jews out of Egypt (Ex. 3:10). Moses asks for God’s name, which is another way of asking for a working definition of God which he could communicate to the Israelites. God said to Moses, “Ehyeh asher ehyeh” (Ex. 3:14), which is best translated, “I will be what I will be.” What kind of name is this? It seems to be vague, not at all defined, and very much open-ended. Moreover, the verb form around which this phrase is built is identical to the verb form of the newly revealed name of God, both of them coming from the verb to be (H Y H).

In order to complete the elements of our puzzle, we must invoke the very first commandment which God will give the newly formed Jewish people:

“This renewal of the moon shall be for you the beginning of the months...” (Exodus 12:1)

The Israelites are commanded to search the darkened sky for the new moon, the light which emerges each month from the blackened heavens devoid of light. The Zohar, in explaining the importance of the moon and our celebration of its renewal each month with Psalms of praise (Hallel), explains:

The Jewish nation is compared to the moon. Just as the moon wanes and seems to have completely disappeared into darkness only to be renewed and reborn, so will the Jewish people often appear to have been overwhelmed by the forces of darkness and evil only to reemerge as a nation reborn in a march towards redemption.

Thus did the Babylonian Talmud emerge from the destruction of the Second Temple and the reborn State of Israel emerge from the tragedy of the Holocaust. From this perspective, the message of the moon is a message of ultimate optimism. The Almighty God Himself guarantees not only survival but also salvation. The paradigm for the optimistic and life-affirming pattern of exile and redemption is our experience of slavery in and exodus out of Egypt – and the

fundamental change in Egyptian society and world mentality wrought by that exodus.

And let us pay special attention to the words of this first commandment: "This renewal of the moon shall be for you the beginning of the months..." The Hebrew phrase "for you" seems superfluous. Its meaning, however, as explained by the sages of the Talmud, makes it central and pivotal to the world as the Bible sees it. Our God is not only the God of creation, El Shaddai, the God who set limits on each element as He set boundaries on the heavens and the earth, the sands and the seas, mineral, vegetable, animal and human life and activity; He is also the God of history, "who will be what He will be," and who has a built-in plan for the world which includes its ultimate betterment and even perfection. And if creation was an act of One, events in history are the result of partnership between the divine and human beings, God, Israel and world. Hence in the marking of the renewal of the month, which is really the marking of historical time, the Lord clearly tells His people that time is in their hands to do with what they will. If indeed how many years we may have to live depends on many factors aside from ourselves, what we do with the time at our disposal depends mostly on us.
Shabbat Shalom!

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>
reply-to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com
to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com
date: Dec 30, 2018, 10:51 AM
subject: Of Frogs and Sanctification

Of Frogs and Sanctification

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Most people find it fascinating to discover that the great tzadikim, Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah, learned from the frogs in this week's parsha that there is a mitzvah to die al kiddush Hashem. Stay tuned to find out...

Question: Amphibious actions!

Where do we find that the deeds of amphibians affect a halachic decision?

Introduction:

The book of Daniel tells us the story of the great tzadikim, Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah, who were thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to prostrate themselves before the statue that Nevuchadnetzar had erected (see Daniel 3:1-30). The Gemara (Pesachim 53b) explains that their decision was based on the actions of the frogs in Mitzrayim. How and what Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah derived from the frogs will be discussed shortly, but we first need to understand some halachic background on this topic.

In general, the observance of mitzvos is superseded when life is threatened. We are well familiar with the law that, in the case of a medical, fire or other emergency, Shabbos observance is suspended to the extent necessary to protect life. The Gemara (Yoma 85a-b) quotes several halachic sources that demonstrate this concept. The conclusion is that we derive the rule that Shabbos observance is suspended to protect life from the pasuk, Vechai bahem (Vayikra 18:5), that the purpose of the mitzvos is to cherish life.

Kiddush Hashem

On the other hand, there is a mitzvah of the Torah, Venikdashti besoch B'nei Yisroel, in which Hashem commanded us to sanctify His presence within the Jewish people. This law teaches that, when an evil malefactor wants Jews to desecrate the Torah, we are sometimes required to sacrifice our lives. When ten Jews are aware that, under these circumstances, a Jew is being coerced to break any commandment, Kiddush Hashem requires that he surrender his life (Sanhedrin 74b). In this situation, someone who did not surrender his life violated not only the positive mitzvah (mitzvas aseh) of Venikdashti besoch B'nei Yisroel, but he also violated a negative command (mitzvas lo sa'aseh) of Velo sechalelu es shem kodshi.

However, when an evil malefactor is coercing a Jew to violate the Torah, but ten Jews are unaware that this is happening, the Jew is not obligated to give up his life, and, according to many authorities, he is not permitted to. There are other exceptions when one is not required or permitted to give up one's life, which we will learn about shortly.

The ruling requiring surrendering one's life is only when the goal of the oppressor is exclusively to get Jews to violate the mitzvos. However, if his goal is to get some benefit or pleasure for himself, there is no obligation to surrender one's life. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 74b) presents the following theoretical example to define the difference.

Rava said, "An idol worshipper who tells a Jew, 'Cut that hay on Shabbos and feed it to the animals, or I will kill you,' the Jew should cut the hay and not allow himself to be killed. On the other hand, if the idol worshipper demands of him, 'Cut that hay on Shabbos and throw it into the fire,' the Jew should allow himself to be killed and not cut the hay. What is the difference? In the latter case, the goal of the malevolent command is to have the Jew violate the mitzvah."

Rashi notes that Rava was discussing a situation that took place in the presence of ten Jews or, as we will soon explain, during a time of persecution. Otherwise, a Jew is not required, and, according to some opinions, not permitted to give up his life.

What about idols?

Aside from the law of Kiddush Hashem that I just discussed, there are other situations in which one is required to surrender one's life, rather than breach the Torah. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 74a) cites a dispute among tana'im concerning what is the halacha when someone's life is threatened should he refuse to worship an idol. Rabbi Yishmael rules that, if the situation is in private, Vechai bahem applies, even regarding the prohibition of avodah zarah. In his opinion, one may perform the external motions that appear to be idolatrous to save one's life. However, when the situation is in public, meaning that ten Jews know about it, Rabbi Yishmael agrees that the pasuk of Velo sechalelu es shem kodshi requires surrendering one's life, rather than violating the Torah.

Rabbi Eliezer disagrees, ruling that the sin of avodah zarah requires yehareig ve'al yaavor, meaning that one is always required to surrender one's life rather than violate the prohibition against idolatry, even if the sin will be performed in private. Rabbi Eliezer derives this ruling from the pasuk we say several times daily, Ve'ohavto es Hashem Elokecha bechol levavcho uvechol nafsbecho uvechol me'odecho, that we are required to love Hashem with our entire heart, soul and resources, which includes that we not renounce our belief in Him; we are required to demonstrate our love for Hashem, even in the event that it would require the ultimate sacrifice (Sanhedrin 74a).

Talmudic conclusion

Quoting the tana Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadok, the Gemara says that the Beis Din Hagadol, the final authority of halacha for the Jewish people, concluded that for three cardinal sins -- idol worship, giluy arayos (incest, adultery and similar offenses), and murder -- we always say yehareig ve'al yaavor. The requirement to sacrifice one's life rather than violate giluy arayos or murder is derived from other sources (Sanhedrin 74a).

In this context, the Gemara cites the following anecdote. A man approached the amora Rava, asking him the following she'eilah: The warlord of his town had told this man, "Go kill so-and-so; if not, I will kill you!" The man wanted to know whether he was permitted to follow the dictate of the warlord to save his life. Rava answered that the Torah does not permit murder, even to save your own life, because of the following point, "who tells you that your blood is redder. Perhaps the other person's blood is redder than yours!" In other words, who tells you that Hashem prefers that you survive, when you have to kill someone else in order to do so (Nimukey Yosef ad locum)?

Thus, we see that there are two situations in which we rule yehareig ve'al yaavor: When saving my life will require that I violate one of the three cardinal sins, or when the intent of the one posing the threat is only to get Jews to violate the mitzvos, and ten Jews are aware that this is happening.

During times of persecution

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 74a) adds a third situation in which the rule is yehareig ve'al yaavor: When the government is intent on destroying Yiddishkeit, which the Gemara calls sha'as gezeiras malchus, literally, at the time of government decrees, one is required to give up one's life rather than violate the Torah, even for a "light mitzvah." What is defined as a "light" or small mitzvah? The Gemara explains that this includes even the difference between the color of the shoelaces that Jews and gentiles use. Rashi explains that the case is when there is a Jewish custom that is more modest. Since the Jews have accepted this

practice, if the gentile is trying to get a Jew to violate accepted Jewish practice, he is required to give up his life. It is a Chillul Hashem to allow a gentile to force a Jew to violate accepted Jewish practice, and a Kiddush Hashem to follow Jewish practice. However, this halacha applies only when it is a time of religious persecution.

Rashi's older contemporary, the Rif, explains that the gentiles wore red shoelaces. Although there is no halachic prohibition to wear a specific color of shoelace, since this was the defining difference in garb between Jew and non-Jew in that time and place, if a gentile insisted that he wants a Jew to dress like a gentile does, one is required to sacrifice his life and not do so.

Sum up

Although when life is threatened, the observance of a mitzvah is generally suspended, in three situations one is required to sacrifice one's life rather than violate the Torah. The three situations are:

1. Being forced to commit one of the three cardinal sins.
2. At a time of persecution.
3. When someone is forcing a Jew to violate accepted Jewish law or practice in the presence of or with the knowledge of ten Jews.

The latter cases are true only when the perpetrator's motive is to force Jews to forsake G-d's law, but not when he is interested in benefiting from the transgression.

Based on the above, let us quote the Rambam:

"All members of the Jewish people are commanded to sanctify His great Name, as the Torah states, Venikdashti besoch B'nei Yisroel, and they are admonished not to desecrate it, as the Torah states, Velo sechalelu es sheim kodshi. How does this law manifest itself? If an idol worshipper will stand up and force a Jew to violate one of the mitzvos of the Torah in a situation that, if the Jew refuses, the idol worshipper will kill him, the Jew should transgress the mitzvah and not allow himself to be killed, since the Torah states, Vechai bahem -- You shall live with them, and not die because of them. If he chooses to die and not violate the mitzvah, he is held responsible for the loss of his own life. When is this true? -- regarding mitzvos other than idolatry, gi'ui arayos and shedding blood. However, regarding these three sins, if the idol worshipper tells him, "Violate one of these sins or be killed," the Jew should allow himself to be killed and not violate the mitzvah.

"When is this true? When the idol worshipper's intention is for his own pleasure, such as, he is forcing the Jew to build a house or to cook for the idol worshipper on Shabbos... However, if the idol worshipper's only goal is that the Jew violate the mitzvah, if... ten Jews are not present, the Jew should violate the mitzvah and not be killed. But if the idol worshipper forces the Jew in the presence of ten Jews, the Jew is required to give up his life rather than violate the mitzvah, even if it is one of the other mitzvos. Furthermore, these rules apply only when it is not a time when the gentiles are making decrees against the Jews. However, in an era that they are, such as when an evil king, like Nevuchadnetzar, makes decrees against the Jews to violate their religion or one of their mitzvos, a Jew is required to give up his life, regardless of which mitzvah he is being coerced to transgress and regardless as to whether this coercion is in the presence of ten Jews or in private" (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:1-3).

The Rambam continues: In every instance when it says that he should violate the mitzvah and not be killed, and the Jew chose instead to be killed rather than violate the mitzvah, he is guilty of giving up his life. And in every instance when it says that the Jew should give up his life rather than violate the mitzvah, and he surrendered his life and did not violate the mitzvah, he has sanctified Hashem's Name. If this happened in the presence of ten Jews, he sanctified Hashem's Name in public, as was done by Daniel, Chananyah, Mishael, Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva and others like them. These are the holy ones whose greatness is above all others... However, one who was required to surrender his life, but chose instead to violate the mitzvah and did not surrender his life has desecrated Hashem's Name, and, if ten Jews were present, he has desecrated Hashem's Name in public, abrogated the positive mitzvah of the Torah, Kiddush Hashem, and violated a negative mitzvah of the Torah, Chillul Hashem. Nevertheless, since his violation was coerced, he is not culpable of transgressing of his own will and, therefore, not subject to punishment for the prohibition violated, since

a person is not punished for a sin performed under coercion (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:4).

Elisha, owner of wings

In this context, the Gemara (Shabbos 130a) shares with us the following story about a tzadik named Elisha, who lived during the time of the Roman persecution:

"Why was he called Elisha, owner of wings?" It once happened that the evil kingdom (a Talmudic reference to the Roman Empire) decreed that any Jew who wears tefillin will have his brain smashed. Elisha went through the streets, proudly wearing his tefillin. A Roman soldier saw him and gave chase. Elisha whipped off his tefillin and hid them in his hands. The soldier caught him and demanded that Elisha tell him what he was holding. Elisha answered him that he was holding "dove's wings." Elisha then opened his hands and, indeed, he was holding the wings of doves! (We will soon explain why he used this example.) How could he?

The rishonim ask why Elisha was permitted to remove the tefillin from his head. This was clearly an era of gezeirah, and, as we noted above, in such an era, one is required to give up one's life even for a custom of the Jews, and certainly for a mitzvah of the Torah!

The rishonim answer that there is a difference between positive mitzvos and prohibitions. Since the evildoers could physically stop the Jews from keeping mitzvos requiring actions, e.g., by locking them up without access to tefillin, there is no requirement to sacrifice one's life to fulfill them (Ran, Pesachim 6a in Rif's dapim). However, in the case of participating in a forbidden activity in an era of gezeirah, there the Torah declared yeihoreig ve'al yaavor, that I am required to give up my life. This ruling is accepted by the poskim as the normative halacha (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 157).

Return of the frogs

As mentioned in our introduction, the Gemara (Pesachim 53b) teaches that Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah derived from the frogs that they could give up their lives, rather than bow to the statue. Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah noted that the frogs jumped into the Egyptian ovens when the ovens were hot, thus cremating themselves. Thus, the frogs, who had no mitzvah of sanctifying Hashem's Name, still did so. Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah reasoned a fortiori (kal vechomer): if the frogs, who were not required to sanctify Hashem's Name, burned themselves for the sake of demonstrating Hashem's greatness, we certainly should.

Tosafos (ad locum) questions: Why did Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah require a kal vechomer from the frogs to conclude that they should sacrifice themselves? The event with the statue of Nevuchadnetzar happened in public, and when an incident occurs in public and the evil person's goal is to demonstrate that he can force a Jew to violate mitzvos, the Gemara requires that one give up one's life. In such a case, it is a requirement to do so, even for a small mitzvah or even for a Jewish custom.

Rabbeinu Tam explained that, technically speaking, Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah were not required to sacrifice themselves, because the statue that Nevuchadnetzar erected was not an idol – it was similar to the statues that we find in our cities whose purpose is to honor someone. Nevuchadnetzar instructed people to bow to the statue to demonstrate their subservience to him. Thus, there was no requirement for Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah to give up their lives, but they derived from the frogs that it was permitted for them to do so.

In another approach, Rabbeinu Tam's nephew, Rabbeinu Yitzchak (usually called simply the Ri) disagreed that this is what happened in the story of Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah. Although he clearly accepts Rabbeinu Tam's halachic analysis, he feels that the statue placed there by Nevuchadnetzar was, indeed, an idol. To answer the question why Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah were not required to give up their lives because of the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem, and needed reassurance from the frogs that they were permitted to sacrifice themselves, the Ri answers that Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah could have fled. Their question was whether they were required to flee to save their lives or whether they were permitted to remain, knowing that by staying they would be required to give up their lives for Kiddush Hashem. They derived from the frogs that they were permitted to give up their lives for Kiddush Hashem, even though they had the opportunity to avoid the situation.

We see from this discussion two additional points:

1. Although there is a mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem, there is no requirement to make sure that one remains in his location to have the opportunity to perform the mitzvah. However, according to the Ri, it is permitted, and perhaps even meritorious, to do so.

2. We should note that the Rambam quoted above stated that, as a rule of thumb, when the Torah does not require *yeihareig ve'al yaavor*, one is prohibited from giving up one's life to do so. This implies that the Rambam disagrees with Rabbeinu Tam, who ruled that Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah were not required to sacrifice themselves in their situation, but were permitted to do so.

However, the Nimukei Yosef concludes that even the Rambam might agree here. When a person whom the Nimukei Yosef describes as a great tzadik sees that the generation is lax, he is permitted to sacrifice himself in order to teach his generation. He rallies evidence for this principle from the story of Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah.

Conclusion

I quoted above the story of the great tzadik called Elisha, "the owner of wings," and how he earned his moniker. The Gemara continues its sharing of the anecdote by asking why Elisha said that his tefillin were dove's wings. The Gemara concludes that the Jewish people are compared to doves, as the pasuk in Tehillim (68:14) compares the Jewish people to the wings of a dove that are coated with silver, and her wing-feathers are like fine gold. Just as the dove is protected by its wings, Klal Yisroel is protected by its mitzvos (Shabbos 130a)! May we always be protected by our mitzvos and never have to live through times when our mitzvos or lives are challenged.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

http://www.ou.org/torah/author/Rabbi_Dr_Tzvi_Hersh_Weinreb

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

OU Torah

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Vaera: Hopeless

I remember the conversation very well. It was a discussion among a group of assorted friends, from a variety of backgrounds. One or two were true scholars. The others were not scholars by any stretch of the imagination but were familiar with those Jewish texts frequently read in the synagogue.

The discussion revolved around the question, "What is the saddest verse in the entire Bible?" The opening candidate for the saddest verse was the passage in the weekly portion of Vayetzei, which reads, "The Lord saw that Leah was unloved." But that phrase was soon rejected in favor of the second half of that same verse, "but Rachel was barren." No question about it. Both the lack of love and infertility are very sad human conditions.

Others quoted various verses from the curses in the weekly portions of Bechukotai and Ki Tavo. There is no paucity of horribly sad verses in those two parshiyot. Here are just a few: "I will set my face against you... your foes shall dominate you;" "I will heap your carcasses upon your lifeless fetishes;" "You shall eat your own issue, the flesh of your sons and daughters." For these phrases, the adjectives "frightening" or "terrible" seem more appropriate than "sad."

For most of the discussion, I remained silent. For, you see, I had long before concluded which Torah verse was the saddest for me. The verse appears in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vaera (Exodus 6:2-9:35). It reads, "But they would not listen to Moses because of their crushed spirit and difficult toil." (ibid. 6:9)

Let's understand the context of this verse. In last week's parsha, we read of the first time Moses delivered the message that the redemption was near. The "people were convinced." They believed. They trusted Moses. They "bowed low in homage." They had hope.

This week's parsha, however, begins after the Jews knew bitter disappointment. Moses had intervened with Pharaoh, but his intervention backfired. Pharaoh reacted by increasing the burden he placed upon the Jews. He said, "Let heavier work be laid upon the men; let them not pay attention to deceitful promises."

After such disillusionment, the eloquent promises with which this week's parsha begins evoked a very different reaction. Moses' words were met with disbelief, with a despair that is the result of *kotzer ruach*, a crushed spirit, and *avodah kashah*, painfully difficult toil.

For me, hopelessness is the saddest of human emotions, especially when it follows upon the excitement of hopefulness. The moment when hopes are dashed and dreams abandoned is, for me, the saddest moment of all. Ironically, this saddest of all verses gives us the opportunity to learn important lessons about hope and its opposite, despair. To learn these lessons we must scrutinize these two phrases, *kotzer ruach* and *avodah kashah*, which I have thus far translated as "crushed spirit" and "difficult toil". Our great commentators give these phrases different "spins".

For example, Rashi understands *kotzer ruach* to mean "shortness of breath", the result of strenuous physical labor. Can a man who is gasping for air be expected to hope? Of course not. He is so panicked that hope for a better future is totally beyond his capacity.

Whereas Rashi translates *ruach* as "breath," Rabbi Obadiah Sforno, the great Jewish commentator who lived in Italy during its Renaissance, prefers to translate it as "spirit." For him, it is not "shortness of breath" that deprives a person of hope. Rather, it is the "shortness of spirit," the absence of a "spirit of faith," which makes hope so difficult. The Jews lost faith in Moses. He had let them down by failing to provide them with an instant solution to their plight. Thereby they lost their faith in the God of Moses. Without faith, argues Sforno, hope is impossible.

The eighteenth century mystic and ethicist, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, understands our verse differently. For him, Pharaoh was the expert par excellence about the processes of despair and discouragement. He knew how to squash hope. He knew why genuine hope is so rare. To keep man from hope, Pharaoh knew, you must keep him so busy with all sorts of tasks and chores that he is too distracted to take the few moments necessary to begin to think of hopeful possibilities.

This is how Luzzato puts it in his masterpiece, *The Path of the Upright (Mesillat Yesharim)*:

"This is, in fact, one of the cunning artifices of the evil yetzer (inclination), who always imposes upon men such strenuous tasks that they have no time left to note whither they are drifting... This ingenuity is somewhat like that of Pharaoh, who commanded, 'Let heavier work be laid upon the men...' For Pharaoh's purpose was not only to prevent the Israelites from having any leisure to make plans against him, but by subjecting them to unceasing toil, to deprive them also of the opportunity to reflect."

Without this opportunity — with *kotzer ruach*, "shortness of time to reflect"—hopefulness is out of the question. One would be too busy to hope.

Another insight into the possible meaning of *kotzer ruach* is found in a most unusual source. There exists a collection of brief homilies, authored by Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Chassidic Rebbe of Piacezna in pre-Holocaust Poland. He recorded these homilies, delivered in the early years of the Warsaw Ghetto, in a little notebook, which miraculously survived those fateful years. He writes that under conditions of *avodah kashah*, of very difficult toil, one loses the "spirit of life." Rabbi Shapira knew all too well the meaning of difficult toil, enslaved as he and his "congregation" were in that horrible ghetto. And he knew how he and they struggled to do God's will despite their dire straits. He witnessed their attempts to help each other, to maintain faith in God, and to perform whatever ritual mitzvot they could. But furthermore, he observed that their tortured souls could not muster the "spirit of life" necessary for religious action. *Kotzer ruach* for him meant the absence of a "spirit of vitality." For him, religious actions performed without enthusiasm were defective.

Like the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, the Jews of ancient Egypt suffered from *kotzer ruach*. They could not respond to Moses with a "spirit of vitality." No vitality, no life, no hope.

These commentators lived centuries apart from each other and in very diverse circumstances. But they all teach us this: there are many factors in life that render hope impossible. Some of these factors are cruel and unusual, as exemplified by the slaveries of Egypt and Nazi Germany.

But some of these factors are common today. They relate to our busy lifestyles, to our work routines, even to the ways we play. We are consumed by

“busyness.” There may be little that slaves can do to free themselves for the possibility of hope. But there is much that we can do to avoid our own “slavery,” to at least limit the avodah kashah that leads to kotzer ruach. Reflect upon it. Where there is time for reflection, there are opportunities for hope.

Fw from Hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky <rmk@torah.org>
reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org
to: drasha@torah.org
date: Jan 3, 2019, 1:06 PM
subject: Drasha - Lost in Egypt

Drasha Parshas Vaera
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Lost in Egypt

Negotiating redemption is not a simple process. You must deal with two different sides and send two different messages to opposite parties. First, you must speak to the oppressors. You must be demanding and firm. You can not show weakness or a willingness to compromise. Then you have to inform to the oppressed. That should be easy: in a soft and soothing manner you gently break the news that they are about to be liberated. They will surely rejoice at the slightest hint that their time has finally come. That is why I am struck by a verse in this week’s portion that directs Moshe to send the exact same message to Pharaoh and the Jewish people, as if Pharaoh and the Jews were of one mind, working in tandem. Exodus 6:13 “Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them to speak to the children of Israel and to Pharaoh the King of Egypt, to let the children of Israel leave Egypt” I was always perplexed by this verse. How is it possible to encompass the message to the Jews and Pharaoh in one fell swoop? How can you compare the strong demand to Pharaoh to the soft, cajoling message necessary for the Jews? Pharaoh, who does not to want to hear of liberation, has to be warned and chastised and even plagued. The Jews should jump at the mention of redemption! Why, then, are the two combined in one verse and with one declaration? There are those who answer that the Jews in this verse actually refer to the Jewish taskmasters who were appointed by Pharaoh as kapos to oppress their brethren. Thus the equation is clearly justified. However, I would like to offer a more homiletic explanation:

There is a wonderful story of a poor farmer who lived under the rule of a miserable poritz (landowner) in medieval Europe. The evil landowner provided minimal shelter in exchange for a large portion of the farmer’s profits. The farmer and his wife toiled under the most severe conditions to support their family with a few chickens that laid eggs and a cow that gave milk. Ultimately, time took its toll and hardship became the norm. The farmer and his wife had their bitter routine and never hoped for better. One day the farmer came back from the market quite upset. “What’s the matter?” cried his wife, “you look as if the worst calamity has happened.” “It has,” sighed the anxious farmer. “They say in the market that the Moshiach is coming. He will take us all to the land of Israel. What will be of our cow and our chickens? Where will we live? Who will provide shelter for us? Oy! What is going to be?” His wife, who was steeped with faith in the Almighty, answered calmly. “Don’t worry my dear husband. The Good Lord always protects His people. He saved us from Pharaoh in Egypt, He redeemed us from the evil Haman and has protected us from harsh decrees throughout our exile. No doubt he will protect us from this Moshiach too!” Hashem understood that the Jewish people were mired in exile for 210 years. They had decided to endure slavery rather than abandon it. Moshe had to be as forceful with those he was planning to redeem as he was with those who had enslaved them. Often in life, whether by choice or by chance, we enter into situations that we ought not be in. As time progresses, however, we get accustomed to the situation, and our worst enemy becomes change. We must tell the Pharaoh within each of us, “let my people go!” Let us not continue on the comfortable path but rather get on the correct one. That message must be told to the victim in us with the same force and intensity as it is told to the complacent. Good Shabbos c1996 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

*Text Copyright © 1996 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.
Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.*

*Drasha is the e-mail edition of FaxHomily, a weekly torah facsimile on the weekly portion. FaxHomily is a project of the Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation
Drasha © 2018 by Torah.org.*

<https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/headlines-breaking-stories/515561/sefer-ruach-eliyahu-seforim-in-review.html>

Sefer Ruach Eliyahu

January 23, 2017

By Rabbi Yair Hoffman for the Five Towns Jewish Times
Finally, finally, we can learn and enjoy the remarkable shmuessin of **Rav Elya Svei zatzal**. Rav Elya Svei zatzal (1924-2009) was not only the Rosh Yeshiva of the Philadelphia Yeshiva together with ylc”t Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky, and a leader on Moetzes Gedolei Torah – he was the recognized Talmid Muvhak of Rav Aharon Kotler zt”l. The illustrious Roshei of Lakewood would not move without him. Sefer Ruach Eliyahu, written in Lashon HaKodesh, was just printed on Bereishis and Shmos. It was culled together from cassette tapes of shmuessim that he delivered in Yeshiva as well as those that he delivered in various venues wherever he spoke. The Sefer is an incredible work. The heartfelt themes are clearly organized and Rav Elya’s very special koach haTziur is brought out beautifully. The Sefer is filled with precious nuggets of Rav Elya’s mussar thought.

NOT TO MAKE CALCULATIONS IN KIDDUSH HASHEM

In **Parsha VaEirah** (p. 351) Rav Elya discusses the Aveirah of Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen at the Mei Merivah. He cites the Baal HaTurim that they did not make a kal vachomer from the behavior of the frogs. Of course, this aveirah was in the form of Dakei Dakos – barely detectable and subtle, but Rav Elya explains that in terms of Kiddush hashem we do not make chesbonos – calculations. Rather, we should listen straight to the dvar Hashem. Rav Elya applies it to Bnei Yeshiva now. Often we make calculations that we can learn longer if we do “action X.” The fact is, however, the Torah forbids action X and we should not be making these calculations. This is an important lesson in modern times and underscores the tremendous loss we suffer in that the Rosh Yeshiva is not with us.

EMULATING HASHEM

In Parshas Ki Sisa (p. 496), Rav Elya cites the Tomer Devorah’s explanation of emulating Hashem. Thus when someone sins against you and apologizes try to become closer to him after his apology just like Hashem does to us when we do Teshuvah. The natural tendency would be, “things can never be the same” – but Rav Elya has us emulating Hashem in that regard. Truly, a remarkable thought.

HAKARAS HATOV

In Parshas Shmos (p. 320) Rav Elya asks how Moshe Rabbeinu could have agreed to a shidduch with Tziporah, who had a father who imprisoned him for ten years and was so bent on Avodah Zarah. Rav Elya answers that it was on account of Moshe Rabbeinu’s remarkable feeling of Hakaras HaTov – that he had for Tziporah who had fed him for those ten years. The message to us, of course, is the focus we must all have in developing this midah.

HONESTY AND GOOD MIDOS

In Parshas Tetzaveh, Rav Elya explains a verse in Malachi (2:7) regarding the Kohanim. He explains that now, Bnei Torah are carriers of the Mesorah to the next generation. Because of their role, they must develop good midos and develop unimpeccable honesty and yashrus. Otherwise, their message cannot be transferred.

SETTING AN EXAMPLE FOR OUR CHILDREN

In Parshas Vayishlach (page 236), he explains how Aharon HaKohen’s performance of the Mitzvos in lighting the Menorah had an impact on the mesirus nefesh of his descendants the Chashmonayim. It was an influence in the zeal and performance of his Mitzvos. By the same token, Rav Elya zatzal points out, the zeal and the manner in which we perform Mitzvos has an effect and an impact on our children and grandchildren. They see how we daven, and our seriousness and kavana when we recite brachos. And, in turn, they daven beautifully and recite brachos with intensity. This lasts for many, many generations.

The sefer is filled with numerous foundational themes in Torah, in Chinuch, and in our Avodas Hashem. ...

Fw from Hamelaket@gmail.com
blogs.timesofisrael.com

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Vaera: The Powers of Speech

If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use the pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time; a tremendous whack. - Sir Winston Churchill

As Moses and his brother, Aaron, prepare to meet with Pharaoh, to demand the release of the Israelite slaves, God gives them some advance notice as to what will happen and what they should do.

God advises them that Pharaoh will ask for some type of sign that they are indeed divine messengers. God indicates that at that juncture Moses shall instruct Aaron to grab his staff and perform a miracle.

The Berdichever notices that in the verse there is a seemingly extraneous word. The translation reads "give for yourselves a sign." The normally word-efficient Torah could have easily transcribed "give a sign." Why the superfluous "for yourselves"?

The Berdichever answers that according to the great Kabbalist, R' Isaac Luria, God is listening to our every word. Furthermore, God gets tremendous pleasure from us when those words are words of Torah, of Mitzvot, of good deeds and kindness. Even beyond that, God, through those positive words that we utter, actually blesses us, and enables the good happenstances in our lives. Our words, the positive utterances of our mouth, have a direct impact on ourselves, on our world, on our reality.

The addition of "for yourselves" in the verse comes to highlight that Aaron and Moses, who dedicated themselves to only good and to the service of God, had the power to affect and change reality just by the power of speech. Just by the words they used and their intention, they were able to bend and contravene the laws of nature and do the miraculous. They could turn a staff into a reptile and then turn that reptile back into a staff. They could be God's agents in bringing down the miraculous plagues upon Egypt. All just from the incredible power of their speech. They understood the power they had harnessed in devoting the words that came out of their mouths to God and Israel. May our words ever be powerfully good – and if they can't be, may we learn the more valuable lesson of when to be quiet.

Dedication - On the marriage of Elisheva and Amichai Matar. Mazal Tov! Shabbat Shalom

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Torah in Action / Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vaaira

פרשת וארא השעש

אלה ראשי בית אבתם בני ראובן בכר ישראל... ובני שמעון... ואלה שמות בני לוי לתלתם גרשון וקהת ומררי

These were the heads of their fathers' houses: the sons of Reuven... the sons of Shimon... These are the names of the sons of Levi in order of their birth: Gershon, Kehas and Merari. (6:14,15,16)

The *Shlah HaKadosh* wonders why, concerning Reuven and Shimon, the Torah states simply: *Bnei Reuven u' Bnei Shimon*, the sons of Reuven and the sons of Shimon, while with regard to Levi it says, *V'eileh shemos Bnei Levi*, "And these are the names of *Bnei Levi*." Why does it not simply say *Bnei Levi* – why the extra word – *shemos* – names of? The *Shlah* explains that Levi knew that his *shevet*, tribe, would not be subjected to the Egyptian slavery. He was quite aware that while the rest of the nation would be suffering under the cruel subjugation of the Egyptian taskmasters, his *shevet* would be ensconced in the *bais hamedrash* studying Torah. True, *Bnei Levi* were preparing for their G-d-given mission in life. Furthermore, as a result of their non-participation in the work detail, they lost out on the precious rations that their cousins received.

Thus, they had to rely on the good-heartedness of their cousins, who shared their meager rations with them. This, too, set the tone for the future in which *Shevet Levi* would not receive a portion of *Eretz Yisrael* and would be relegated to be supported by the nation. Nonetheless, *Bnei Levi* were in the *bais hamedrash*, while the rest of the Jewish People were suffering under the Egyptians.

This troubled Levi. Therefore, he decided to give each one of his sons a name that corresponded in some manner to the Egyptian bondage. Gershon: "I was a *ger*, stranger in a strange land"; Kehas: "Their teeth became dulled because of the many *tzaros*, troubles, which they had endured"; Merari: "Their lives were embittered by the slavery to which they were subjected." It was these names that helped *Shevet Levi* to be *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*, carry the yoke with his friend or, in other words, empathize with his fellow Jews. Thus, the Torah underscores the names of the sons of Levi, because these names were special.

The answer is powerful. Nonetheless, I would like to supplement it with a personal observation. Viewing Levi's actions with regard to naming his sons through the lens of contemporary society, one might ask: How does one stigmatize his child with a name that implies and calls slavery, troubles and bitterness to mind? I am certain that today's psychologists would claim that Levi was setting his sons up for failure, making them prone to depression and negativity. After all, is that not what their names implied?

Baruch Hashem, we are not bound by the views and norms of contemporary society. A powerful lesson can be derived from the manner in which Levi named his sons, giving them names which showed empathy with the suffering the Jewish People had endured. He was conveying a message to his children: As *Klal Yisrael's* future Torah leaders, you must bear the yoke with the community. Never forget who you are and from whom you descend. I think this is why, when after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe *Rabbeinu* called out, *Mi l'Hashem elai*, "Whoever is for Hashem, join me!" (*Shemos* 32:26), *Shevet Levi* came forth. In order to be so connected with Hashem, one must demonstrate an inextricable affinity for his fellowman. Levi's naming of his sons imbued them and their descendants with a sense of responsibility for their brethren. As a result, they were able to ascend the ladder of spirituality to reach the pinnacle of "*Mi l'Hashem elai!*"

לך אל פרעה בבקר הנה יצאה המימה

Go to Pharaoh in the morning – behold! He goes out to the water. (7:15)

Rashi explains the purpose of Pharaoh's daily jaunt to the Nile as going to the place in which he regularly relieved himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god, and he would say that he has no need to relieve himself – as humans do. He would, therefore, arise early in the morning, go out to the Nile River and secretly tend to his body's needs. We derive from here, comments *Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita*, the strength of the power of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. Pharaoh lied to his entire country. He sold the lie that he was a god to anyone who would believe it. So wrapped up was he in his lie that he actually fooled himself. He began to believe his own lie – even though deep down he knew that it was untrue. He was not a god.

This is the power of insidious prevarication. It begins with a small white lie, a tinge of deceit, which festers and grows until it becomes a full - scale deception. It, however, does not stop at this point, because none of us is beyond deceiving him/herself. Indeed, everyone has a little bit of "Pharaoh" in himself. Deceiving others leads to self-deception, which, in its most extreme and pathological form, is deemed as delusional. It is a condition that is much more pervasive than we think. We begin to twist the truth until we become convinced of its veracity. We dismiss certain facts that are incompatible with our myth of ourselves in favor of those that are less threatening and more corroborative. We become so "good" (or bad) at this distortion of facts that we begin rewriting our self-history for the purpose of preserving our (flawed) self-image. This was Pharaoh. He was a wise man, but not as smart as the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, which helped him along with his self-deception until it (in his cognitive dissonant state) became his (distorted) reality.

אמר אל אהרן קח מטק ונטה ידך על מימי מצרים

Say to Aharon, "Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt." (7:19)

So begins the Ten Plagues that shook up the underpinnings of Egyptian arrogance and obstinacy. Hashem instructed Aharon to strike the waters; later,

he struck the water from which emerged the frogs and then the earth which produced the lice. Why Aharon, and not Moshe? *Chazal* explain that the Nile River had protected Moshe *Rabbeinu* when he was an infant. It would have been wrong for him to serve as the instrument to inflict a plague on it. Likewise, the earth concealed the Egyptian that Moshe had slain. The Torah considers it wrong to show ingratitude even to an inanimate river/earth. How much more so should we be vigilant not to show ingratitude to a human being. In his *Michtav MeiEliyahu*, *Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl*, explains that while it is true that the inanimate object has no feelings, our concern is not for the object; rather, we are concerned that a person acting ungraciously, as the *Talmud* expresses itself, “Do not throw shoes into a well from which you drink,” will negatively affect his subconscious. The well will not feel lacking as a result of the person’s ingratitude, but the man’s character will be diminished as a result of his ingratitude.

Horav Moshe Abuchatzera wonders why Moshe did not show *hakoras hatov*, appreciation/gratitude, to Pharaoh in whose home he had grown up. If Moshe was obligated to be grateful to sand and water, would Pharaoh not inherently be included in the obligation? Nonetheless, Moshe catalyzed the remaining seven Plagues. He explains that this Pharaoh was the *melech chadash*, “new” king, who somehow forgot or did not know Yosef – the man who had saved Egypt. The country, with its millions of citizens, would have perished from hunger had Yosef not organized them. Pharaoh would have been left with nothing. Whatever he had become was attributable to Yosef’s descendants. His excuse: He did not “know” anyone by the name of Yosef. (How quickly our enemies forget the contributions of the Jews’. This scenario has played itself out over and over throughout the ages. Pharaoh was the first to manifest this amnesia, and his many followers throughout history have developed and even embellished this illness.)

To such an ingrate as Pharaoh, we say: “If you do not remember Hashem, Whom you know sent Yosef to help you – then we do not know you, either.” Since Pharaoh showed that gratitude was not a character trait that he valued, Moshe was not obligated to show any appreciation to him.

Alternatively, Pharaoh was a despot who had no respect for human life. He enslaved an entire nation just because he wanted to. He had no rationale behind his decree. *Bnei Yisrael* were no danger to him – much like what has happened to our people throughout the millennia. The fact that he was kind to Moshe, the infant, was because he deferred to his daughter; Moshe and his people meant nothing to him. Such a person deserves no *hakoras hatov*, no form of appreciation. Whether the reason is that Pharaoh was himself a *kafui tov*, ingrate, or that he was a tyrant who had no respect for human life – Pharaoh was not a person who deserved our *hakoras hatov*.

It goes without saying that the *middah*, character trait, of *hakoras hatov* is of extreme significance, to the point that it defines one’s humanness. One who is an ingrate is not a *mentsh* – period. Many of us are sadly deficient in one specific aspect of *hakoras hatov*. We fail to recognize that gratitude is an obligation at all times – even when the situation has changed and the favor is no longer occurring. The following story is an example.

Reb Kalman was a well-to-do lumber merchant who was generous with his *tzedakah*, charitable contributions. Every economic climate has its ups and downs. Therefore, the fellow who is wealthy today might be a pauper tomorrow – and vice versa. When a fire broke out in *Reb Kalman*’s warehouse, he was reduced to pauper status overnight. With the limited funds that remained in his portfolio, he attempted to invest in varied business startups – all of which failed. *Reb Kalman*’s wealth was history. He was now relegated to living in abject poverty. When a *frum*, observant, Jew sustains such a “message” from Hashem, he goes to his *Rebbe* or *gadol*, Torah giant, to seek an interpretation, advice and guidance. *Reb Kalman* proceeded to *Horav Yitzchak Zelig Sokolov, zl*.

Reb Kalman came into his *Rebbe*’s office, loudly bemoaning his miserable circumstances: “*Rebbe*, Help me! I am finished!” The *Rebbe* listened intently with great empathy, and related to him an inspirational *Chazal*. *Chazal* teach (*Sanhedrin 92b*) that following Nevuchadnezer’s conquering of Yerushalayim, the evil king wanted to praise Hashem through *shirah*, song of praise. Indeed, he wanted his song to be able to surpass even David *Hamelech*’s songs of praise – *Sefer Tehillim*. As soon as he articulated his arrogant request, a *malach*, angel, came and slapped him on the mouth. Nevuchadnezer immediately stopped.

The *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, wonders why the angel put a swift end to Nevuchadnezer’s *shirah*. If, as he claimed, his song was even more beautiful than that of David *Hamelech*, why not allow him to sing? The *Rebbe* teaches us a powerful lesson. When the angel slapped Nevuchadnezer’s mouth, it was not for the purpose of preventing his *shirah* from being sung; rather, it was a test to ascertain if he would be able to continue singing even after he had been on the receiving end of a Heavenly slap.

David *Hamelech* authored *Sefer Tehillim*, his book of *shirah* to Hashem, reflecting all of life’s situations. David *Hamelech*’s life was filled with highs and lows, with triumph and much adversity. From a simple shepherd to *Melech*, King of *Yisrael*, from moments when he was running for his life, to the time when he was ensconced on his royal throne – *Tehillim* reflected his constant and ever ready gratitude to Hashem. He did not turn from Hashem when his bed of roses withered. He always sang his feelings of gratitude and praise.

This was the challenge to Nevuchadnezer: You want to sing a more beautiful song than David *Hamelech*? Very impressive! However, can you say/sing it like David *Hamelech* – during all situations – even after you have received a Heavenly slap? It was this challenge that Nevuchadnezer failed.

The *Sokolover Rebbe* looked at his *chassid* and said, “My dear student, in Heaven they saw that you sang *shirah*, that you praised Hashem, during and following times when life was good, when Heaven had overtly smiled on you. Now, they want to see if you are prepared to sing *shirah* and thank Hashem for all that you have left, for all that you had the good fortune to receive in the past. Can you sing *shirah* after you have received Hashem’s slap? You no longer have your wealth. The slap is very painful. Can you still sing? Heaven is awaiting your response!”

The *Rebbe*’s warm and sincere words hit home, and *Reb Kalman* realized that the difficulties he was presently experiencing should neither negate his song nor prevent him from continuing to sing, to pay his gratitude to the Almighty. He kept on singing, and over the next few months, having passed the Heavenly challenge, he saw his wealth return.

Can we say that we act any differently? Do we quickly forget the fellow who helped, sponsored, was there when we were in need – now when he is either unable, or lacks the desire – or we are in better shape? How easy it is to forget. How natural this altogether immoral attitude is. Nonetheless, it is all too common. The question is: Are we prepared to follow David *Hamelech*’s lead, or will we settle to be like Nevuchadnezer or – worse – like Pharaoh?

וימות הצפרדעים מן הבתים מן החצרות ומן השדות... ויסר הערב מפניה מעבדיו ומעמו לא נשאר אחד

The frogs died from the houses, from the courtyards, and from the field... He removed the swarm of wild beasts from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people – not one remained. (8:9,27)

The frogs (most of them) died. The *arov*, wild beasts, and *arbeh*, locust, did not. *Kli Yakar* explains that Hashem sought to teach that one who gives himself up for *Kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify Hashem’s Name, will be saved. Thus, those frogs that climbed into the burning hot ovens belonging to the Egyptians – lived. The other frogs, who did not enter the ovens, but rather “chose” to invade the country, the fields, the homes – died. The ones that risked death for the glory of Hashem were spared; the others were not. It was this lesson that Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah called to mind when they made the decision to sacrifice their lives *Al Kiddush Hashem*.

The *Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 13:4)* says, “We derive from here that one who relinquishes his life *Al Kiddush Hashem* – is spared. One who refuses to give up his life (should know) that *Harbei shluchim laMakom*, Hashem has many agents to catalyze one’s designated death. In other words; if it is one’s time to die – he will die, regardless of his actions. If it is not his time, then giving up his life *Kiddush Hashem* will not harm him. This is why, counterintuitively, the frogs that did not enter the ovens died, while those who gave themselves up for *Kiddush Hashem* were saved.

Chazal (Talmud Taanis 18b) set the standard for sanctifying Hashem’s Name for the purpose of saving Jewish People. They cite the actions of the *harugei Lod*, the martyrs of Lod, that no creature can stand in their (holy, exalted) presence. The *Talmud* relates the incident for which these two men earned such distinction. The daughter of the king was found dead, and immediately a false rumor went out that the Jews were behind the murder. The natural, but sadly

not uncommon, response to such allegations was to first decree the death of all of the Jews and then investigate. When they saw that the only way to annul this decree was to assume responsibility, two Jewish men, Lulianus and Papus, came forward to take the blame. The king executed these two martyrs, and the community was spared.

The dialogue between Turyanus and the martyrs is recorded in the *Talmud*: “If you are descendants of Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah, let your G-d come and save you from death as He saved them from King Nevuchadnezar,” the king said. The martyrs replied, “They were holy and worthy Jews, and Nevuchadnezar was a king worthy of being a catalyst for a miracle. We were destined to die for Hashem. If you will not kill us, then Hashem has many agents. Many bears and lions abound that can carry out the Heavenly decree. Furthermore, you are an evil king (not of the caliber of Nevuchadnezar and, thus, unworthy of being involved in a miracle.) Hashem chose you to be His agent, because He will, in the future, mete out His vengeance against you.” *Chazal* state that, despite their response and the threat of Divine vengeance notwithstanding, Turyanus executed them, just before a pair of officers came from Rome bearing an imperial edict against Turyanus. The officers split open the head of Turyanus.

In the city of Vyzon (Vyzuonos) an ancient Lithuanian town, an incident occurred which is recorded in the *Sefer Gedolei Hadoros* (cited in *Niflaosecha Asicha*). A Jewish apostate whose animus for the Jewish community was beyond rationale (he was rejected for his heresy and conversion) committed an egregious act of terror against the Jewish community. (Sadly, such self-loathing which manifests itself with acts of vengeance against the Jewish community was not uncommon. We have been dealing with self-loathing for as long as there has been hatred). *Erev Hoshanah Rabbah*, when all was quiet, he hid a crucifix (with the godhead attached) under one of the benches in the *shul*. He then told the local priest, a rabid anti-Semite, that on *Hoshanah Rabbah* the Jews strike the crucifix against the floor, basically defiling their sacred godhead. Soldiers immediately surrounded the *shul* and, following a search (this was after *chibut aravah*, when the *aravah* is struck on the ground five times), they arrested all of the men and brought them to Vilna, the capital city. They were (of course) immediately found guilty and given the death penalty, which meant being hung in the town square.

At that moment, one of the members of the community, whose name was Menachem Mann, came forward and “confessed” his guilt, thereby removing the onus from the community. This unique individual sacrificed his life to save the community. As a result, the community of Vyzon always made a special, “*Keil malei rachachanim* (Prayer for the Dead) four times a year (during the *Yizkor*, memorial, service) in memory of Rabbi Menachem Mann *HaKadosh*, who gave up his life to save their community.

It is not all about willingness to give up one’s life for Hashem. Veritably, there are those who would come forward at the bat of an eyelash to relinquish their lives, but to arise early in the morning to attend *davening* on time is for them a formidable challenge. Giving up their money to help a friend in need is, for them, a no-brainer, but to refrain from speaking during *davening* or to attend a *seder* or *shiur* comes with great difficulty. They want to demonstrate their love for Hashem through great deeds – not “mediocre” ones. *Mesiras nefesh* comes easy to them, because they truly love Hashem, but they want to show their love in “big” way. If they cannot give a *kiddush* in *shul* with all the trimmings – they will not give a *kiddush* – period. It is either all or nothing.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, זל (quoted by *Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita*), explained this is the context of the *shofar* that we blow on *Rosh Hashanah*, as a *zchus*, merit, for *Klal Yisrael*. We blow the *shofar* as a “reminder” to Heaven of the participation of *Yitzchak Avinu* and his father, *Avraham Avinu*, in the *Akeidas Yitzchak*. It was this outstanding, unprecedented act of selfless *mesiras nefesh* which infused this *middah*, character trait, into our collective DNA. The *Rosh Yeshivah* asked why the *shofar* is singled out more so than the *maacheles*, knife, that *Avraham* prepared to use to slaughter *Yitzchak*. He explained that many people are prepared to execute great deeds – even to be slaughtered with a knife – to demonstrate their abiding, all-consuming love for Hashem. As a result, the knife, which indicates a Jew’s readiness to be *moser nefesh* for Hashem, is not all that significant. It is a natural trait endemic to our People. Instead, we take a *shofar*; the ram’s horns were caught in the *s’vach*,

thistle. *S’vach* also means *sibuchim*, confusions, problems, challenges, issues. The *kunst*, trick, is to serve Hashem even when one is overwhelmed with *sibuchim*. To pass those, relatively speaking, minor tests can be considered greater *mesiras nefesh* than the greater life-altering tests. Challenges are relative. Some of us can relate better to the “exotic” challenges, but fail dismally in the everyday arena of challenge. Some people thrive on crisis, but ignore the mundane challenges that confront us on a regular basis.

The path of life is strewn with difficulty and pain. What hurts one person does not necessarily afflict another. It is all relative. Furthermore, man cannot comprehend the implications of every given situation in life. One thing is for certain: without Hashem, we are totally helpless. We shore up our faith for the greater challenges, but do not realize that getting out of bed in the morning on time to *daven* properly is a difficult challenge for some. As we appeal to Hashem for what appear to be staggering challenges, we should, likewise, turn to Him for all of life’s situations with which we grapple regularly, almost on a daily basis.

לזכר נשמת

ר' משה יהודה ליב בן אשר אל תר חיים ו"ל

נפטר כ"ד טבת תשס"ט

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved
prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum