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TorahWeb.org
Rabbi Hershel Schachter
The Danger of Being Overly Inclusive

The parsha tells us (12:38) that when Bnai Yisroel left Mitzrayim a tremendous group of converts left with them. The Midrash explains that this was Moshe Rabbeinu's original idea; Hakodosh Boruch Hu did not instruct him to gather these geirim. Following the cheit ha'eigel (Shemos 32:7) Hashem tells Moshe Rabbeinu to go down from Har Sinai because "your nation" has sinned. Rashi (ibid) quotes from the Midrash that Hashem's choice of words - "your nation" - alludes to the eiruv rav (the aforementioned group of converts) since Hashem would not refer to the Jewish people as "your" nation but rather as "my" nation. Apparently it was Moshe Rabbeinu's idea to accept all these converts.

Moshe Rabbeinu was told in advance (Shemos 3:12) that yetzias Mitzrayim is going to lead up to ma'amad Har Sinai, and apparently he felt that it would be much more honorable ("b'rov am hadras Melech") if there would be throngs of people present at Har Sinai for the gilui Shechina. His decision turned out to be detrimental to the Jewish people because this group - the eiruv rav - were the ones who instigated the cheit ha'eigel as well as other troublesome incidents during the forty years of travelling in the midbar.

The institution of geirus was not originated by Moshe Rabbbeinu. Already when Hashem chose Avrohom Avinu to be the founder of a new nation He notified him that members of a different race would be able to convert and join the Jewish people (see commentary of the Rashbam to Breishis chapter 12:2-3). Indeed, the Torah tells us that when Avrohom Avinu moved to Eretz Yisroel he brought with him many converts (see Breishis 5:12). Rashi quotes the tradition from the Midrash that Avrohom Avinu was active in converting men and Sara Imeinu was active in converting women.

Even though the halacha of geirus was known from the very beginnings of the Jewish people, it was not right for Moshe Rabbeinu to make the decision to accept the eiruv rav without consulting Hashem first. Very often a halacha appears "on the books" and is explicit in the Shulchan Aruch without any dispute but it is still a mistake to make a major innovation in Jewish observance based on any halacha without consulting gedolei Torah. A very sad example of this is well known: at the beginning of the reform movement in Germany, a group of well-meaning rabbis felt that since the masses did not understand Hebrew it would be beneficial to have the tzibbur daven in German. The Shulchan Aruch does in fact quote from the Gemorah that the tefilla which is offered by the tzibbur may be recited in the vernacular. The gedolei Torah of that generation were not consulted and were all opposed to this new innovation for various reasons, and we know what terrible results came about because of that innovation.

Moshe Rabbeinu's idea that having a much greater crowd present at Har Sinai would enhance Kovod ha'Shechina was apparently not so compelling. True, we have a principle that "b'rov am hadras Melech", but on the other hand being overly inclusive runs the risk of lowering the level of religious intensity. The nevi'im tell us that l'osid lovoh, there will be a fulfillment of the theme of malchiyos, i.e. that all of mankind will recognize Hashem, but we are not yet living in the time of l'osid l'ovoi. The novi Yeshaya said (54) that the day will come that the barren woman will give birth to many children and will be rejoicing. This is a reference to the fact that the Jewish people will return to Eretz Yisroel and will become very great in numbers. The Gemorah (Berachos 10a) tells us that on one occasion an apikores confronted Bruria, the wife of R' Meir, regarding the meaning of that posuk. The apikores understood the posuk to mean that the barren woman (the Jewish people) rejoices because she has no children, and therefore the apikores challenged that this does not make any sense - why should a barren woman rejoice over the fact that she has no children? Bruria responded, accepting this additional level of interpretation of the apikores (that the barren woman will rejoice over the fact that she has no children), by explaining that the Jewish people rejoice in the fact that they are still small in number. If we would be in much greater number this would certainly lower the level of the religious observance of the masses. (This is, in brief, a famous drosha delivered by Rav Soloveitchik on the gemorrah in Berachos about "roni a'kora".)

We were told in advance by the nevi'im that over the course of the years of galus many Jews will assimilate and be lost to our nation. We try to do whatever we can in the area of kiruv to keep all Jews within the Orthodox fold; but we don't fall to pieces over this loss of numbers.

Many in our generation make the same mistake that Moshe Rabbeinu made and think that it is important to have large numbers of Jews, and therefore try to be lenient and water down the mitzvos a bit so observance should be more appealing to the masses. Moshe Rabbeinu was told by Hashem after the chet ha'eigel that this attitude is improper.

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>
date: Thu, Jan 22, 2015 at 5:39 PM
What's Your Story
Britain's Former **Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Go to Washington and make a tour of the memorials and you will make a fascinating discovery. Begin at the Lincoln Memorial with its giant statue of the man who braved civil war and presided over the ending of slavery. On one side you will see the Gettysburg Address, that masterpiece of brevity with its invocation of "a new birth of freedom." On the other is the great Second Inaugural with its message of healing: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right …"

Walk down to the Potomac basin and you see the Martin Luther King Memorial with its sixteen quotes from the great fighter for civil rights, among them his 1963 statement, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." And

giving its name to the monument as a whole, a sentence from the I have a Dream speech, "Out of the Mountain of Despair, a Stone of Hope."
Continue along the tree-lined avenue bordering the water and you arrive at the Roosevelt Memorial, constructed as a series of six spaces, one for each decade of his public career, each with a passage from one of the defining speeches of the time, most famously, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."
Lastly, bordering the Basin at its southern edge, is a Greek temple dedicated to the author of the American Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson. Around the dome, are the words he wrote to Benjamin Rush: "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." Defining the circular space are four panels, each with lengthy quotations from Jefferson's writings, one from the Declaration itself, another beginning, "Almighty God hath created the mind free," and a third "God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?"
Each of these four monuments is built around texts and each tells a story.
Now compare the monuments in London, most conspicuously those in Parliament Square. The memorial to David Lloyd George contains three words: David Lloyd George. The one to Nelson Mandela has two: Nelson Mandela, and the Churchill memorial just one: Churchill. Winston Churchill was a man of words, in his early life a journalist, later a historian, author of almost fifty books. He won the Nobel Prize not for Peace but for Literature. He delivered as many speeches and coined as many unforgettable sentences as Jefferson or Lincoln, Roosevelt or Martin Luther King, but none of his utterances is engraved on the plinth beneath his statue. He is memorialised only by his name.
The difference between the American and British monuments is unmistakable, and the reason is that Britain and the United States have a quite different political and moral culture. England is, or was until recently, a tradition-based society. In such societies, things are as they are because that is how they were "since time immemorial." It is unnecessary to ask why. Those who belong, know. Those who need to ask, show thereby that they don't belong.
American society is different because from the Pilgrim Fathers onward it was based on the concept of covenant as set out in Tanakh, especially in Exodus and Deuteronomy. The early settlers were Puritans, in the Calvinist tradition, the closest Christianity came to basing its politics on the Hebrew Bible. Covenantal societies are not based on tradition. The Puritans, like the Israelites three thousand years earlier, were revolutionaries, attempting to create a new type of society, one unlike Egypt or, in the case of America, England. Michael Walzer called his book on the politics of the seventeenth century Puritans, "the revolution of the saints." They were trying to overthrow the tradition that gave absolute power to kings and maintained established hierarchies of class.
Covenantal societies always represent a conscious new beginning by a group of people dedicated to an ideal. The story of the founders, the journey they made, the obstacles they had to overcome and the vision that drove them are essential elements of a covenantal culture. Retelling the story, handing it on to one's children, and dedicating oneself to continuing the work that earlier generations began, are fundamental to the ethos of such a society. A covenanted nation is not simply there because it is there. It is there to fulfil a moral vision. That is what led G. K. Chesterton to call the United States a nation "with the soul of a church," the only one in the world "founded on a creed" (Chesterton's antisemitism prevented him from crediting the true source of America's political philosophy, the Hebrew Bible).
The history of storytelling as an essential part of moral education begins in this week's parsha. It is quite extraordinary how, on the brink of the exodus, Moses three times turns to the future and to the duty of parents to educate their children about the story that was shortly to unfold: "When your children ask you, 'What is this service to you?' you shall answer, 'It is the Passover service to God. He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians, sparing our homes" (12: 25-27). "On that day, you shall tell your child, 'It is because of this that God acted for me when I left Egypt'" (13: 8). "Your child may later ask you, 'What is this?' You shall answer him, 'With a show of power, God brought us out of Egypt, the place of slavery' (13: 14).
This is truly extraordinary. The Israelites have not yet emerged into the dazzling light of freedom. They are still slaves. Yet already Moses is directing their minds to the far horizon of the future and giving them the responsibility of passing on their story to succeeding generations. It is as if Moses were saying: Forget where you came from and why, and you will eventually lose your identity, your continuity and raison d'etre. You will come to think of yourself as the mere member of a nation among nations, one ethnicity among many. Forget the story of freedom and you will eventually lose freedom itself.
Rarely indeed have philosophers written on the importance of story-telling for the moral life. Yet that is how we become the people we are. The great exception among modern philosophers has been Alasdair MacIntyre, who wrote, in his classic After Virtue, "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" Deprive children of stories, says MacIntyre, and you leave them "anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words."[1]
No one understood this more clearly than Moses because he knew that without a specific identity it is almost impossible not to lapse into whatever is the current idolatry of the age – rationalism, idealism, nationalism, fascism, communism, postmodernism, relativism, individualism, hedonism or consumerism, to name only the most recent. The alternative, a society based on tradition alone, crumbles as soon as respect for tradition dies, which it always does at some stage or another.
Identity, which is always particular, is based on story, the narrative that links me to the past, guides me in the present, and places on me responsibility for the future. And no story, at least in the West, was more influential than that of the exodus, the memory that the supreme power intervened in history to liberate the supremely powerless, together with the covenant that followed whereby the Israelites bound themselves to God in a promise to create a society that would be the opposite of Egypt, where individuals were respected as the image of God, where one day in seven all hierarchies of power were suspended, and where dignity and justice were accessible to all. We never quite reached that ideal state but we never ceased to travel toward it and believed it was there at journey's end.
"The Jews have always had stories for the rest of us," said the BBC's political correspondent, Andrew Marr. God created man, Elie Wiesel once wrote, because God loves stories. What other cultures have done through systems, Jews have done through stories. And in Judaism, the stories are not engraved in stone on memorials, magnificent though that is. They are told at home, around the table, from parents to children as the gift of the past to the future. That is how story-telling in Judaism was devolved, domesticated and democratised.
Only the most basic elements of morality are universal: "thin" abstractions like justice or liberty that tend to mean different things to different people in different places and different times. But if we want our children and our society to be moral, we need a collective story that tells us where we came from and what our task is in the world. The story of the exodus, especially as told on Pesach at the seder table, is always the same yet ever-changing, an almost infinite set of variations on a single set of themes that we all internalise in ways that are unique to us, yet we all share as members of the same historically extended community.
There are stories that ennoble, and others that stultify, leaving us prisoners of ancient grievances or impossible ambitions. The Jewish story is in its way the oldest of all, yet ever young, and we are each a part of it. It tells us who we are and who our ancestors hoped we would be. Story-telling is the great vehicle of moral education. It was the Torah's insight that a people who told

their children the story of freedom and its responsibilities would stay free for as long as humankind lives and breathes and hopes.
[1] See Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory. London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>
to: **Potpourri** <parshapotpourri@shemayisrael.com>
date: Thu, Jan 22, 2015 at 6:46 PM
subject: [Parshapotpourri] **Parsha Potpourri by Oizer Alport** - Parshas Bo
Parshas Bo - Vol. 10, Issue 15
Compiled by **Oizer Alport**

HaChodesh ha'zeh lachem rosh chadashim (12:2)
Parshas Bo contains the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon, which is the first mitzvah that Hashem gave to the Jewish people as a collective nation. The Seforno explains that also included in this mitzvah was the most precious commodity of all - time - and the freedom to do with it whatever one desires. Until this point, the Jewish people were enslaved and forced to spend their time fulfilling the demands of their Egyptian taskmasters. As Hashem prepared to take the Jewish people out of Egypt, He told Moshe to inform them that now for the first time ha'chodesh ha'zeh - this month - lachem - is yours, because you will have the freedom to use your time as you see fit.
However, Rav Avrohom Yaakov Pam explains that while this freedom was certainly welcome news to the Jewish slaves, it is also a double-edged sword, as with it comes responsibility. He suggests that just as the Sanhedrin was commanded to sanctify the new month, so too every Jew is expected to sanctify every moment of his day, and just as people devote significant time and energy to researching the best investments for their money, so to we should focus on how to achieve the maximum return on the precious time that we are granted by "investing" it wisely in Torah and mitzvos. The concept of having control over our time, and being accountable for how we choose to spend it, is so essential that it is the message of the first mitzvah that Hashem gave to the Jewish people.
Unfortunately, it is difficult for us to utilize all of our time productively, as the Rambam writes (Hilchos Deios 6:1) that human nature is to be influenced by our neighbors, and we are surrounded by a culture that does not value time and even has an expression for "killing time." The Chasam Sofer was once asked, "How long does it take to become a Gadol (great Torah scholar)?" He replied that it takes only five minutes. The incredulous questioner asked him what one could possibly do in five minutes to become so learned. The Chasam Sofer explained that every time there was a five-minute delay, such as when one is waiting in line at the grocery store, or waiting for a wedding to begin, most people allow that time to idly go to waste. The secret to reaching the highest levels of piety and Torah scholarship is to make a conscious effort to utilize all of those five-minute intervals.
The yetzer hara (evil inclination) attempts to convince us that this concept does not apply to us, because we will never be Torah scholars on the level of the Chasam Sofer. However, this attitude is mistaken, as the mitzvah that teaches our responsibility to use our time productively was presented to the entire Jewish nation. Even if we are not on the level to utilize every spare moment for Torah study, our time can still be used for chesed and other mitzvos, as the following story illustrates.
Rav Pam was once told that an acquaintance of his had been hospitalized. Because Rav Pam was a Kohen, he was unable to visit his friend in the hospital due to the possibility of being exposed to the impurity transmitted by a dead body. Instead, Rav Pam wrote him a short note expressing his best wishes for a speedy recovery. Unfortunately, the man did not recover and passed away. At the funeral, one of the speakers mentioned that the deceased had received a handwritten note from the well-known Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaath, which he showed to eagerly showed off to all of his visitors. When this was relayed to Rav Pam, instead of rejoicing at the support and inspiration that his letter had provided, he began to cry. He explained that it took him less than five minutes to write the short message, yet it made such a difference in somebody else's life. This made him realize that he would now have to provide an accounting for every other five-minute period in his life and whether he had used it equally productively, a message which applies to each of us.
Rav Chaim Kanievsky is the contemporary Rabbi who is most renowned for maximizing his time through his numerous learning sessions throughout the day, which enable him to study the entirety of the Written and Oral Torahs and their commentaries on an annual basis. Because of his reputation for his encyclopedic knowledge, he also receives a number of letters daily, asking for legal rulings and sources for various customs and opinions. He replies to each of them, but because his valuable time is so measured, his responses represent the epitome of terseness, often consisting of only one or two words, such as asur - forbidden, mutar - permitted, or tzarich iyun - it's unclear.
A chavrusa (study partner) of mine once told me about a friend of his, who possesses the record for the shortest reply ever sent by Rav Chaim. After sending off his question, he anxiously came home each day to check if the reply had come. When it finally arrived, he eagerly opened up the envelope only to discover that … it was completely blank inside! He knew that Rav Chaim was known for short replies to avoid wasting time, but in this case it seemed like he had wasted a stamp and an envelope. However, upon further reflection, the questioner recognized the true brilliance of Rav Chaim.
He had recently gotten engaged, and because he had an unusual Yiddish name, he decided to write to Rav Chaim to confirm how his name should be spelled in the kesubah (marriage contract). He realized that when Rav Chaim addressed the envelope to him, he had already answered the question, and therefore there was no need for him to waste the time required to write his name a second time inside of the envelope. In addition to resolving the chosson's (groom's) question about the proper spelling of his name, Rav Chaim also taught him an even more valuable lesson about the value of every second.

V'haya ki yishalcha bincha machar leimor mah zos (13:14)
The Haggadah teaches that the Torah addresses four different types of children and instructs us how to educate each of them about the Exodus from Egypt. In his work Shemen HaTov, Rav Dov Weinberger points out that when examining the verses which record the questions posed by the three types of sons who are capable of asking questions, the Torah (Shemos 13:14 and Devorim 6:20) introduces the questions of the wise son and the simple son with the words "ki yishalcha bincha machar" - when your son asks you tomorrow - but in conjunction with the question attributed to the wicked son, the word "machar" (tomorrow) is omitted.
Rav Weinberger explains that although the wise and simple sons have questions about the Exodus from Egypt, the Torah tells us that they only ask their questions the following day. On Pesach itself, they are focused on performing the mitzvos that they recognize that they are obligated to do, and only after they have fulfilled their obligations do they ask about what they did so that they can better understand the mitzvos. The wicked son, on the other, insists on asking his question today, because if he is unable to understand the mitzvah and doesn't receive a satisfactory answer to his question, he will refuse to perform the mitzvah. This is what makes him wicked, as it is the diametric opposite of the Jewish attitude of "na'aseh v'nishma" - we will do and we will listen (Shemos 24:7).
Similarly, the Kotzker Rebbe points out that we declare "Ein Keilokeinu" - there is none like our G-d - and only afterwards do we ask "Mi Keilokeinu" - who is like our G-d. He explains that this teaches us that asking questions is permissible and encouraged, but only after one has clearly established and accepted the fundamental tenets of Jewish belief.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik had a student who unfortunately left yeshiva and abandoned the Torah lifestyle. Many years later Rav Chaim was visiting the city where this student lived, and the student came to visit him. He said to Rav Chaim, "I have a number of questions and doubts about Hashem and Jewish beliefs. Can we discuss them?"
Rav Chaim responded, "I'll be happy to sit down and talk to you about your questions, but first tell me one thing: did your questions come before you stopped observing Shabbos or afterward?" The student replied that the doubts developed after he began to desecrate Shabbos. Rav Chaim responded that in that case, the student didn't have questions but answers. In other words, he had already decided not to adhere to the Torah, but he began to feel guilty over his decisions, so he developed questions to rationalize and justify his decisions. Rav Chaim added, "I'm happy to answer questions, but for answers I have no answers."
This theme is one of the lessons of the four sons. Questions are fine, even from a wise child, as long as they are symbolically asked tomorrow, meaning after one has accepted the primary and unshakeable obligation to perform the mitzvos. However, if the questions are a prerequisite to observing the Torah's commandments, it is an indication that we are unfortunately dealing with a wicked son.
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Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein
Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein
My Books
I have always been a lover of books. Even when I was a young student in the yeshiva many decades ago I would read books on all sorts of different subjects. Back then, I then used the meager financial resources at my disposal to purchase books. Prices were different then and for three dollars I was able to obtain classic books by great Talmudic scholars.
When I was a rabbi in Miami Beach, I often had the experience of finding a pile of Hebrew books on my doorstep placed there by the heirs of the previous generation. Apparently the children and grandchildren of the deceased had no use for their books and simply disposed of them by leaving them on the doorstep of the rabbi or the synagogue building.
Most of those books I had to dispose of myself. However, in the pile there always was a certain special book, even on occasion a rare book that caught my eye and interest that I kept for myself. I never had the resources or inclination to become a true book collector but I acquired a very large library over my years in the rabbinate.
A number of great rabbinic scholars visited my home in Monsey in order to do research, as I had a book that apparently was no longer available to them. There was a time when I knew the location of every book on my shelves. Not only did I have books of Jewish scholarship and Torah value but I also had books relating to general world history and biography as well as some much lighter reading, which gave me some psychological relief from the pressures of the rabbinate.
When I moved to Israel, I left a substantial part of my library in the United States. My much smaller quarters in our apartment here in Jerusalem did not afford me the space to bring them all with me. There are times now when I am working on writing a book or making a presentation/lecture that I recall a fascinating insight or anecdote, which appeared in one of the books that I once owned.
I picture the book on the shelf back in Monsey and to my dismay I then realize that it is not here with me in Jerusalem. This happens to me so often that my level of frustration over it is now much diminished since I no longer really expect to be able to find the book here. Sometimes I am pleasantly surprised by the fact that I do have the book here and I am even more amazed that I was able to find it amongst the book shelves that line my apartment.
All of my bookshelves are full to overflowing and therefore I no longer purchase any new books. There are many that I would wish to acquire put practicality dictates that I restrain my acquisitive instincts. Also, the fact that there is an enormous amount of material that I can access through CDs that I own and from the thousands of books available on the internet softens the blow that I can no longer, in good conscience, purchase books to bring home.
Jews have always had a reverence for books. There is an anecdote regarding Jewish professor, Harry Wolfson, who was one of the first Jews to acquire tenure at Harvard University. This was in the beginning of the twentieth century when academic anti-Semitism in the United States was open and palpable. Wolfson was once confronted by one of his colleagues who said to him: "Why do you Jews think you are so special?!" Wolfson is reported to have coolly answered: "As far as I know, we are the only people who when we drop a book on the floor, we pick it up and kiss it."
This attitude towards books, in the Jewish mindset, is not limited only the books of holiness and Torah. Many surveys have shown that Jews constitute a large bloc of the book purchasing public in the United States, far greater than their numbers and population would warrant. Of course, there are a lot of trashy books in circulation, many of which actually prove more popular and outsell books of greater worth and gravity.
So, like everything else in life, there are positive and potentially negative consequences in acquiring and reading books. History has shown us that banning books is counterproductive to the very cause that it is attempting to protect. One must become a connoisseur of books in order to obtain the full value of having and reading books. But the old Hebrew adage that "books should be members of your household" still certainly applies in the Jewish world.
Shabbat shalom

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein
Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel
Bo
The story of the Jewish people's suffering under Egyptian bondage reaches its climax in this week's Torah reading and in the beginning part of next week's Torah reading as well. The Torah does not really dwell on the history and political significance of this momentous event. It tells us of the plagues visited upon the Egyptians, of the stubbornness of Pharaoh and of the eventual capitulation of the Egyptians to the demands of Moshe.
However, it does not in any way inform us of the geopolitical consequences of the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. Rather, the balance of the Torah readings of the year will concern itself almost exclusively with God's relationship and instructions to the Jewish people.
Even when other nations and personages are mentioned and described later in the Torah, this is done only regarding their direct relationship to the Jewish people. So, one can certainly wonder at this seemingly xenophobic exclusive type of narrative. The Jewish people have always been a very small percentage, not only of the world's population, but also of the population of the Middle East itself.
The Land of Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people, is a very small country covering only a minute portion of the landmass of the vast Middle East. Why does the Torah, so to speak, ignore the rest of human society and geopolitical reality and concentrate only on the story of a small people who will inherit a very small slice of world territory? This question of Jewish exclusivity lies at the heart of a great deal of the internal and external debates regarding Israel and the Jewish people in today's world as well.

The story of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt is the basis for the root concept of Judaism, that the Jewish people are mysteriously special and unique amongst all other peoples that inhabit the globe. As the Torah proclaims: "Has there been any other historic occurrence where one nation has been extracted from the midst of another nation?"
Many peoples have experienced revolutions against oppressors and the achievement of national freedom. But the story of the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt remains a singular and unique one. This is because the purpose for that exodus was not limited to achieving national freedom and personal comfort. Rather, as expressed so often by Moshe and written in the Torah itself, it was that this people should be a light unto the nations, a chosen people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation dedicated to the service of God.
It is because of this higher layer of freedom that the exodus from Egypt represents that the Jewish people have survived and prospered in spite of all odds and through all generations. Throughout the ages, many in the non-Jewish world have dealt with the issue of Jewish survival and its ultimate mystery. Judaism, Jewish values and ideals have penetrated and influenced all sections of humanity. One can say that it is the very exclusivity of the Torah narrative and of Jewish thought and lifestyle that carries with it the universality that the Jewish people have achieved. Among the many great paradoxes of the human story, this paradox of the exclusivity and universality of the Jewish people is primary.
Shabbat shalom

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from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>
to: weekly@ohr.edu
subject: Torah Weekly
Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Bo
For the week ending 24 January 2015 / 4 Shevat 5775
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights
The Law of Accelerating Returns
"And you will eat it (the Pesach offering) in haste." (13:17)
In 1982, an Osborne Executive portable computer weighed 100 times as much, was 500 times as big, cost approximately 10 times as much, and had about 1/100th the clock frequency of a 2007 Apple iPhone.
"Moore's law" is the observation that, over the history of computing hardware, the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles approximately every two years. In like fashion, microprocessor prices, memory capacity, sensors and even the number and size of pixels in digital cameras all are improving at roughly exponential rates as well.
Moore's law has been applied not just to technology but also to accelerating change in social and cultural progress throughout history. It suggests faster and more profound changes in the future, leading to a point of "singularity" where the pace of change becomes so accelerated that it leads to an apocalyptic event where the world as we know it metamorphoses into something beyond our imagination. The futurists see technological change so rapid and profound it represents a rupture in the fabric of human history.
"And you will eat it (the Pesach offering) in haste."
The Exodus from Egypt was experienced as a moment of "singularity" — a moment faster than time itself, racing to meet the redemption from slavery. Just as the first, so is the last.
The Rambam says that one should not speculate too much about what things will be like in the Messianic Era because "No one knows what it will be, until it will be."
The world is accelerating faster and faster to its moment of climax. What secular futurists detect is indeed a world of accelerating returns. A world impossible to visualize. The coming of Mashiach, when all mankind will return to G-d.
"The voice of my Beloved! Behold, it came suddenly to redeem me, as if leaping over mountains, skipping over hills." (Shir HaShirim 2:8)
May it come speedily in our days!

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>
to: Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>
subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parshas Bo
So that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt… that you may know that I am Hashem. (10:2)
The Revelation of the Divine Presence witnessed by the Jewish People in Egypt was unparalleled. They saw how Hashem manipulated the "laws of nature" to serve the needs of His People, as he meted out justice to the evil Egyptians. This year of Revelation led up to their liberation from Egypt, followed by the Splitting of the Red Sea, which was the precursor to the seminal event in Jewish history: the Giving of the Torah. It would all be for naught, however, had it not been transmitted to future generations. The Torah invokes us to relate this experience to our sons and grandsons. The Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh explains why Sippur yetzias Mitzrayim, relating the story of the Exodus, is incumbent upon the grandfather, as well as the father.
The Baal Shem Tov says that herein lies a new perspective on the critical importance and the overriding responsibility one has towards the chinuch, education, of his children. The Torah intimates that the command concerning the successful passage of the torch of Torah from father to son is dependent upon the father's sense of responsibility. A father must not simply educate his son - one generation; rather, he must see to it that the chinuch he imbues in his son will carry on to the next generation as well. He must see his grandson's "face" in his son's image. If he teaches for only one generation, the chances are that if it even lasts that generation, it surely will not last much longer. We measure successful chinuch by its enduring nature, its ability to transcend and survive the test of time and challenge. When a father teaches his son, just as when a rebbe teaches his talmid, student, he must realize that before him stands not just one child, but the future potential of generations. If he imparts the lesson with feeling, love and inspiration, it will endure the test of time.
How does one teach in this manner? How does one ensure that his lesson will be successfully infused in his son/talmid for generations to come? Perhaps we can explain it utilizing the following novel approach towards mitzvah observance. In his Michtav MeiEliyahu, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, distinguishes between two concepts which each describe the essence of mitzvos vis-?-vis man. We find that mitzvos are referred to as chaim, life: Ki heim chayeinu, "For they are our life." In other sources, however, we find that mitzvos are called levushim, garments. He explains that these two terms apply to the manner and attitude with which one performs the mitzvos.
One can perform mitzvos with pnimius, an inwardness of the heart, with feeling, with dedication, struggling to overcome the wiles and challenges presented by the yetzer hora, evil inclination, and with mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice. This is the meaning of "life" vis-?-vis mitzvos, since it adds to the personality of the one who executes the mitzvah, a degree of sanctity which had not previously been there. To "live" means to supply a need which the ego feels and struggles to fulfill - and this need is fulfilled in such a case.
There is another manner of mitzvah performance - regrettably, one to which many of us adhere. It is the result of the way we have been raised: K'mitzvas anashim melumdah, as human commands learned by rote, or, to put it simply, complacency. This is the type of mitzvah which is called levush, "apparel." We cannot dismiss this approach; although it lacks inwardness, it can still contain considerable educational value by maintaining one's spiritual status quo, by preventing him from descending to a lower spiritual

plateau. One who is surrounded by mitzvos possesses a certain tris, shield, against the yetzer hora, even if his performance is only extrinsic and superficial. Thus, mitzvos are referred to as "apparel," since clothing provides a covering over the body, a safeguard against the environment. There is kedushah, holiness, in every mitzvah endeavor - even if performed for extrinsic motives.

The Michtav MeiEliyahu delves deeper in explaining the distinction between these approaches to mitzvah observance, emphasizing the long-term effect of each. We explore two ways to perform mitzvos. One's attitude towards mitzvah performance affects his relationship with that mitzvah. One can transmit "life" to the next generation. If the role of a mitzvah is only on the "apparel" level, however, the father is hard-pressed to transfer this mitzvah to his son. After all, no "apparel" comes in "one size fits all." My jacket will fit my body - not my son's body!

I think that herein lies the secret to transmitting our Jewish heritage from generation to generation. If a father wants to transmit his mitzvah experience to his son in such a manner that he will eventually transmit it to his son (the grandson), it is necessary that the father/grandfather maintain the proper attitude/approach towards mitzvah performance. If the mitzvah is "life" to him, then he will be able to imbue this life-source in his son and grandson. If, however, it is only an activity that he carries out superficially, without feeling or devotion, the chances are that his son will observe this and not take the mitzvah to heart. He certainly will not feel it incumbent upon himself to transmit it to his son.

Perhaps the key to Sippur yetzias Mitzrayim, "relating the story of the Exodus," is to be found at the end of the pasuk: V'yidaatem ki Ani Hashem, "That you may know that I am Hashem." What does "knowing" have to do with the mitzvah of transmitting the story to one's son and grandson? Perhaps yediah, knowledge, defines our attitude. The word yediah, which is normally translated as knowledge, is also defined as turning particular attention to a subject, ie, to care deeply, to love someone. Hashem says (Bereishis 18:19), Ki yidativ, concerning Avraham Avinu, "For I have turned My particular attention to him/I have loved him." To "know" something/someone is to care deeply about him. Hashem wants Klal Yisrael to have such a deep awareness of what took place in Egypt that this awareness will catalyze within them a deep sense of love for Hashem. When one performs a mitzvah on the yediah level, it will be transmitted to the third generation.

After all is said and done, the Torah is underscoring the need for parents to inculcate their children with love for Hashem and a deep desire to carry out His mitzvos. This infusion must be strong enough to carry on for generations. To the parent who comments, "I can only do so much; the rest is up to the school," I conclude with the timeless words of Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, "If there is one lesson that Judaism teaches about the family, it is this: There can be no substitute for the mother and father in producing a Jewish child and in ensuring Jewish continuity. The best of schools cannot achieve what even the average parent can achieve when it comes to Jewish education."

Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, quotes Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, who explains the Rama's addendum to the Shulchan Aruch. The Mechaber (author of the Shulchan Aruch, Horav Yosef Karo, zl) writes that, when a boy reaches the age of bar-mitzvah and receives his first Aliyah, is called up to the Torah, his father recites the Baruch Shepitrani, blessing Hashem for absolving him from the punishment for the deeds of this person - namely, his son. The Mechaber is of the opinion that the blessing is made b'Shem u'Malchus, using Hashem's Name. From now on, once the boy has entered adulthood, the boy is responsible for himself. He is no longer the father's headache. His son is now an adult.

The Rama agrees that a brachah is recited - only without including Hashem's Name. Hence, the father says, Baruch Shepitrani meiansho shelzeh. Why is this? Rav Elya explains that a parent is freed from responsibility for his child's deeds - only in such a case that the father has given his son proper correct chinuch, Torah education, prior to his becoming a bar mitzvah.

If he has given his son the proper chinuch and later the child decides (on his own) to reject it, the father is not responsible. The Rama feels that no one can truly assert that he has given his son the complete proper chinuch. Issues always arise during a child's formative years which can necessitate augmenting a child's chinuch. Some parents take action; others do not. We may have the right intention, but this does not necessarily catalyze the right results. If a father cannot stand up and say with all certainty that he has given his son the right chinuch, then he cannot make the brachah with Hashem's Name, because it might be a brachah l'vatalah, in vain.

One thing is certain. As parents, we can and should see to it that we serve as the proper role models for our children. If we do this, if we make every effort to set the proper standard for our children to emulate, we will merit to derive Torah nachas from our children.

Please speak in the ears of the People. (11:2)

Rashi quotes the Midrash which explains the reason that Hashem asked Moshe Rabbeinu to make a special effort to convince the Jews to request valuables from the Egyptians. If they would not do so, the neshamah, soul, of Avraham Avinu would take umbrage, saying that Hashem had carried out His promise that the Jews would be enslaved and persecuted, while he had not carried out the second prophecy, concerning the Jews' exodus amid great wealth. It appears that Hashem's primary concern was regarding what Avraham would say. What about Hashem's word? The Almighty informed Avraham that two things would occur: imminent slavery and persecution, followed by leaving with great material wealth. Is His word not sufficient reason for asking the Jews to borrow from the Egyptians? What does Avraham have to add to the equation?

The commentators, each in his own inimitable manner, offer perspective concerning this question. In his Sefer Dorash Mordechai, Horav Mordechai Druk, Shlita, quotes an explanation he heard from the Klausenberger Rebbe, zl, based upon an incident which took place during the frightening days of the Holocaust. The men were placed on different blocks. The Rebbe found his assigned "bed" was next to that of a Jew who had abandoned the faith, someone we refer to as a yehudi mumar.

It was late one night when the mumar whispered to the Rebbe, "You know, despite my rejection of the Jewish faith, I will nevertheless receive a portion in Olam Habba, the World to Come."

The Rebbe was shocked by this man's statement. "You? How is that possible? You are a meshumad, apostate. Why would you deserve Olam Habba?" the Rebbe asked.

"Let me explain," the man began. "The accursed Hitler sent me to the camps because, after searching back for three generations, he found Jewish blood in my lineage. Apparently, for Hitler, the slightest connection with Judaism is sufficient reason to subject me to persecution, deprivation and death. I figured that if I am 'Jew' enough to suffer with you, I am, therefore, also good enough to enter Olam Habba. I do not believe that I will suffer down here and not receive a portion in the World to Come!"

When the Rebbe heard this man's logical deduction, he commented, "I thank you for allowing me to answer a question that has been bothering me for some time. I always wondered why Hashem included Avraham's potential grievance as a reason for having the Jewish People leave Egypt with material wealth. Now I have gained a new perspective on the issue. After all, did Hashem owe anything to the Jews? They had descended to the forty-ninth level of spiritual contamination. They worshipped idols in Egypt. Certainly, Hashem owed them nothing.

"However, Hashem had given His word to Avraham that they would be enslaved, and that they would leave wealthy. Can you imagine what our Patriarch Avraham would say? 'Hashem, if they were Jewish enough to suffer persecution, they must also be worthy of leaving with wealth'!"

And you shall redeem every human first born among your sons. (13:13)
The mitzvah of Pidyon HaBen is a rite of passage mitzvah in which the firstborn son is redeemed for five silver coins. This is an important mitzvah, in that the child/b'chor/firstborn is like a Kohen, since the priesthood was once the domain of the firstborn. They lost it, and it was transferred over to Shevet/Tribe of Levi, of which the Kohanim became the replacement b'chorim. Thus, every firstborn harbors a degree of sanctity which must be redeemed, since he cannot use it. In the following incident, we see exactly how important the mitzvah of Pidyon HaBen really is.
Rav Meir Gruzman is Rav in Tel Aviv and also teaches a Judaism course for Israeli soldiers in the military academy. This course covers basic Judaism, its history and hashkafah, philosophy, heralding back to the Revelation at Har Sinai, and continuing on to the issues confronted by Jews in modern times. One day, following an especially spirited class explaining the concept of nevuah, prophecy, and the unique nature and distinction of those chosen by Hashem to be His prophets, he was asked by one of his students, a captain, "Do we still have such men of stature who represent the spiritual elite to the Jewish People?" Rav Gruzman responded with a short discourse on the thirty-six tzaddikim, righteous Jews, in whose merit this world is sustained. He talked for a few minutes about the truly righteous Jews of past generations and their achievements. He saw, however, that the student was not buying his reply: "I am not asking about the past. I want to know about the here and now. Do we have such righteous people today?"
Rav Gruzman was about to navigate the topic to a different subject, when, suddenly, one of the students raised his hand to speak. He was a decorated colonel by the name of Samuel: "I would like to share with the class a perspective to which I was personally privy. It is a story of a great man, who, I think, will fit the bill.
"Let me first introduce myself. I was born in Bucharest, Romania, during the Communist occupation. The country was agnostic, G-d playing no role whatsoever in the lives and outlook of its citizens. My parents were no different. We knew that we were Jewish, but we did not know what being Jewish meant - other than being reviled by the Communists. As a young child, I was healthy physically. My first three years of life were no different than that of any other young boy.
"Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, I began fainting whenever I heard a noise. The slightest sound, even a cup falling to the ground, would cause me to faint. If a bus passing my house would make a loud noise, I would convulse and faint. My parents feared the worst. They stuffed my ears with cotton and took me from doctor to doctor. There was no specialist that we did not see. They exhausted me with tests covering my entire body - all to no avail. They remained clueless to my illness. No one knew why an otherwise healthy boy was constantly fainting when he heard noise.
"We finally returned to Bucharest, exhausted and wasted. My mother wanted to keep on hoping for some type of cure, but the doctors were not very reassuring. They could not figure out the source of my problem. My mother was sitting there one day, bemoaning her life and my predicament to a close family friend, who, albeit also assimilated, did have some knowledge of Judaism. 'Have you gone to a tzaddik, righteous person, for a blessing?' the woman asked my mother. 'Never,' my mother replied. 'What can a tzaddik do that the greatest specialist could not do? Is he a doctor? Does he know anything about medicine? How could he help me?'
"The friend was adamant: 'You cannot give up hope until you have tried everything. Go to this tzaddik and petition his blessing. What do you have to lose?' she asked.
"We went to this holy Jew. I was a four-year-old boy, but I remember his eyes. They were piercing - yet soft and caring. His entire countenance and bearing bespoke a man who carried enormous responsibility on his shoulders. I never saw an angel, but, if I had to imagine the appearance of an angel, I would describe the image of this tzaddik.
"He asked my mother various questions concerning my symptoms, who the doctors were with whom we had consulted, and which medical centers we had visited. Finally, after obtaining a complete image of my medical picture, he asked my mother, 'Since he is your firstborn, did you perform the Pidyon HaBen rite with him?' My mother had no idea what he was talking about, and she said so. 'What is a Pidyon HaBen, and what impact does it have on my son's health?' she asked somewhat impatiently.
"The holy tzaddik was very patient as he described the entire procedure to my mother, explaining the significance of the mitzvah. Meanwhile, worshippers were entering the building on their way to the shul to pray the Minchah, afternoon service. The tzaddik called in a minyan, quorum of ten men, including among them a Kohen, and performed the mitzvah of Pidyon HaBen. I remember that, at the conclusion of the ceremony, the tzaddik took my hand in his and said, 'In the merit of the mitzvah you will be healed.'
"From that day on, I became a changed person. Noise no longer bothered me. The windows of my house could now be kept open; no more cotton in my ears. I no longer needed them."
Obviously, everyone wanted to know the name of this holy Rebbe. Samuel said it was the Buhasher Rebbe. Samuel added that every year on Erev Rosh Hashanah he, together with his family, visit the Rebbe and petition his blessing for a healthy new year.

And it shall be a sign upon your arm, and an ornament between your eyes. (13:16)
The four Scriptural passages contained in the Tefillin are basic to Judaism. They address the concepts of the Oneness of G-d, reward and punishment, and the obligation of a Jew to observe all of the mitzvos of the Torah. Also contained therein is a reminder of the Exodus which catalyzed our freedom from tyranny, leading up to our acceptance of the Torah and eventual initiation as Hashem's People. Thus, wearing Tefillin daily is an affirmation of our belief in all of the above. A Jew who does not put on Tefillin is referred to as a poshei Yisrael b'gufo, Jewish sinner with his body, which serves as the vehicle for this transgression. One who wears Tefillin not only fulfills a most important mitzvah, but he also wraps himself in an insurance policy, which is demonstrated by the following episode.
Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl, symbolized ameilus baTorah, toil in Torah, at its zenith. His brilliant encyclopedic knowledge was without peer. His mastery over Torah granted him the unique power which allowed him to have a penetrating insight into situations which would elude others. Commensurate to his great strengths was his outstanding humility. He made every effort not to call attention to himself, by constantly playing down his involvement in a specific endeavor. During the shivah, seven-day mourning period, following his passing, the following story came to light.
A Kollel fellow from Elad (city in Eretz Yisrael near Tel Aviv) went for an outing with his family. They all climbed into the family van and set out on their journey. Sadly, shortly after they left, they were involved in a collision with another vehicle. Everyone in his family suffered injuries - none life-threatening, but painful. Their oldest son, a b'chor, firstborn, who was at the time nine and a half years old, did sustain serious injuries. For the first few hours, he hovered between life and death. The doctors performed brain surgery on the child, which was partially successful. They saved his life, but they saw little hope that he would ever regain his full brain function. They felt that, to a certain extent, he had suffered irreversible brain damage. He would be mentally deficient for the rest of his life.
The father, who was miraculously the only one not to have sustained injury in the crash, was beside himself. He could not accept the surgeon's diagnosis, and he went all over Eretz Yisrael to various tzaddikim, righteous Jews, to petition their blessing for his son. One of the father's close friends was a Tefillin-maker and scribe. As a result of his vocation, he had opportunity to speak often with Rav Elyashiv. He offered to go to the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, to ask for his blessing.
The man quickly took the boy, who at the time was in bed staring out in space, to Rav Eliyashiv. The Rav listened to the story and responded, "Go home and bring a pair of Tefillin and place them on the boy's head." The

only available pair of Tefillin he had at home were in preparation - plain, undyed boxes that did not in any way resemble the real thing. Rav Elyashiv felt that Tefillin would engender positive results. The man quickly picked up the Tefillin and brought them to the home of the young boy. Following the instructions of Rav Elyashiv, he put the Tefillin on the boy.

The surgeon walked into the room to see, to his shock, a boy in a coma wearing Tefillin. He thought the scribe insane, but respectfully did not raise a ruckus. He turned around and quietly left the room, thinking that this time the rabbi was totally insane.

One week later, the boy was standing on his feet. Two weeks after he had been administered the "Tefillin medication," the boy left the hospital on his own volition. That same day, he attended shul, standing next to his father, davening. It was as if nothing had ever happened. The surgeon now agreed that nothing short of a miracle could have affected such results.

Only a handful of people were aware of this story. That was Rav Elyashiv. He did not seek or want any publicity. It remained circulated only within the immediate family. The boy's father had occasion to be in Bnei Brak, so he visited Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita. After relating the story to him, Rav Chaim listened and then commented, "The Midrash states: (Hashem says) 'I did not create a head (for no) other (reason) than to put Tefillin on it.'" Rav Chaim added, "If there are Tefillin, then there is a reason for a head!"

When the story was related during the shivah, a member of the family commented, "That was the fourth time that a person was saved through the vehicle of Tefillin."

Sponsored in loving memory of Vivian Stone Chaya Leah bas Shimon a"h niftara 18 Shevat 5769 By her children Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column
Bo: "Tell Me A Story"

Since back in early autumn, when we began reading the Book of Genesis in the synagogue, we have been reading one long story. It has been a very dramatic story, extending over many centuries. It began with the creation of man, and proceeded with the narrative of the transformation of a small family into a large nation.

For the past several weeks, the plot has thickened. That nation became cruelly enslaved. In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Bo (Exodus 10:1-13:16), the story takes a suspenseful turn. We sense that the redemption from slavery is imminent. But before redemption begins, the narrative is interrupted.

The Torah shifts gears. It is no longer a story that we hear, but a set of God given commands: "This month…shall be the first of the months of the year for you. Each member of the community shall take a lamb…Your lamb shall be without blemish…You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month and…slaughter it at twilight, eat the flesh that same night…not eat any of it raw…not leave any of it over until morning." (Exodus 12:1-10)

Whereas the novice reader of the Torah is jolted by this drastic transition from the narrative mode to a set of laws, Rashi and Ramban were not surprised by this sudden shift. They wondered why the Torah would focus at such length on storytelling and not proceed directly to this passage of ritual law.

"Is the Torah a story book?" they ask. "Is it not, rather, a set of instructions for ritual and ethical behavior?" They each answer these questions differently, but both conclude that much of the Torah, perhaps even most of it, is one long and fascinating story.

Why does a book designed to teach the reader about proper religious belief and practice take the form of a narrative?

I think that the reason is quite simple. The Torah recognizes the power of the story to influence the minds and hearts of men. An author who wishes to profoundly impact his reader will do well to choose the narrative mode over other modes of communication. In secular terms, a good novel is more powerful than the best law book.

Taking note of this important lesson enables us to understand an otherwise puzzling phenomenon. Despite the fact that the Exodus from Egypt was, and remains, the central experience of Jewish history, there were at least two Jews who alive at the time of the Exodus who did not experience it directly. I refer to Gershom and Eliezer, the two sons of Moses. They remained behind in Midian when Moses struggled with Pharaoh. They did not witness the ten plagues. They missed the thrilling flight from Egyptian bondage. They did not personally experience the wondrous miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea. They were brought back to Moses by their maternal grandfather Yitro, so it is not at all clear whether they were even present at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given.

The early twentieth century Chassidic master, Rabbi Yehoshua of Belz, wonders about this puzzling fact. His answer is a most instructive one: God wanted Moses to tell his sons the story of the Exodus. He wanted Moses to be the storyteller par excellence, the one who would model storytelling for every subsequent father in Jewish history. Gershom and Eliezer were denied witnessing the Exodus because God wanted them to serve as the first Jewish children who would only hear its story; who would not know the real-life experience of the Exodus but only hear its narrative told to them by their father.

This, teaches the Belzer Rebbe, is the simple meaning of the verse in this week's Torah portion: "…So that you (singular in the Hebrew) may tell the story, in the ears of your son and son's son, of how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am the Lord" (Exodus 10:2). The singular "you" at the beginning of the verse, explains the Rebbe, refers to Moses himself. He is to tell the story to each of his sons individually, because he is the only father then alive whose sons would hear the story of the Exodus second hand. In this manner, Moses set the stage for all subsequent Jewish fathers. A Jewish father must be a storyteller!

A good story's power is familiar to all of us. The secret of the Chassidic movement's success was not its texts or teachings, but the inspiring stories it told to its early adherents. To this day, Chassidim maintain the tradition of storytelling in their melava malka, or post-Shabbat repast, every week.

Personally, I long ago became familiar with an approach to psychotherapy called narrative therapy, in which the patient uses his or her own personal narrative as the basis for curative change. My favorite mentor would emphasize that when a therapist first encounters a patient, his opening question should not be, "What's your problem," but rather, "Please tell me your story."

As I reflect upon those of my teachers who left a lasting impression upon me, I recall the fact that they all told stories. Indeed, I remember those stories better than the academic lessons they taught me.

I remember a youth group leader named Shmuli who told us stories and gave us cupcakes every Shabbat afternoon. I later learned that he obtained those stories from an early Chabad publication entitled Talks and Tales. Those tales left me with a taste for religion that even surpassed the taste of those delicious cupcakes.

I remember my seventh-grade teacher who read us the stories of William Saroyan at the end of each class, laying the foundation for my abiding love of literature. And, of course, there were the stories my unforgettable Talmud teacher told us about the heroes of rabbinic history, which ultimately inspired me to pursue a career in the rabbinate.

Frankly, I fear that storytelling is becoming a lost art with the rapid change of our modes of communication. Grossly abbreviated electronic messages have replaced the face-to-face encounters that are essential for storytelling. The absence of the good story will effect personal development negatively and will impede the spiritual development of our children and grandchildren.

For me, Torah is but the most outstanding of the many stories which shaped my Jewish identity. I can think of only one modality that rivals the narrative as a basis for emotional growth. That modality is music. But space limits me to describing the narrative nature of the Torah in this column. I will reserve my take on the Torah as music for another Person in the Parsha column. Watch for it.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas *Bo*
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Break No Bones About It

One of the initial mitzvos of the Torah, the Korban Pesach, was given to the Jewish nation as a preface to redemption. It is filled with myriad details, surely a distinct departure from other introductory exercises that leave the participants with simple initiatory protocol.

What is truly amazing is the place where the Torah put the specific mitzvah that prohibits the breaking of the meat bones of the sacrifice, to get to the food.

At first, in the early part of the parsha, the Torah details the way the lamb is roasted and how it is eaten. "But if the household is too small for a lamb or kid, then he and his neighbor who is near his house shall take according to the number of people; everyone according to what he eats shall be counted for the lamb or kid.: They shall eat the flesh on that night -- roasted over the fire -- and matzos; with bitter herbs shall they eat it.: "You shall not eat it partially roasted or cooked in water; only roasted over fire -- its head, its legs, with its innards: You shall not leave any of it until morning; any of it that is left until morning you shall burn in the fire: "So shall you eat it - your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; you shall eat it in haste -- it is a Pesach-offering to Hashem" (Exodus 12:4-7).

It makes no mention of the command to eat it without breaking a bone. Only, some thirty verses later, later when the Torah discusses the fundamentals of the offering,does it add that law, as a seemingly misplaced detail among serious edicts: such as who is permitted to eat it; and that the korban is a mitzvah which is incumbent on every Jew.

"Hashem said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the chok (decree) of the Pesach-offering - no alienated person may eat from it. Every slave of a man, who was bought for money, you shall circumcise him; then he may eat of it. A sojourner and a hired laborer may not eat it.

Then it adds, "In one house shall it be eaten; you shall not remove any of the meat from the house to the outside, and you shall not break a bone in it. The entire assembly of Israel shall perform it: "When a proselyte sojourns among you he shall make the Pesach-offering for Hashem; each of his males shall be circumcised, and then he may draw near to perform it and he shall be like the native of the land; no uncircumcised male may eat of it. One law shall there be for the native and the proselyte who lives among you.": (ibid 43-49).

The question is: why insert the issue of broken bones,a seemingly minor detail, together with the fundamentals of this most important ritual?

When the Satmar Rav came to this country after World War II he had a handful of Hungarian immigrants, most of them Holocaust survivors, as his Chasidim. As the custom is with Chasidic rebbes, they would come for a blessing and leave a few dollars for the rebbe to give to charity on their behalf. The poor immigrants, would come in for blessings, some leaving a dollar, others some coins and on occasion a wealthier chasid would leave a five, a ten, or even a twenty-dollar bill. The rebbe would not look at the offerings; rather he would open the old drawers of his desk and stuff them in, ready, and available for them to be put to charitable use.

Of course, givers were not the only one who visited the rebbe. Those who were in need came as well. Each of them bearing their tale of sorrow, asking for a donation.

Once a man came desperately in need of a few hundred dollars, which the rebbe gladly agreed to give.

The rebbe opened hid drawer, and began pulling out bills. Out came singles and fives, a few tens and even a twenty. Then the rebbe called in his Gabbai (sexton), "Here," he said, please help me with this."

The Rebbe began straightening out the bills one by one. Together, they took each bill, flattened it and pressed it until it looked as good as new. The rebbe took 100 one dollar bills and piled it into a neat stack. Then he took out a handful of five-dollar bills and put them into another pile. Then he took about five wrinkled ten dollar bills, pressed them flat, and piled them as well. Finally, he slowly banded each pile with a rubber band, and then bound them all together. He handed it to the gabbai and asked him to present it to the supplicant. "Rebbe," asked the sexton, "why all the fuss? A wrinkled dollar works just as well as a crisp one!"

The rebbe explained. "One thing you must understand. When you do a mitzvah. It must be done with grace, and class. The way you give tzedoka, is almost as important as the tzedoka itself. Mitzvos must be done regally. We will not hand out rumbled bills to those who are in need."

The prohibition against breaking bones is not just a culinary exercise. The Sefer HaChinuch explains it is a fundamental ordinance that defines the very attitude toward that Jews should have toward mitzvos. Though we eat in haste, we must eat with class. We don't break bones, and we don't chomp at the meat; especially mitzvah meat. That fact is as fundamental as the others it is placed with. A person's actions while performing a Mitzvah is inherently reflective of his attitude toward the Mitzvah itself. The Torah, in placing this seemingly insignificant, command about the way things are eaten together with the laws of who is to eat it tells us that both the mitzvah and the attitude are equally important with no bones about it.

Dedicated in memory of R'Yisrael Zisha ben Reb Hirsch Mordechai - Reb Yisroel Zisha Tanzer by Mr. and Mrs. Gedaliah Cohen and Family

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Rav Kook List
Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Bo: Draining Egypt

"The Israelites did as Moses had said. They requested silver and gold articles and clothing from the Egyptians. God made the Egyptians respect the people, and they granted their request. The Israelites thus drained Egypt of its wealth." (Exodus 12:35-36)

God's command that the Hebrew slaves request gold and silver from the Egyptians is commonly explained as reparations for hundreds of years of slave labor. But why was it necessary to completely drain Egypt of its wealth?

The Talmud (Berachot 9b) describes this 'draining' of Egypt with two different metaphors:

"Rav Ami said: they made Egypt like a trap without bait. Resh Lakish said: they made Egypt like a net without fish."

What do these metaphors mean? What is the difference between a "trap without bait" and a "net without fish"?

Trap without Bait

We find that the Torah prohibits returning to Egypt in order to prevent the Jews from falling once again under the spell of the idolatrous Egyptian culture. The Canaanites also worshipped idols, yet Egypt posed a bigger threat to the spiritual purity of the nation. Having lived there for centuries, the Jewish people were comfortable with all aspects of Egyptian life, including their idolatrous practices.

In order to neutralize the attraction of Egypt, it was necessary to impoverish the country. One of the principle reasons for migrating to another land is the possibility of increasing personal wealth. But without its gold and silver, the Egyptian economy was in shambles. It was like a "trap without bait" - the country held no real incentive to lure back Jews seeking to do business there.

Net without Fish

There could be, however, a second factor in the decision of certain individuals to return to Egypt. The local culture and arts, the Egyptian lifestyle, so familiar to the newly freed

slaves, could also serve as a lure to draw back nostalgic former residents. Resh Lakish therefore compared Egypt to a "net without fish." Fish swim together, and are more likely to be drawn to a net that has already caught other fish. By draining Egypt of its wealth, not only was the country devastated economically, but it also suffered from a dramatically lower standard of living and poverty of culture. The final memories of the departing Israelites would be of an impoverished land whose remaining inhabitants struggled to eke out a living. It would be a "net without fish," holding little enticement for them to return.
(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 45)
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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Who is the True Redeemer?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Discussing the mitzvah of pidyon haben is certainly appropriate to this week's parsha—I therefore bring you…

Question #1: Deadbeat dad

Mrs. Gerusha* calls me with the following question:

"I am a divorced baalas teshuvah with two young children, a son and a daughter. My son never had a pidyon haben, and my ex-husband is an agnostic who is not interested in participating. Am I required to perform the pidyon haben for my twelve-year-old son, and what is the procedure if I do?"

Question #2: Who's on first?

Mrs. Gerusha's son asks: "May I perform my pidyon haben at my bar mitzvah?"

Question #3: Late bloomer

The Schwartz family discovered observant Judaism sometime after their oldest son was born some twenty years ago. Recently, they realized that they have never fulfilled the mitzvah of pidyon haben. The question is: Who should perform the mitzvah now, Mr. Schwartz or his yeshivah-bachur oldest son? In other words, if a father did not redeem his firstborn son who is now an adult, may he still fulfill the mitzvah?

Answer

This week's parshah includes one of the places where the Torah mentions the mitzvah of pidyon haben, the redeeming of a firstborn son. This mitzvah is usually fulfilled by a father giving to a kohen five silver coins, each of which is worth a sela (plural sela'im), the cost established by the Torah to fulfill this mitzvah. This mitzvah is required only if the firstborn is not a kohen or a levi, his mother is not the daughter of either a kohen or a levi, and his delivery was a natural birth, in which case he is called a petter rechem. The Gemara (Kiddushin 29a) derives that a father is required to fulfill the mitzvah of redeeming his firstborn son.

There are three obvious situations in which the father would not perform this mitzvah:

1. The father died before he performed the mitzvah.
2. The father is not Jewish or is unknown.
3. The father did not fulfill the mitzvah, although he could have.

Regardless as to why the father does not perform the mitzvah, the mother has no responsibility to do so. Rather, upon becoming bar mitzvah, the firstborn son himself becomes obligated in the mitzvah.

Thus, we can already examine Mrs. Gerusha's question concerning her son who never had a pidyon haben, and whose father is unwilling to perform the mitzvah. She asked whether she is required to perform the pidyon haben.

Certainly, Mrs. Gerusha is not required to redeem her son.

May she?

When Mrs. Gerusha was told that she is not required to perform pidyon haben, she immediately asked whether she may perform the mitzvah. Answering this question requires an introduction.

Pidyon haben vs. bris

Pidyon haben is similar to the mitzvah of bris milah in that the father is the individual primarily responsible to fulfill it. However, there is a major difference between the two mitzvos: Should the father not fulfill the mitzvah of bris milah, the rest of the Jewish people become obligated to perform the bris milah on the uncircumsized child. The Gemara calls this "beis din being obligated in the mitzvah," since they are the representative of the Jewish people.

On the other hand, in the case of pidyon haben, the community is not obligated to redeem this child. Should there be no father or should he fail to redeem his son, the mitzvah becomes the child's to perform upon his becoming old enough to do so.

May they redeem?

Granted that no one is obligated to perform pidyon haben other than a father of the firstborn or, upon becoming of age, the firstborn son himself, may someone else give money to a kohen for the purposes of pidyon haben and thereby redeem the firstborn?

This question is discussed by several halachic authorities, the Taz (Yoreh Deah 305:11) concluding that someone other than the father cannot perform the redemption on behalf of a minor, whereas most authorities rule that a third party may redeem the firstborn (Nekudas Hakesef and Gra ad loc; Machaneh Efrayim, Hilchos Zechiyah #7; see also Ketzos Hachoshen 243:7 and Milu'ei Choshen ad locum). Thus, although Mrs. Gerusha is not required to redeem her son, according to most authorities, should she choose to do so, the redemption is effective.

When the bechor redeems himself, he recites a different version of the text than a father does when he redeems his son. When a father redeems his son, he recites Asher kideshanu bemitzvosav vetzivanu al pidyon haben [He Who commanded us in His commandments concerning redeeming the son] (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 305:10). According to the Shulchan Aruch and the prevalent practice among Sefardim, when the bechor redeems himself, since he is not redeeming his son he closes the brocha with the words lifdos habechor (to redeem the firstborn). According to the Rema and the prevalent Ashkenazic custom, he concludes with the words al pidyon habechor (concerning redeeming the firstborn).

Early responsum

One of our opening questions asked whether a father is still responsible to observe the mitzvah of pidyon haben after his son becomes old enough to fulfill the mitzvah himself. This very question is discussed by the Rashba (Shu't Harashba 2:321). The rabbonim of the city of Toledo, Spain, asked the Rashba (who lived his entire life in Barcelona) to rule on a situation in which a father had not redeemed his son shortly after the latter's birth. Many years have passed, and the son is an adult who is interested in performing the mitzvah himself. The father has decided that he would like now to do the mitzvah, and contends that it is his mitzvah to perform. On the other hand, the son feels that once he became an adult the mitzvah is entirely his and no longer his father's. Does the father still have a requirement to perform the mitzvah? Assuming that he does, is there a preference which of the two, the father or the son, performs the mitzvah?

The Toledo contention

The rabbonim of Toledo were unsure what to do, and therefore decided to have both the father and the son give the required amount for pidyon haben to the kohen, to be certain that the mitzvah was performed correctly. Since they were undecided as to whether the father or the son was observing the mitzvah, they ruled that neither one should recite the brocha prior to giving the kohen the redemption money. Since the kohen had now received more money than he was entitled to according to the halachah, he was required to return the difference. (The responsum does not say to whom the money was returned.)

Rashba's ruling

Although the pidyon had already been performed according to their ruling, the rabbonim of Toledo asked the Rashba whether their decision was accurate. The Rashba explained that the rabbonim of Toledo had not ruled correctly. The mitzvah of a father to redeem his son never ends, even when the son becomes old enough to be required to perform his own redemption. Since both father and son are now required to perform the redemption, yet only one pidyon is required, whoever performs it first fulfills the mitzvah and should recite the brocha prior to giving the kohen the redemption money. The Rashba concludes that if the father and son ask which of them should preferably perform the mitzvah, the answer is the father. Therefore, in the case of Toledo, the son could have performed the mitzvah and recited the brochos (including shehecheyanu, see below), but, preferably, the father should have performed the mitzvah, in which case he would recite the brochos.

At this point, we can return to our opening question #3: The Schwartz family joined observant Judaism some time after their oldest son was born, some twenty years ago. Recently, they realized that they had never fulfilled the mitzvah of pidyon haben. The question is: Who should perform the mitzvah now, Mr. Schwartz, or his yeshivah-bachur oldest son? In other words, if a father did not redeem his firstborn son who is now an adult, may he still fulfill the mitzvah?

The answer is that either the father or the son can perform the mitzvah, and whoever does so recites the brochos. If they ask who should preferably perform the mitzvah, the answer is that it should be Mr. Schwartz.

Coercion

Should a father fail to perform the mitzvah of pidyon haben, the beis din has the halachic right and responsibility to coerce him to perform his mitzvah. What is the law if the father did not perform the mitzvah when his son was young, and now the son is old enough to perform the mitzvah himself? Does beis din coerce one of them to perform the mitzvah, and if it does, which one, the father or the son?

The Rashba rules that if the son is in a financial position to perform the mitzvah, we coerce the son, rather than the father, to do so. If the son is not in a financial position to perform the mitzvah himself, beis din should force the father.

Redeeming yourself

What is the procedure for performing pidyon haben when the adult son redeems himself?

Let us first review the basic steps of a regular pidyon haben performed by a father to redeem his recently born son.

A festive meal is celebrated in honor of the pidyon haben, in order to call attention to the mitzvah. After hamotzi has been recited, the father brings the bechor to the kohen, who is seated at a place of honor. The father declares to the kohen that the baby is a firstborn son, whom he is required to redeem.

The kohen then responds with the famous and enigmatic thousand-year old question: "Mai ba'is tefei?" "Which do you prefer? Would you rather have your child or the five silver coins, sela'im, of pidyon?"

The father responds that he would prefer his son, and that he has the money on hand with which to redeem his son. The father then recites two brochos: Asher kideshanu bemitzvosav vetzivanu al pidyon haben for the mitzvah of pidyon haben, and Shehecheyanu (Rema, Yoreh Deah 305:10). He then places the silver coins in the kohen's hand. The kohen recites the verses of the birchas Kohanim and other words of blessing over the head of the bechor. The procedure is completed by the kohen reciting a brocha on a cup of wine and drinking it.

Redeeming oneself

An early halachic authority, the Maharshal, adapts the choreography of a standard pidyon haben to the situation in which a firstborn is redeeming himself because his father died before fulfilling the mitzvah:

The adult firstborn begins the proceedings by reciting the following declaration: "I am a firstborn petter rechem (see above) and Hashem commanded us to redeem the firstborn. Unfortunately, my father died before he redeemed me, and I remain with the responsibility to redeem myself… I am now prepared to fulfill the mitzvah of Hashem." The kohen then tells the firstborn, "Would you prefer your own body or the five sela'im that you are required to pay as your redemption money?" To which the firstborn answers: "I want to keep myself, and here are the five sela'im coins." The firstborn then recites two brochos, the brocha on the mitzvah of pidyon haben and the brocha of Shehecheyanu (Yam shel Shlomoh, Kiddushin 1:53).

At this point, we can complete our answer to Mrs. Gerusha's opening inquiry: "I am a divorced baalas teshuvah with two young children, a son and a daughter. My son never had a pidyon haben, and my ex-husband is an agnostic who is not interested in participating. Am I required to perform the pidyon haben for my twelve-year-old son, and what is the procedure if I do?"

As we mentioned above, the halachah is that a mother is not required to perform the mitzvah of pidyon haben. If the father refuses to perform the mitzvah, the mitzvah will devolve upon the firstborn son, upon his becoming obligated in mitzvos. In this latter case, the choreography would follow the Maharshal's approach, making a slight modification in the text to accommodate the difference in circumstances – the firstborn's father is alive.

Should the mother perform the pidyon on behalf of her son, as we mentioned above, most authorities consider the redemption valid, and the son will not be obligated in this mitzvah upon his becoming an adult. If she followed this approach, she should modify the pidyon haben choreography to note that she is redeeming her son. Personally, if I were asked what to do, I would advise them to wait until the son is old enough to perform his own pidyon, and to follow the text mentioned by the Maharshal, with the appropriate change reflecting the fact that the father is still alive.

When to redeem himself?

If the son is performing his own pidyon haben, when should he do it?

Since he becomes obligated in this mitzvah upon his bar mitzvah, he should perform the pidyon haben as soon as he has money with which to perform it. He is not required to beg or borrow money in order to do so, but may wait until he has earned the money or received it as a present. Other people may give him money so that he can perform the pidyon haben. Anyone may pay for the festive pidyon haben seudah.

This leads us to a new question: Since they would be celebrating a special meal on the occasion of his turning bar mitzvah, should they make the pidyon haben at that meal, or have two separate festive meals, one for the pidyon and the other for the bar mitzvah?

Combining semachos

Is it permitted for the firstborn bar mitzvah to combine his bar mitzvah celebration party with the pidyon haben? The background to this question is as follows:

The Mishnah (Moed Katan 8b) prohibits getting married on Chol Hamoed. The Gemara presents several disputing reasons for this ruling. One approach is that one should not overlap two festivities. Does this concern apply should the firstborn son celebrate his pidyon haben and his bar mitzvah at the same banquet – that this joint celebration deters from the celebration of one of the mitzvos?

Pidyon haben on Chol Hamoed

Tosafos (Moed Katan 8b s.v. Mipenei) discusses whether the prohibition against marrying on Chol Hamoed extends to other celebrations, such as a pidyon haben. At first, he considers that this might be prohibited, but he concludes that the Mishnah's prohibition includes only getting married on Chol Hamoed, but not pidyon haben and other celebrations that are not as festive as is a wedding. This decision is followed by the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 546:4) and others (Birchei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 305:18), but not by all authorities (see Rema, Yoreh Deah, 305:11). Similarly, we rule that a bris, a sheva brachos or a bar mitzvah may be celebrated on Chol Hamoed (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 546:3, 4), and that the only combined celebration prohibited is a wedding on Chol Hamoed.

Thus, it is perfectly fine for the son to do his pidyon haben at his bar mitzvah celebration. As a matter of fact, I would strongly encourage that he do so if he has the money with which to fulfill the mitzvah, since this accomplishes that fulfilling the mitzvah of pidyon haben is not delayed, and that it is observed at a festive occasion.

Thus we can now answer Mrs. Gerusha's son's question that we quoted at the beginning of this article: "May I perform my pidyon haben at my bar mitzvah?"

The answer is that he certainly may, and, since it is the first opportunity for the son to do so, it is, indeed, an exemplary time to perform the mitzvah.

Conclusion

Since the time of makas bechoros, all first-born males have a certain kedusha. This special sanctity should have resulted in their taking a special role in the service in the Beis Hamikdash. However, because the bechorim were involved in worshipping the eigel hazahav, they lost their unique status and could no longer perform any special role there. As a result, the bechor must undergo a redemption ceremony to make amends – which is accomplished by giving money to a kohen as a means of "redeeming" his kedusha.

* All names have been changed to protect people's privacy.