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**subject: Rav Frand - The Importance of Eagerly
Anticipating the Geula**

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Bo

The pasuk introducing Makas Choshech (the Plague of Darkness) says, "Moshe stretched forth his hand toward the heavens and there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for a three-day period." (Shemos 10:22). Rashi explains the reason for Makas Choshech: There were wicked people amongst the Jewish nation who did not want to leave Mitzraim. These people died and were buried during these three days of darkness so that the Mitzrim would not witness their downfall, thus enabling them to claim that the Jews were suffering plagues as well.

Rashi's wording implies that the wickedness of these people was that they did not want to leave Mitzraim. Those who were not me'tzapeh l'geulah (anxiously looking forward to redemption) did not deserve to be redeemed. The Peirush HaRosh al haTorah says the same idea: He asks why did all

these people die during the days of darkness, but Dasan and Aviram, who were totally wicked individuals, did not die during that period? The Rosh answers that even though Dasan and Aviram were wicked, they did not lose hope in the promised redemption.

The Medrash Rabbah is even more explicit. The Medrash says that there were Jewish slaves who had Egyptian patrons who gave them wealth and honor. They had it good in Mitzraim and did not want to leave! Hashem said, if He kills these Jews outright, the Mitzrim will say that the Jews are also dying, therefore Hashem brought Makas Choshech, during which these Jews could die without the knowledge of the Mitzrim. This is something for us in the United States of America to bear in mind. Baruch Hashem, Jews have been able to have wonderful lives here. Torah is flourishing and many people are well off. But we always need to retain this aspiration of "tzeepesa l'yeshua" (anxiously anticipating redemption). When the time comes, we should be anxious and excited to go to Eretz Yisrael. A person who says "What is so bad with staying in America?" is echoing the sentiments of the Jews who were wiped out during Makas Choshech.

This unfortunate phenomenon repeated itself all the way back at the time of Ezra. When Ezra told the Babylonian Jews after seventy years in exile "Okay, Yidden, it's time to go back to Eretz Yisrael" they said "Babylonia is great!" Similarly, the Jews at the time of the Crusades felt their homes in Christian Europe were more than adequate. Their towns were destroyed! We need to keep that in mind as well. Baruch HaShem, we have a great life here but it is still lacking. We need to anticipate the geula, speedily in our days!

Additional observation (in 2023): Perhaps this is a silver lining regarding the current situation of the significant increase in antisemitism in the United States and around the world in reaction to the war in Eretz Yisroel. Just maybe this is like a gift from Hashem to remind us not to be too comfortable in galus and to anxiously anticipate the geula.

Precision Punishment

The beginning of the parsha says "Hashem said to Moshe, 'come to Pharoah, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst; and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Mitzraim (ais asher his'alalti b'Mitzrayim) and My signs that I placed among them – that you may know that I am Hashem.'" (Shemos 10:1-2). What does the word his'alalti mean? Rashi interprets "see'chakti" (I made fun of them; I mocked them). The Torah uses the same word that it uses by Bilaam complaining to his donkey that he was making a fool out of him (Bamidbar 22:29).

The Tolner Rebbe of Yerushalayim notes that by no other makah, other than here at the beginning of the Parsha by Makas Arbeh (the Plague of Locusts), does it say "you should

tell this over to your children and grandchildren.” It is as if Hashem is telling Moshe, “I want you to tell your children how I ‘played’ with Pharaoh, how I made a laughing stock out of him.” Why, of all the things that happened during the process of Yetzias Mitzrayim, is this the one thing that Hashem emphasizes for us to tell our children?

The Tolner Rebbe says that Pharaoh is referred to in two ways in the teachings of Chazal. Sometimes he is called Pharaoh the wicked (for example in Sotah 12a). This is certainly a title for which he qualifies, considering his sadism and cruelty as described by Chazal. However, Pharaoh is referred to in another way as well. Shlomo haMelech writes: “letz takeh...” (You should smite the scoffer...) (Mishlei 19:25). Rashi there says that the letz referenced in this pasuk is Pharaoh, who was smitten by plagues. Pharaoh is described as a person who mocks, who humiliates. That is what letzanus is. Letzanus means to take anything of value and to devalue it.

Where do we see the letzanus of Pharaoh? Chazal say that Pharaoh subjected the Jews to “avodas perach” which they interpret as assigning women’s work to men and men’s work to women. What is the point of that? It is obviously an inefficient waste of the talents and strengths of his workers of both genders! Clearly the arrangement is a joke – just another way to humiliate the slaves. Alternatively, Chazal interpret avodas perach (as in Vayikra 25:43) as pointless labor – commanding slaves to do a hard job and then throwing the output into the garbage. (I did this only to make you work, I was not at all interested in the product you produced).

The whole purpose of Yetzias Mitzrayim, as the Ramban writes at the end of our Parsha, was to demonstrate that the Ribono shel Olam runs the world and He runs it with the principle of “midah k’neged midah” (measure for measure). When the Almighty punishes a person for his aveiros (sins), the punishment will precisely correspond to the aveira. The payback for wickedness occurs exactly the same way the original act of wickedness was performed.

It says in Shiras HaYam that some Mitzrim sank like a rock (Shemos 15:5); some sank like lead (Shemos 15:10), and some like straw (Shemos 15:7). Chazal say that it depended on how bad the individual Mitzrim were. The Mitzrim who were “not too bad” sank like a stone (they died quickly). Those who were crueler, were consumed like straw. Straw doesn’t go down very quickly. They realized they were drowning during a drawn out and terrifying ordeal. Why? It was midah k’neged midah. Each was punished precisely in accordance with their own level of wickedness.

The Ribono shel Olam wants us to tell our children the concept of Hashgacha Pratis (Personal Divine Providence). The Almighty knows everything a person does, and He keeps a record. When the time comes, He is going to give back precisely what is appropriate. “Tell your children how I mocked Mitzraim...” because this is the biggest demonstration

of the Hashgacha Pratis – the tailor-made punishment. “Pharaoh made leitzanus from us; I am going to make leitzanus from him!”

The pasuk says, “G-d should take revenge before our eyes for the blood of his servants that has been spilled.” (Tehillim 79:10) We look at the last two thousand years of history and see how much pain the non-Jews inflicted upon us, starting from the destruction of the Second Temple, and all the way through. We will witness that revenge, IY”H, and they will get exactly what they deserve.

I recently read that the United Methodist Church of America, which has seven million members, just came out with a policy that they will not do any business with Israeli banks. This is part of the BDS (Boycott, Divest, and Sanction) movement. Do the Methodists do business with China? Do they do business with Saudi Arabia? Do they do business with all these murderous regimes? Of course! But because in Israel, people live on the “West Bank,” they won’t do business with us? It is such blatant antisemitism! Why are we held to a standard that nobody else is held to? It is for one simple reason. It is because we are Jews. I just can’t wait to see what the Ribono shel Olam is going to do to the Methodists. And what He is going to do to the Nazis and the Germans and the French and the Spanish and the British and the Russians and the Ukrainians and the Poles, and the list goes on and on and on.

Tell your children that we are suffering now, but the day will come when we will see that the Ribono shel Olam will give it to them precisely the way they gave it to us. Pharaoh mocked us, the Almighty mocked him.

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The March of Folly

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There is a fascinating moment in the unfolding story of the plagues that should make us stop and take notice. At the opening of this week’s parsha, seven plagues have now struck Egypt. The people are suffering. Several times Pharaoh seems to soften, only to harden his heart again. During the seventh plague, hail, he even seems to admit his mistake.

“Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. “This time I have sinned,” he said to them. “The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.”

Ex. 9:27

But as soon as the plague is over, he changes his mind: “He and his officials” says the Torah, “hardened their hearts.”

Ex. 9:34

And now Moses and Aaron have come to warn of a further plague, potentially devastating, a plague of locusts that, they say, will devour all the grain left after the hail as well as the fruit of the trees. And for the first time we hear something we have not heard before.

Pharaoh's own advisors tell him he is making a mistake: Pharaoh's officials said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their God. Do you not yet realise that Egypt is ruined?" Ex. 10:7

These words immediately transform the situation. How so? Back in 1984 the historian Barbara Tuchman published a famous book called *The March of Folly*. In it, she asked the great question: How is it that throughout history intelligent people have made foolish decisions that were damaging both to their own position and to that of the people they led? By this she did not mean, decisions that in retrospect proved to be the wrong ones. Anyone can make that kind of mistake. That is the nature of leadership and of life itself. We are called on to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty. With the wisdom of hindsight we can see where we went wrong, because of factors we did not know about at the time.

What she was talking about were decisions that people could see at the time were the wrong ones. There were warnings and they were ignored. One example she gives is of the legend of the wooden horse of Troy. The Greeks had laid siege to Troy unsuccessfully for ten years. Eventually they appeared to give up and sail away, leaving behind them a giant wooden horse. The Trojans enthusiastically hauled the horse inside the city as a symbol of their victory. As we know, inside the horse were thirty Greek soldiers who, that night, came out of hiding and opened the city gates for the Greek army that had sailed back under cover of night.

It was a brilliant ploy. Laocoön, the Trojan priest, had guessed that it was a plot and warned his people, in the famous words, "I fear the Greeks even when they come bearing gifts." His warning was ignored, and Troy fell.

Another of Tuchman's examples is the papacy in the sixteenth century which had become corrupt, financially and in other ways. There were many calls for reform, but they were all ignored. The Vatican regarded itself, like some financial institutions today, as too big to fail. The result was the reformation and more than a century of religious war throughout Europe.

That is the context in which we should read the story of Pharaoh and his advisers. This is one of the first recorded instances of the march of folly. How does it happen? Some years ago, DreamWorks studio made an animated film about Moses and the Exodus story, called *The Prince of Egypt*. The producer, Jeffrey Katzenberg, invited me to see the film when it was about half complete, to see whether I felt that it

was a responsible and sensitive way of telling the story, which I thought it was.

What fascinated me, and perhaps I should have understood this earlier, was that it portrayed Pharaoh not as an evil man but as a deeply conservative one, charged with maintaining what was already the longest-lived empire of the ancient world, and not allowing it, as it were, to be undermined by change.

Let slaves go free, and who knows what will happen next? Royal authority will seem to have been defeated. A fracture would appear in the political structure. The seemingly unshakeable edifice of power will be seen to have been shaken. And that, for those who fear change, is the beginning of the end.

Under those circumstances it is possible to see why Pharaoh would refuse to listen to his advisors. In his eyes, they were weak, defeatist, giving in to pressure, and any sign of weakness in leadership only leads to more pressure and more capitulation. Better be strong, and continue to say "No," and simply endure one more plague.

We see Pharaoh as both wicked and foolish, because we have read the book. His advisors could see clearly that he was leading his people to disaster, but he may well have felt that he was being strong while they were merely fearful. Leadership is only easy, and its errors only clearly visible, in retrospect. Yet Pharaoh remains an enduring symbol of a failure to listen to his own advisors. He could not see that the world had changed, that he was facing something new, that his enslavement of a people was no longer tolerable, that the old magic no longer worked, that the empire over which he presided was growing old, and that the more obstinate he became the closer he was bringing his people to tragedy. Knowing how to listen to advice, how to respond to change and when to admit you've got it wrong, remain three of the most difficult tasks of leadership. Rejecting advice, refusing to change, and refusing to admit you're wrong, may look like strength to some. But, usually, they are the beginning of yet another march of folly.

Yeshiva University Community Mourns Passing of Rabbi Charlop, Long-Time RIETS Dean Jan 18, 2024 By: heisenman
An extraordinary leader, scholar, educator, and one of the architects of Yeshiva University as we know it today, **Rabbi Zevulun Charlop z"l**, YU '51, RIETS '54, **passed away on Tuesday**, beseiva tovah, at the age of 94. As the Max and Marian Grill Dean of the Rabbi Issac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) for more than 35 years, his impact on YU was deep and profound. Under his stewardship, RIETS experienced enormous growth, graduating thousands of rabbis, educators and Jewish scholars. As Dean of RIETS, Rabbi Charlop left a deep and enduring imprint on YU, becoming a role model for what it means to be a rabbi. "This yeshiva was

forever changed, elevated and made great by the religious personality and character of our longtime rebbe,” said Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, President of Yeshiva University.

Rabbi Charlop was a grandson of the saintly Yerushalmi Gaon Rav Yaacov Moshe Charlop as well as the son of Rabbi Yechiel Michel Charlop, one of the leading rabbonim of the U.S. In leadership capacity at YU and in organizations across the county, he nurtured generations of rabbinic and lay leaders, impacting Jewish communities throughout the world. “My father was a great rabbi, and I wanted to be like him,” Rabbi Charlop once said. “I knew I would never reach his heights, but nonetheless that’s what I aspired to be. The word rabbi means teach, it’s also the community; a man of great compassion and caring, you have to love your people no matter what. It’s not always easy.” For 54 years, Rav Charlop served as the rov of the Young Israel of Mosholu Parkway in the Bronx — where he spent most of his life. Dedicated to God and to the Jewish people, a scholar of Torah, rabbinic law, and American history, Rabbi Charlop was a role model for rabbinical students, devoting his life to educating future generations of rabbis; his goal was always to create rabbis who could relate to the broadest range of Jews throughout the country and world. With a passion for Judaism and for life, he embodied the ideals of Yeshiva University.

“At the heart of Rabbi Charlop was Yeshiva University, its students, its leadership, its rabbeim,” said Yaakov Neuburger, Rosh Yeshiva of RIETS and Rabbi Charlop’s son in law. “He was one of the great stewards of Yeshiva University and he believed with the greatest passion in what Yeshiva University accomplishes.” “Rabbi Charlop was completely unique individual,” said Rabbi Mordechai Willig, Rosh Yeshiva of RIETS. “There was no one like him. He fought the battles of Hashem, for the sake of heaven, without any personal interest whatsoever, without fear, for the sake of the truth.” Rabbi Charlop authored numerous scholarly essays, including “The Making of Orthodox Rabbis” in Encyclopedia Judaica and “God in History and Halakha from the Perspective of American History.” He also was the editor of novellae on Torah and Talmud by his late father and the author of Shefa Yamim, a 470-page collection of his original Torah thoughts. Zevulun Charlop served as president of the American Committee for the United Charities in Israel, General Israel Orphans Home for Girls in Jerusalem, and the National Council of Young Israel rabbis. May Hashem comfort the family with all those who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem.

<https://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/interviews-and-profiles/tales-of-rav-kook-ben-gurion-rav-shneur-kotler-and-more-an-interview-with-yus-rabbi-zevulun-charlop/2014/04/14/>

Tales Of Rav Kook, Ben-Gurion, the Chazon Ish, And More: An Interview With YU’s Rabbi Zevulun Charlop

By Elliot Resnick - 15 Nisan 5774 – **April 14, 2014**

Rabbi Zevulun Charlop is a mind rich with fascinating stories and historical anecdotes. The son and grandson of distinguished rabbis, Rabbi Charlop was head of Yeshiva University’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) from 1971-2008. He is currently special adviser to YU President Richard Joel on yeshiva affairs and rav of Young Israel of Mosholu Parkway. The financially strapped Bronx congregation – which once boasted hundreds of members – has not davened together since July due to extensive water damage to its synagogue. But Rabbi Charlop has not entirely given up hope of it meeting once again.

The Jewish Press recently met with him in his Washington Heights office.

The Jewish Press: What’s your background? Rabbi Charlop: I was born in the Bronx, and I think the Yankees and I are the only ones who never left. My father, Rav Yechiel Michel Charlop, was one of the most famous rabbis in the country. He was born in Yerushalayim and studied in some of the finest yeshivas there. He also had a special chavrusah with both Rav Kook and Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and was the conduit between them. Each one used to ask about the other and would send his regards through my father. Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer wrote a kuntrus for my father. I met Rav Shneur Kotler – Rav Meltzer’s grandson – and he said, “It’s impossible! My grandfather never wrote a kuntrus for anybody.” But I found it and showed it to him. When my father left Eretz Yisrael, my grandfather said he never knew anyone who left to America knowing all of Bavli and Yerushalmi be’al peh.... My father wrote three sefarim on one amud of Shas.

When did your father leave to America? In 1920. In America he studied in [RIETS]. In fact, he received the first Rokeach Award. Rokeach, the famous company, was founded by a very religious man who came from Kovno. He’s famous for making kosher soap [since soap is usually made with tallow]. Many rabbanim gave heterim because soap is eino ra’ui l’achilas kelev, but Rav Yitzchak Elchanan, the rav of Kovno, felt [soap needed to be kosher]. So he sent a call out to all the chemists, and Yisrael Rokeach made this soap. The bars were blue and red – for milchig and fleishig. It was such a successful business that the Russian government was going to put Rokeach in jail in order to take over his business. Rav Yitzchak Elchanan found out about it and told him to run to America. So he came here and many years later he offered a \$5,000 prize for getting the highest yoreh yoreh, yadin yadin. My father won the first one. Later, my father served as a rabbi in Canton, Ohio and Omaha, Nebraska and, in 1925, he became the rabbi of the Bronx Jewish Center, which was the largest synagogue in the Bronx. The Bronx had close to 700,000 Jews at the time – more than the entire Jewish population in Israel when Israel was created in 1948.

What schools did you attend growing up? Yeshiva Salanter, which was the only yeshiva in the Bronx, TA [Talmudical Academy], Yeshiva College, Columbia University, and RIETS. From there I became the rabbi of the Young Israel of Mosholu Parkway. This year would have been my 60th in that shul.

Is it true that the teachers in Yeshivas Salanter taught in ivris b'ivris? Yes, not ivrit b'ivrit, but ivris b'ivris. I found a remarkable letter signed by all the rebbeim of [RIETS] which was sent to Yeshivas Salanter – I think it was instigated by Rav Moshe Soloveitchik – and it stated that the only way to learn Gemara is in Yiddish. [They stated their opinion] as a halacha. They said Yiddish has been used for centuries, the thinking is in Yiddish, and that Yeshivas Salanter therefore has to teach Gemara in Yiddish, not ivris. The only one who didn't sign the letter was Dr. [Bernard] Revel, and I think it's probably because he didn't approve.

What was the logic behind teaching in ivris and not ivrit? The great Hebraists throughout the world spoke in ivris because it was lashon ashkenazis. That's the way people read Chumash and davened. Many Hebraists felt that was the real Hebrew.

Can you speak a bit about your grandfather, Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop? He was a close student of Rav Kook, correct? My grandfather was a great tzaddik and gaon.... When the state was established, gedolim went to Ben-Gurion and asked him not to draft women and, later, yeshiva bachrim. If you read history books, they'll name all the gedolim who [supposedly convinced Ben-Gurion to leave women and yeshiva bachurim alone]. But the truth of the matter is that he rejected them. It was only because of my grandfather who came to him and cried.

Wasn't it the Chazon Ish who convinced Ben-Gurion? According to a new biography about my grandfather that just came out, the Chazon Ish asked my grandfather to go to Ben-Gurion. It's in the [official record] of the Knesset. When Ben-Gurion said he's making these exemptions, his own party asked, "What's going on here?" Ben-Gurion said in the Knesset: "I did it only for Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop." Why would he do it for your grandfather? Because my grandfather loved all Jews and was a lover of Eretz Yisrael. How close was your grandfather to Rav Kook? He was a talmid chaver. He was the only one in the room when Rav Kook died, and he gave an initial hesped when they were metaher Rav Kook's body.... They wrote amazing letters to each other. Someone once publicly called my zaidie a talmid chaver of Rav Kook, so my zaidie wrote to Rav Kook, saying, "I apologize, I never said to anybody that I'm, chas v'chalilah, your talmid chaver. How could I even dream of being your talmid – let alone your talmid chaver?" And Rav Kook wrote back, "How could I say that you're my talmid? You're my chaver."

How did your grandfather become Rav Kook's talmid? He was haredi, completely haredi, like all the other Yerushalmim. He was considered a tzaddik when he was 20, 25 years old. His father came to Eretz Yisrael in 1842 or 1843 as part of one of the last waves of [aliyah by] the Vilna Gaon's students. My great-grandfather was one of the dayanim of Reb Yehoshua Leib Diskin, who was the greatest rav of his time. They say that whenever Rav Chaim Soloveitchik and the Beis HaLevi saw a piece of Torah of Reb Yehoshua Leib, they would begin to shake. We can't even imagine that today. When my grandfather was a bachur, from the age of 12 and on, he worked with Reb Yehoshua Leib, helping him mesader his writings because Reb Yehoshua Leib was already nearly blind.

My grandfather was known as one of the great iluyim of Yerushalayim, maybe the greatest. He got semicha from the Ridvaz, and the Ridvaz said he could be the rabbi in the greatest Jewish cities in the world. This was when my zaidie was in his early 20s.

If he was so haredi, how did he become close to Rav Kook? When he was very young, he used to learn so hard that he wasn't well and the doctor told him to go to Yaffo. So he went. It was the year, or the year after, Rav Kook came from Europe, and they had big signs on the walls of Yaffo that Rav Kook was speaking between Minchah and Ma'ariv. My zaidie debated with himself whether he should go because everybody said Rav Kook was too modern. But he knew that Rav Kook was a great gadol, so he decided to go. He walked into the shul, which was packed, and stood in the back. He listened and was transfixed. He began to stare at Rav Kook, and Rav Kook saw this tall young man fixated on him, and he became fixated on my zaidie. When it was over, Rav Kook looked for him but couldn't find him. So he went over to the great posek, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, who was also there, and asked him, "Do you know that tall young man who came in?" Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank said, "Yes, that's Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, one of the iluyim of Yerushalayim." He said, "I want you to find him and tell him to see me." The rest is history.

What about Rav Kook so impressed your grandfather? His greatness. He saw that Rav Kook was a gaon olam, even as he was a gaon b'machshavah. My zaidie was very big in machshavah himself. As dean of YU's rabbinical school for 37 years, you obviously interacted with many interesting rabbanim, such as Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik, Rav Dovid Lifshitz, and Rav Mendel Zaks, the Chofetz Chaim's son-in-law.

Can you talk a bit about Rav Zaks? Rav Mendel Zaks was the bochen of the yeshiva. He was a gadol and the rosh yeshiva of Radun while the Chofetz Chaim was still alive. I remember at his levayah, Dr. Belkin [YU's president], who received semicha from the Chofetz Chaim when he was 17, said he knows for a fact that Reb Mendel edited [portions of] the Mishnah Berurah and the Chofetz Chaim accepted all his

emendations. Reb Mendel Zaks had a son, Reb Gershon Sacks, who was a gadol olam. He began the Chofetz Chaim yeshivas in Monsey. Reb Gershon gave shiurim and some of the biggest rebbeim here [at YU] went faithfully every week to hear him. What was your relationship with Rav Soloveitchik [popularly called “the Rav”] like? I saw the Rav every week. At the beginning [when I first became dean of RIETS], the Rav would walk into my office several times a year to show that I was like his boss, chas v’chalilah. I was very upset, and later on he didn’t do it. He was a great supporter of mine. At the time, the relationship between the Rav and Dr. Belkin was very difficult – which was very well known – but they both, for reasons unbeknownst to me, liked me very much and trusted me, and I helped bring them together. You must have had many interesting encounters with Rav Soloveitchik. Can you share just one? The story that is most interesting and unbelievable is one I told at his tenth yahrzeit. There was a man, a judge in New Jersey, who was married to a cousin of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The couple was married for 11 or 12 years but didn’t have any children, so they decided to adopt. She went to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, her cousin, but the Rebbe was very much opposed to adoption because of the problem of yichud. There are heterim, but the Rebbe was against it. He said, though, that she should go to Rabbi Soloveitchik, and he’ll allow you to do it. Something like that. So the husband came to me and said he wanted to see the Rav. I told the Rav the story, but he got very upset. He said, “The Rebbe sends him to me [implying that the Rav was a meikil]? It’s his cousin and I should pasken.” He was very much opposed. So I told him, “They’re going to get divorced. Also, the Rebbe didn’t say no to them. The Rebbe wanted to save his cousin, but he just couldn’t do it because he publicly came out against adoption.” The Rav was finally assuaged, and because the Rav was the Rav, I couldn’t imagine he wouldn’t give them a heter. After meeting the Rav [and not getting a conclusive answer], they wanted to meet him again. But the Rav backtracked and said he didn’t want to see them. Later he agreed, but when they knocked on his door, he didn’t answer. I called him up and said, “They’re knocking on your door...” He said, “I don’t want...” He was backtracking again. Finally, he opened the door and took them in. Now, I had told the husband that the Rav understands the situation and I’m almost sure he’ll say it’s all right. After the meeting, I spoke to him and he said the Rav was going in that direction but then stopped and said, “Come back in a year. If you don’t have a child in a year, ask me again.” It was a crazy answer. I called the Rav and said, “What happened?” He said, “I was going to do it. But then,” he said, “I told the Eibershter that if You don’t give this woman a child within a year, I’m going to give her the heter.” About four or five months later, the man called me up and said his wife became pregnant for the first time. She gave birth several weeks before the year was up. They wanted the Rav to

be the sandek, so I went and spoke to the Rav. He started to laugh. “I’m not a rebbe, chas v’chalilah. I didn’t do it. What did I do?”

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Rabbi Daniel Stein

Take the Egyptian Clothing

On their way out of Mitzrayim, at the behest of Moshe Rabbeinu, the Jewish people "borrowed from the Egyptians silver objects, golden objects, and garments" (Shemos 12:35). Many meforshim wonder how this could have been sanctioned and even endorsed. After all, according to the Medrash (Psikta Zutrasa, Shemos 6:6) a contributing factor to the survival of the Jewish people was their staunch refusal to adopt the Egyptian mode of dress. If the Egyptian clothing was so problematic, why were the Jewish people permitted and encouraged to wear them upon leaving? The Shinever Rebbe (Divrei Yechezkel) suggests that in fact the Egyptian clothing was not meant to be worn as is, but deconstructed and used for its fabric. Alternatively, Rav Baruch ha-Levi Epstein (Tosefes Baracha) submits that the length of the Egyptian clothing caused it to be considered immodest. For this reason, the Jewish people were specifically instructed to "place them on your sons and daughters" (Shemos 3:22) for whom the shorter length might have been suitable and appropriate. More convincingly, Rav Yosef Sorotzkin (Meged Yosef) proposes that the Egyptian clothing was not actually inherently distasteful or objectionable at all. The effort to maintain a distinctly Jewish wardrobe, and the resistance to conform to the prevailing trends, was part of a coordinated effort to create an embankment against the tide of acculturation and assimilation. By maintaining their native names, language, and style of dress, the Jewish people hoped to protect and preserve their unique identity and mission from the alluring onslaught of Egyptian culture. However, upon leaving Egypt and entering the desert, the boycott of Egyptian clothing would no longer be relevant. Perpetuating the fierce battle against the local particulars of Egyptian society while removed and residing far away in the desert would be akin to the last stand of Hiroo Onoda and wrestling with the ghosts of the past. To avoid this kind of anachronistic folly, the Jewish people were asked to place the Egyptian clothing, if not on themselves, at least on their children. It might have been too soon or too difficult for the adults to don the very object of their remonstrations, but the children needed to pivot and be poised to confront the challenges that lied ahead. While the dangers and pitfalls of galus are universal and omnipresent, every iteration comes dressed in a different set of clothing. The Gemara (Menachos 28b) states that almost all

the utensils fashioned by Moshe for the Mishkan could be passed down to future generations. Only the chatzosros, the silver trumpets used to gather the people for the purpose of traveling or waging war, needed to be forged anew. Rav Yechezkel Abramsky explains that the utensils represent the performance of the mitzvos and avodas Hashem whose methods, forms, and principles are immutable and eternal. Therefore, the utensils from one generation are equally effective and valid in subsequent generations since the performance and substance of the mitzvos ought to be identical. However, the chatzosros were meant to inspire the people to move and change, and although its call and content was consistent, the vehicle and method used to convey its message must be adapted to the current situation. The leaders in every generation are charged with creating their own set of chatzosros to amplify the timeless values and lessons of the Torah in a way that will resonate and be applicable to the context and constituency of the times.

Indeed, when the proper pitch and chord of the chatzosros is struck the Jewish people are acutely attuned and inclined to listen. The Gemara (Sotah 12a) tells us, "Amram, the father of Moshe was the gadol hador. Once he saw that Pharaoh said: Every son that is born you shall cast into the river and every daughter you shall save alive, he said: We are laboring for nothing by bringing children into the world to be killed. Therefore, he arose and divorced his wife. All others who saw this followed his example and arose and divorced their wives. His daughter, Miriam, said to him: Father, your decree is harsher for the Jewish people than that of Pharaoh, as Pharaoh decreed only regarding the males, but you decreed both on the males and on the females. And now no children will be born. Amram accepted his daughter's words and arose and remarried his wife, and all others who saw this followed his example and arose and brought back their wives."

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein (Ohr Yechezkel) notes the astonishingly deferential way the Jewish people followed Amram's personal example. Without plastering pashkevlim on the walls of the city or dispatching roaming loudspeakers proclaiming the binding nature of his position, the entirety of the Jewish community undertook the drastic step of divorcing and then remarrying their wives without any clarifications, comments, or complaints. We can only imagine what the contemporary reaction would be to such a bold decision and retraction. What accounts for this disparity? Have the temperament and attitude of the Jewish people changed so much?

It seems that the secret to Amram's implicit influence over the Jewish people is hinted to by another detail of the story. After Miriam informed her father that his actions would ultimately cause the demise of the Jewish people, he heard her argument and changed course. But why did he need Miriam to alert him to this eventuality? Could he not foresee independently that the

Jewish people would not be viable for very long as a nation of divorced couples and stagnating families?

Perhaps Amram only intended to separate from his wife temporarily as a sign of solidarity. Many families had been shattered by the death of their sons who were forcibly drowned in the Nile. As far as we know, Amram was not impacted personally by this barbaric decree, but he likely felt uncomfortable continuing his normal routine at home, with his family intact, while others were suffering and sacrificing. Much like the sentiment today, for those of us on the sidelines of the war in Eretz Yisrael, he was desperate to do something to show his support for those who were grieving and anxious, so he suspended his own marriage. Many others presumably felt the same way and therefore, without any prompting, immediately followed suit. However, Miriam observed that this movement was in fact counterproductive. Instead of strengthening the resolve of the families who were directly affected, as intended, it had caused them to become more despondent and hopeless. Amram accepted her assessment and resumed his regular family life in the hopes of restoring their sense of optimism. Once again, the rest of Jewish people also resumed their marriages in a resounding chorus of confidence about the resiliency of the Jewish future.

Amram did not need to give fiery derashos, issue a kol korei, or write a teshuvah to persuade people of his opinion. He had authority because he was speaking to the heart and mood of the people. They intuitively knew that he had hit the mark and therefore they responded in kind. During the uncertainty of a crisis, when the hearts of the Jewish people are broken, they crave rabbinic guidance, they long for it instinctively. But for it to be effective it is essential that it be in tune and in touch with the times.

This lesson is already alluded to by the pasuk, "you shall come ... to the judge who will be in those days" (Devarim 17:9).

Rashi comments, "and even though he is not as eminent as other judges that have preceded him ... you have none else but the judge that lives in your days." Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (Sichas Mussar) comments that this directive is not a begrudging obligation to adhere to the rulings of a declining and dwindling selection of judges, since there is no other option, rather it is a glowing endorsement of their credentials. Only leaders who "live in your days" are qualified and equipped to confront the challenges of the times. We are told, "remember the days of old understand the years of generations" (Devarim 32:7). The root "shanah" or "year" is related to the root "shinui" or "difference," because while we are enjoined to revere and remember the teachings of the past we must simultaneously contemplate and be sensitive to the differences that exist between generations.

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Hope and Joy during Wartime

Revivim - Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

The most reasonable solution for Gaza is encouraging the emigration of the residents outside the country's borders * There is room for joy in private matters even during this time, as long as we continue to remember alongside this our soldiers who are fighting, and the fallen and kidnapped * A woman who marries a husband from a different ethnic community should only change her customs regarding practices that were clear in his home; for the rest of the laws, they should follow the simple halachic principles, and not adhere strictly to the ethnic community's customs mentioned in books

In these days of war, when hearing about more holy soldiers who gave their lives to protect the nation and land, or were severely injured, a painful feeling of gloom and frustration arises. Why aren't we managing to defeat Hamas? (They prepared for war against us much better than the security establishment estimated). Why did the IDF leaders fall asleep on guard, and why did they prefer containment, instead of a severe attack one hundredfold on any provocation? (There was a mistaken perception regarding the enemy's intentions). Why did the political leadership fail in decisions regarding the withdrawal from Sinai, the Oslo Accords, establishing the terror authority in Judea and Samaria, the withdrawal from Lebanon, and the withdrawal from Gush Katif? (Overall weakness in fulfilling the national vision of settling the Land, and standing up to the enemy).

However, from this week's Torah portion we can find a direction of consolation. We learned that sometimes the process lengthens, and at certain stages, it seems as if the situation is becoming worse; indeed, Pharaoh intensified the enslavement, but in the end, it turns out that this too was for the better, because as a result of this, the Egyptians received more severe plagues, and God and Israel's honor in the world, increased.

Hope

Ultimately, the reasonable solution for the war between us and the Arabs is expulsion of the Arab enemy from the entire Land of Israel. Without this, we will need to continue fighting them again and again, killing thousands and tens of thousands, and sacrificing precious victims.

Unfortunately, for various reasons, internal and external, we have difficulty encouraging emigration of Arabs who want to destroy the State of Israel, and rewarding those who want the Jewish state's wellbeing. The longer the war continues, the Gaza Strip will become a more difficult place to live in, and it will take many years to recover. This situation can encourage the emigration of many Arabs who have received an evil education to hate Israel, and were trained to devote the majority of their efforts to war against us. We must act so that the political and security leadership will always prefer to destroy the enemy's houses and not endanger our soldiers, and

remember that the more devastated Gaza is, the more security we will have – and not hinder this goal by hasty discussions about “the day after”. Discussions, that as long as they are not aimed at encouraging emigration of our Arab enemies, are likely to produce hasty failed “solutions”, similar to the previous “solutions”.

Small Joys during Wartime

Question from a youth: Is it proper to be happy during such a time of war and tension and worry for our soldiers? For example, I passed a driving test yesterday. Can I be happy about this, or do I need to restrain happiness in solidarity with the soldiers and mourning families?

A: Regarding questions like these our Sages said “A wise question, is half the answer”. The very posing of the question already points to the solution, for if one is happy while forgetting the soldiers and mourners, then this is indeed problematic happiness, which ignores the challenges and difficulties. But when one remembers the great challenges ahead of us, identifies with the sorrow of the mourners for the holy ones who gave their lives to protect the nation and land, and prays for the soldiers, then one can be happy.

In addition, intend that with the driver's license you will do good deeds, help parents and grandparents, volunteer to drive those who need it, drive on straight paths, and of course, observe all safety rules.

Blessing “Shehecheyanu” for Passing a Driving Test
It is worth mentioning here that our Sages enacted blessing “Shehecheyanu” (a common Jewish blessing to celebrate special occasions) when receiving good news, and this includes one who was notified that he passed a driving test, or received a high grade on a psychometric exam or another important test – if one is very happy about this, he should bless “Shehecheyanu”. And similarly, one who was accepted to a job he wanted, and is happy about this – should bless “Shehecheyanu” (Peninei Halakha: Berachot 17: 8).

Ethnic Customs between Spouses

In a state of war, the great value of Jewish unity is revealed, and here is a question arising from the blessed process of ‘Ingathering of the Exiles’, which is the foundation of unity.

Q: “Rabbi, I will first take this opportunity to thank you for the ‘Peninei Halakha’ books that gave me an entrance to the world of halakha, and learn it in a clear and joyous manner. I will be marrying my beloved in another five months. I come from a family that immigrated from Ashkenaz, and my future bride is from Eastern ethnic communities. I wanted to know if my fiancé needs to change all of her minhagim (customs) and follow Ashkenazic halakhic rulings in an absolute manner, or are there certain things, she can remain with the customs she had at home? And if so, in which situations?

I would also appreciate knowing if there is a centralized place where I can learn all of the laws that have differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, according to your rulings.

I will specify questions that have arisen so far:

When we are guests at their home for Passover, can I eat kitniyot (legumes), or at least can my fiancé eat them?

Are we allowed to eat at her parents' home on glass dishes, which they use for both dairy and meat?

Does my fiancé need to receive bridal counseling adapted for Ashkenazi women?

I saw that in 'Peninei Halakha' you wrote that the woman needs to change her prayer nusach (version) by the time her children reach education age. Is this a recommendation, or an obligation, to change the nusach?

Answer

In general, the differences between customs are not great, and mainly relate to nusach of prayer. And in halakha, besides the differences not being great, almost always the differences are not between all Ashkenazim, and all Sephardim, but rather, between the majority of Ashkenazim, and a minority of Sephardim, and between the majority of Sephardim, and a minority of Ashkenazim. Therefore, you will not find books that orders the differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, because the topic is fundamentally not orderly, and much more detailed than the general division of Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Therefore, my approach is that in customs known to all from what was seen at one's father's home, it is proper to continue acting in accordance with that custom. And regarding what is not known unless written in books, it is proper to act according to the general halakhic principles, such as safeika d'orita le'chumra (when a person has a doubt on a Biblical command, then we are stringent) and d'Rabanan le'kula (Rabbinic law, we are lenient); halakha follows the majority opinion, and similar principles, as explained in 'Peninei Halakha'.

Kashrut and Legumes

And from here, to the questions themselves. The Rashbatz (Responsa Tashbetz 3:179) wrote that it is obvious, without any doubt, that it is impossible for a couple to regularly eat at the same table, when some foods are permitted for one, and forbidden for the other. Therefore, a woman needs to follow her husband's customs, since, according to halakha, ishto k'gufo (one's wife is like his own body). And as we have learned that when a Jewish woman marries a Kohen, she has the law of a kohenet and eats terumah, and a Kohen's daughter who married a regular Jew, has the law of a regular Jewess, forbidden from eating terumah.

According to this, a woman from Ashkenazi descendants who married a Sephardic man, eats kitniyot on Passover, and a woman from Sephardic descendants who married an Ashkenazi man, does not eat kitniyot on Passover. However, if they are at her parents' home, and she strongly wishes to eat kitniyot with them, in the first years of their marriage, she can eat them. This is because minhag ha'makom (the local custom) also carries weight, and since she was already accustomed to

doing so at their home, she can continue her previous custom of eating with them. But as their children grow older, she should refrain from doing so even at her parents' home, so as not to confuse the children.

Glass Utensils for Meat and Dairy According to Sephardic Customs

Indeed according to Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 451:26), it is permitted to use glass utensils for dairy and meat with washing in between, and many have ruled this way in practice (Prishah, Sdei Chemed, Yabi'a Omer vol. 4, Yoreh De'ah 5; Nitvei Am, Shemesh U'Magen), while the Rema was strict. However, even among Sephardic poskim, there were those who tended to be strict (Kenesset HaGedolah, Olat Zophim, Rabbi Chaim David Halevi), and apparently, in practice, they did not have the custom to be lenient about this. On the other hand, even among Ashkenazi poskim, there were those who were lenient about this (She'elat Ya'avetz, Chamudei Daniel, Yad Yehuda).

In practice, it is preferable even for Sephardim not to eat meat and dairy foods using the same glass dishes, since this kula (leniency) contradicts the other accepted separation practices among Jews. However, one whose family custom follows the lenient opinion, may of course continue their custom (see, all of this, in 'Peninei Halakha: Kashrut' 32:5, 4).

When Ashkenazim are guests at Sephardim who have the custom to eat meat and dairy in the same glass dishes, they can eat in their dishes without any concern, since it is absolutely clear that there is no intermixing of meat and dairy flavors. All the more, a groom should act this way when he is a guest at his wife's parents' home.

Bridal Counseling

Your fiancé can receive counseling from any bridal counselor, since the differences between ethnic community customs are small. The most important thing is that the counselor is good, explains the mitzvah of conjugal happiness well, and does not confuse chumrot (stringencies) with halakhot.

Regarding the letter of the law, even though you follow Ashkenazi customs, it is proper for both of you that your fiancé continue the custom of the Shulchan Aruch, who is lenient regarding waiting days, before starting the seven clean days. Incidentally, as with all disputes, this is not a dispute between Sephardic and Ashkenazi customs, since even among Sephardim, there were those poskim who were stricter than Ashkenazim; rather, there was a dispute between Shulchan Aruch, and Rema. And since Shulchan Aruch ruled according to the majority opinion of the vast majority of Rishonim (early authorities), and the stringency here undermines the mitzvah of conjugal duty, it is proper that your wife continue the custom of her family (see, 'Peninei Halakha: Taharat Ha'Mishpacha 4:7).

Changing Prayer Nusach

A woman who marries a husband from a different ethnic community, has the law of one who moves to live in a place where everyone practices differently than what she was used to, that since she intends to live there permanently, she must nullify her previous customs, and practice according to the custom of the people of her new place (based on Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 214:2; Orach Chaim 568:4, Mishnah Berurah 14). And similarly regarding nusach of prayer, it is proper for the woman to pray and bless according to her husband's nusach, so there will not be two different nusach's in the same home.

However if this does not bother her husband, and it is difficult for her to switch to his nusach, regarding what she prays silently – she can continue praying in the nusach of her father's home.

And when their children reach education age, she must educate them to pray and bless according to her husband's nusach. Therefore, even if her husband agreed for her to continue praying and blessing in the nusach she was used to, when their children reach education age, it is good for her to switch to her husband's nusach, so it will be easier for her to educate them in prayer and blessings ('Peninei Halakha: Women's Prayer 24:4). However, sometimes, for Birkat Hamazon, since it is easy to teach the children to bless using the Ashkenazi nusach tune, in many homes, the husband also agrees for them to bless using the Ashkenazi nusach.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/survival-2/2024/01/18/>

The Jewish Press

Survival

By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser - 8 Shevat 5784 – January 18, 2024 0

“Against all the Children of Israel, not one dog shall whet its tongue ...” (Shemos 11:7).

The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni (187) tells us that R' Yeshaya, a disciple of R' Chanina ben Dosa fasted 85 days because he could not understand why the dogs, of whom it is said (Yeshaya 56:11), “the dogs are greedy and do not know satiation,” should merit to sing praise to Hashem. An angel came down from Heaven and told him to stop fasting because it was a Heavenly decree, and its secret had only ever been revealed to Chabakuk. However, since he was a disciple of such an illustrious individual the angel would give him an explanation. Simply, since the dogs did not bark or growl, they will merit to sing praise to Hashem in the world-to-come. The angel further said, “Concerning your question, return and do not speak anymore of this, as it says (Mishlei 21:23), ‘One who guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from troubles.’”

The concluding words of the angel need an explanation. R' Yeshaya properly asked why the dogs merit to sing the praise of Hashem. He also received an appropriate answer from the angel. Why was it necessary, then, for the angel to caution R' Yeshaya not to pursue any further inquiry?

The Yalkut Shimoni (Chabakuk 563) relates that four individuals arranged prayers that upset Heaven, among them Chabakuk who said (1:3-4), “Why do You allow me to see iniquity ... that is why the Torah is weakened ...” He saw Chananya, Mishoel and Azaryah enter the burning furnace and emerge unscathed, and he saw R' Chananya ben Tradyon and his colleagues consumed in fire. Chabakuk became upset and cried out, “These are righteous, and these are righteous; these are pure and these are pure; these were saved and these were not.” Hashem appeared to Chabakuk and said, “Isn't it written (Devarim 32:4), ‘a G-d of faith without injustice’ – there are no mistakes?” At that moment, Chabakuk expressed his regret and said (3:1), “A prayer of Chabakuk for erroneous utterances.” Rashi expounds that Chabakuk asked for mercy for challenging the middas hadin (the Attribute of Justice) of Hashem.

The angel's concluding remark to R' Yeshaya is to teach that emunah in Hashem means not asking such questions. The Talmud (Makkos 24a) states that a number of individuals sought to establish the defining foundation(s) of Torah. Dovid HaMelech established the Torah on eleven mitzvos; Yeshaya established it on six mitzvos, and Chabakuk established it on the one mitzvah of emunah, as Hashem told Chabakuk (Chabakuk 2:4), “But the righteous person shall live through his faith.”

Hashem revealed to Chabakuk the foundation of creation that keeps a person strong in any situation. It is our primary exercise and endeavor in the service of Hashem. It is specifically when it is impossible for a person to analyze the guiding philosophy of world events that emunah plays a dominant role. Emunah is an amalgam of hope, anticipation and patience. Emunah is not the ability to calculate the how, the why and the what.

Rav Menashe Reisman observes that the main essence of emunah is believing in Hashem when one could have questions. Emunah is seeing R' Chananya ben Tradyon marched to his death, or R' Akiva's flesh being combed with iron combs and understanding that all that happens is hashgacha (Divine Providence). When Chananya, Mishoel and Azaryah entered the fiery furnace they had no questions or insights on Hashem's conduct. When they emerged unharmed, to the extent that their clothes did not even smell of smoke, Nevuchadnezzar was so affected that he wanted to make them gods and to sing praise to Hashem Himself. Why, then, could not Hashem have saved the Ten Martyrs from their gruesome deaths? It is such circumstances and sequence of events that demand “But the righteous person shall live through his faith.”

When one has questions about Hashem's ways that is when he needs to work harder in his service of Hashem and strengthen his emunah.

The great Rosh Yeshiva of Netzach Yisroel, **R' Yisroel Gustman**, lived in Rechavia. Once, when his disciples passed by his house, they saw the Rav in front of his house tending to his garden. Feeling that it was beneath his dignity, they quickly offered to tend to the plants for him, however he demurred. The next time, they came they saw Rav Gustman watering his plants. "Please let me water it for you," offered one of the students.

"Thank you, but I'd rather do it myself," said Rav Gustman. When the students came a third time and saw Rav Gustman pulling out weeds from his garden, they could not understand his insistence on doing it himself, and asked him the reason. He explained that he was once walking in the forest with **R' Chaim Ozer** as they were engaged in a Talmudic discussion. Suddenly R' Chaim Ozer interrupted himself to point out an edible plant that he saw growing in the ground. As they continued their walk, R' Chaim Ozer interrupted the conversation again to point out a plant that was poisonous. They continued to walk and talk, but every once in a while, R' Chaim Ozer would stop to point out various plants that were nutritious, or difficult to digest, poisonous, or easily found in the forest.

Rav Gustman admitted to the students that he had been baffled by R' Chaim Ozer's conduct and could not understand why he would take away time from learning to point out all these different plants.

Soon after, World War II broke out and Rav Gustman was forced to escape into the forest. It was difficult to survive without food. However, he suddenly recalled that walk in the forest when R' Chaim Ozer had pointed out the different plants in the forest that were edible. Rav Gustman sustained himself on these plants for many years and his life was saved.

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**Depressing Time, Productive Time, and Redemptive Time
Is Time a Storm in Which We Are All Lost?**

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Always Late

Sarah was always late to work no matter how much she tried to be on time, or how many times her boss scolded her. She just could not wake up on time. Her boss said she would fire her if it did not stop. Sarah decided to seek the advice of her doctor.

He prescribed her some medication and told her to take one pill before going to sleep, so she can fall asleep immediately and rise early. She did just that and she woke up before dawn and headed into work feeling well-rested. Sarah told her boss about the doctor's prescription and how well it worked. Her boss said, "That is great, Sarah, but where were you yesterday?"

Choosing the World & the Jews

It is a strange Midrash, found in this week's Torah portion, Bo. At the surface, it seems baffling, but upon deeper reflection, it contains an extraordinary meditation on how we live our lives and manage our time.

The Jewish calendar has twelve lunar months. The first day of each month is known as Rosh Chodesh (the head of the month); the first day of the year (the first day of the first month of the year) is known as Rosh Hashanah (the head of the year.) Says the Midrash:[1]

שמות רבה טו, יא: דָּבָר אֶחָד, הִחָדֵשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם. הִנָּהּ הוּא דִּקְתִּיב (תהלים לג, יב) אֲשֶׁרִי הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהָיו, מִשְׁבַּחַר הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ, קָבַע בּוֹ רָאשֵׁי חֳדָשִׁים וְשָׁנִים, וּכְשֶׁבַחַר בְּיַעֲקֹב וּבְנָיו קָבַע בּוֹ רָאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים שֶׁל גְּאֻלָּה. When G-d chose His world, He established 'heads of months' and 'heads of years.' When G-d chose Jacob and his children, the Jewish people, He established the 'head of the month of redemption' (the first day of the month of Nissan, the month of the Exodus).

What does this Midrash mean? What does it mean "when G-d chose His world?" Why does the Midrash not say, "when G-d created His world?"

And what does choosing a world have to do with the establishment of the head of a month and the heads of a year? And what does the Midrash mean when it says that "when G-d chose Jacob and his children, He established the Head of the month of redemption?"

Delineating time into months and years is based on the astronomical lunar and solar orbits. The moon completes its orbit after one month. The sun completes its orbit after a year. What does any of this have to do with G-d "choosing His world," or "choosing Jacob and his children?"

An Address to High School Girls

On January 16, 1964 (2 Shevat, 5724), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) addressed a group of teenage girls, the graduating class of a New York Jewish girls' high school, Beth Rivkah.[2] He offered them a most marvelous insight into this Midrash. This profound perspective can teach us volumes about how to view a one-liner in Midrash, and how to speak to the hearts of teenage girls.

(This coming Shabbos, 10 Shevat, marks the 74th anniversary of the passing of the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (1880-1950), who passed away on Shabbos morning, Parshas Bo, 10 Shevat, 5710, January 28, 1950. On the same day, one year later, the seventh Lubavitcher

Rebbem succeeded his father-in-law as the leader of Chabad-Lubavitch. The following insight is characteristic of the profundity and richness of the Rebbe's Torah insights and perspectives.)

Three Types of Time

Aristotle said that time was the greatest teacher who killed all his students. There is no “teacher” like time. What we learn through time and aging is unparalleled by any class or teacher. The experience of life is the greatest teacher. The saying goes: When a man with money meets a man with experience, the man with experience ends up with the money; the man with the money ends up with an experience.

And yet the clock stops for nobody. “Suspect each moment, for it is a thief, tiptoeing away with more than it brings,” John Updike said. You may be sleeping, sipping a coffee, surfing the web, or getting angry at your boss or your spouse, the clock is ticking away. How do we deal with the merciless reality of time?

There are three ways, suggests the Midrash. There are three experiences of time: depressing time, meaningful time, and redemptive time. You choose in which time-zone you will breathe.

Depressing Time

For some, time is just an endless flow, a shapeless blob, a random stream that never ceases. A day comes and a day goes, and then another day comes and goes. Each day is the same as the day before, and they all add up to nothing.

Sometimes you watch people who allow their days and years to pass without goals. Every day is an invitation to squander yet another 24 hours until it too will bite the dust. If the boredom gets to you, you find ways to escape and dull the void.

This is an empty time: time devoid of any theme. Time as it is on its own, without human initiative and creativity. Shapeless and formless. One set of 24 hours is indistinguishable from another set of 24 hours.

Productive Time

Comes the Midrash and says, “When G-d chose His world, He established ‘heads of months’ and ‘heads of years.’” For the world to become a chosen place, a desirable habitat, a place worth living in, a place that G-d not only created but chose, we must grant the endless flow of time the dignity of purpose.

Every day ought to have a productive objective, every month—a meaningful goal, every year—a dynamic rhythm. The world G-d chose and desired was one in which humanity learns to confer meaning on time, to utilize it for constructive and beneficial endeavors. A meaningful life is a life in which every day is filled with meaningful choices and experiences, utilized to promote goodness, righteousness, and justice.

This is what it means to choose your world and choose your life, to appreciate that G-d chose this world. There is meaning and purpose in each moment. You can view life as random and

valueless, or you can see life as a gift, and view time as priceless, something I ought to cultivate in the fullest way. I choose to invest all my energy, creativity, and passion into each moment; and for me, each day is an invitation to deeper growth and awareness.

So “When G-d chose His world, He established ‘heads of months’ and ‘heads of years.’” For time to be utilized purposefully, every month must have a “head,” which gives the month its tone and direction. Every year must have a “head,” Rosh Hashanah, the time to put into focus the year that passed and the year ahead. For time to be used productively, it must be delineated. I must take note of sunrise and sunset, of a new month and a new year. Each presents me with a specific energy, calling, and opportunity.

Redemptive Time

You can live a productive life, mark your days with worthy objectives. Your life has rhythm. You have a morning, a night, a lunch break, a weekend, and a vacation.

But you are still confined within the realm of a mortal, finite and frail universe. As one wise man said, Men talk of killing time, while time quietly kills them. Or: Time is a storm in which we are all lost; time is free, but it’s priceless; you can’t own it, but you can use it. You can’t keep it, but you can spend it. Once you’ve lost it you can never get it back.

Within the restricted structure of our bodies, life span, and circumstances, we can use our time productively. Yet, we can’t free ourselves from the prison of mortality. Even when I work hard and use my time well, it is still cruel to me. It ages me. At any moment something can happen which will shake up and destroy my entire structure and rhythm.

Here is where the Midrash opens us up to another dimension of time, and this is where the Jewish story is introduced into history. “When G-d chose Jacob and his children He established the head of the month of Redemption.” G-d gave us the ability to liberate and redeem ourselves from the natural, mortal, and finite reality. He allowed us to align our posture with Divine infinity; not just to be productive with our time, but to confer upon each moment transcendence, to grant it the resonance of eternity, to liberate it and ourselves from the shackles of mortality.

You can be productive with your time. You can use it to shovel the snow, mow the lawn, fix the garage, read a good book, shop in Costco, enhance your computer speed, sell a building, cook a gourmet meal, and help society. This is worthwhile. But you are capable of more: You can make each moment Divine, elevating it to the realm of the sacred, where each moment, hour, day, week, month, and year become infused with G-dliness and are thus transformed into eternity. You can allow your time to become a conduit for the timeless.

“When G-d chose Jacob and his children He established the head of the month of Redemption.” This is the month of Nissan, the month when we were set free of Egyptian bondage

and were empowered to free ourselves from every form of bondage. Torah and Mitzvos make our time not only productive but Divine.

When you align your time rhythm with the Divine, realizing that every moment of time is an opportunity to connect with the infinite light vibrating through your body and the cosmos; when you use your time to study G-d's Torah, to connect to G-d, to perform a mitzvah, and to live in the Divine consciousness of oneness, your time is not only productive, but it is redemptive, uninhibited by the shackles of nature finitude. You redeem and transform your time—by aligning it with the divine blueprint for life.

The Choice

When the sun rises, and I declare “Shema Yisroel” to align my posture with Divine oneness—the moment of sunrise is now etched in eternity. When the sun of Friday is about to set and I kindle the Shabbos lights, it is a moment transformed into transcendent peacefulness. When I take a moment to do a favor for another person, for tuning into the love of the universe, for studying Torah or praying, I elevate the moment into transcendence.

In the words of the Tanya (ch. 25), “In the higher reality, this union (between the soul and G-d when we perform a mitzvah) is eternal, for G-d and His will transcend time... Only here below is the union within the limits of time.”

Each of us can choose in which “time zone” we will live. Do I live in a “depressing time,” letting my days and nights pass without meaning? Do I elevate my days into worthwhile experiences? Or, in my ultimate calling, do I turn each day into a redemptive experience, into a conduit for infinity?

How We Study Science and Physics

The Rebbe said one more thing to these girls about their academic studies. Some of us study the sciences and see them merely as interesting data, raw facts. However, much of humanity has come to appreciate that when we study biology, physics, history, or math it must be with a productive and meaningful purpose—to make the world a better place, to enhance life on our planet, and to promote justice and compassion.

Yet, our ultimate calling is to see all of our studies, all branches of wisdom, as an instrument to transform our world and our lives into an abode for the Divine infinite reality, to infuse all aspects of our lives with true and timeless meaning, with everlasting love and holiness, by revealing that ultimately, we are all one, and everything is part of that oneness.

[1] Shemos Rabba 15:11. [2] The talk is published in Likutei Sichos vol. 4 p. 1263-1267. (The Rebbe bases his explanation on Or Hatorah Parshas Bo p. 264. This Sichah is an extraordinary example of how to “translate” a maamar into relevant language. The maamar in Or Hatorah is abstract and the Rebbe applied it in the most practical and relevant way.)

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Parshas Bo

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Z'ev Ben Zion, William Freiman.

The Future Begins Now

That you may tell in the ears of your son, and of your grandson, how I toyed with the Egyptians, and my signs which I have done among them; that you may know that I am Hashem [...] (10:2).

The Torah informs us that one of the purposes of the makkos was to provide us with a tool to explain to our children the greatness of Hashem. This, of course, is the source of the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, relating the events that unfolded in Egypt.

However, the construct of the verse is a little odd; the verse ends with the words “that you may know that I am Hashem.”

As the purpose of describing what occurred in Egypt is to relate the greatness of Hashem, would it not seem imperative for the narrator of the story to first know the greatness of Hashem before he tells it over to his children? Why is it only AFTER relating the story that one becomes sensitized to the greatness of Hashem?

The Torah is revealing to us a remarkable truism of life.

Obviously, one must know the facts of the story before giving them over, but the lesson of the story, and what we learn to do as a result of it, is somewhat fluid. There are many people in possession of facts who make contrary life choices. Whether it's about quitting smoking, losing weight, or leaving an abusive relationship, people often choose one more cigarette, one more donut, and one more day; knowing full well that the decision is incorrect.

We live in a culture that is often preoccupied with “yichus” — one's lineage, as in parents and grandparents. However, most fail to recognize that the truly defining element of one's relationship with Hashem is the yichus of our children and grandchildren. This is the only real yichus that we should be preoccupied with. Why? Because nearly everyone will follow the path their children and grandchildren have chosen — when it comes to choosing between family and religion most people choose family. In other words, if our kids become more religious we make decisions to accommodate them and if, chalilah, they choose otherwise we make decisions to accommodate that choice as well, even if it means compromising our own former value system.

The possuk is teaching us that only AFTER teaching the greatness of Hashem to your children will you “know that I am

Hashem.” Remarkably, your relationship with Hashem depends on how well you have taught your children because that will likely define where you end up as well.

Who is a Jew?

[...] at midnight Hashem struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon (12:29). Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by why the firstborn sons of the captives were killed. After all, they weren’t even citizens of Egypt and had nothing to do with the enslavement of the Jews. Rashi therefore explains it was either because they were rejoicing at how the Jews were being treated (and would have participated had they been given an opportunity — much like the Nazi soldiers who claimed “to only be following orders” but in every picture they are laughing and jeering while terrorizing and abusing the German and Polish Jews) — or so that the captives couldn’t claim it was “their” God who was bringing Makkos Bechoros upon the Egyptians. In other words, according to Rashi, had it not been for those two reasons the children of the captives would not have died. This is difficult to understand, especially since Moshe instructed the Jews to put the blood of the Korban Pesach on the door posts of their homes so that they would be protected and not affected by the tenth plague. This means that the first born sons of the Jews would have died unless there was blood on the door posts. How is it possible that Jews would be more susceptible to the plague than the children of the captives in the dungeons?

There seems to be only one possible explanation: there was no decree of death from the plague on foreigners — Makkos Bechoros was only a decree on the Egyptians. That is why the children of the captives would have been excluded. But the Jews faced an existential quandary of self-definition. Are we Egyptian Jews or Jewish Egyptians?

After a year in which the Jews were relieved of their enslavement (slavery ended once the plagues began) and had started to accumulate wealth (because they weren’t affected by the plagues they had economic opportunities; they sold water during the plague of blood, etc.) many Jews began to feel like privileged Egyptian citizens. In fact, up to 80% of the Jews died during the plague of darkness (see Rashi 13:18), seemingly because they wouldn’t have left Egypt even if given the opportunity to do so (quite alarmingly, in today’s day and age the percentage of Jews who would choose to stay in America given similar circumstances might even be higher). The tenth plague came to differentiate between the Jews and the Egyptians. Those Jews who felt they were Egyptian citizens first were judged as Egyptians. Moshe gave the people the sign on how to define themselves: If you’re an Egyptian Jew put the blood of the Korban Pesach on the doorpost; if you’re merely a Jewish Egyptian then you will meet the same fate as the Egyptians.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Parshas Bo - Pride and Prejudice

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The Master of the Universe does not say “please” often. He commands. Yet this week, in issuing one of the final charges to Moshe during the final days in Egypt he does not command Moshe to do his bidding — He beseeches him. In Exodus 11:2 Hashem asks Moshe to, “please speak in the ears of the people (of Israel): let each man ask his fellow (Egyptian) man and each woman ask her fellow (Egyptian) woman for gold and silver utensils.”

The Talmud in Tractate Brachos explains the unusual terminology — “please.” Hashem was concerned. He promised Abraham that his children would be enslaved in a foreign land and leave with great wealth. Yet so far only the first half of the promise was fulfilled. Hashem did not want the righteous one (Abraham) to say, “Enslavement you fulfilled, but you did not fulfill the promise of wealth.” Therefore, though out of character, Hashem implores Moshe “please speak in the ears of the nation that they ask the Egyptians for gold and silver.”

The questions are obvious. First, Hashem must keep His commitment because of His own promise, regardless of Abraham’s impending complaints. Second, why must G-d enrich his people by telling them to ask the Egyptians for their due? Couldn’t He have showered them with riches from the heavens as He gave them Manna?

Rav Shmuel Shtrashan of Vilna* (1819-1885) was a wealthy banker as well as a renowned Torah scholar. In addition to his commerce, he maintained a free-loan society to provide interest-free loans to the needy. One time he granted a one-year loan of 300 rubles to Reb Zalman the tailor and carefully recorded it in his ledger. One year later, to the date, with 300 rubles in an envelope, Reb Zalman knocked on the door of Rav Shmuel’s study. The Rav was in the midst of deep Talmudic contemplation and hardly interrupted his studies while tucking the money away in one of the volumes he had been using.

A few weeks later, while reviewing his ledgers, Rav Shmuel noticed that Reb Zalman’s loan was overdue. He summoned him to his office to inquire about the payment. Of course, Reb Zalman was astonished. He had paid the loan in full on the day it was due! The Rav could not recall payment and insisted that they go together to Beis Din (Rabbinical Court).

Word in town spread rapidly, and people began to shun Reb Zalman. His business declined, and his children and wife were affronted by their peers. The only recourse the Bais Din had was to have Reb Zalman swear that he had repaid the loan. Rav Shmuel did not want to allow a Jew to swear falsely on his account and decided to forego the procedure by annulling the loan. This latest event brought even more scorn to the tailor,

and eventually he felt forced to leave Vilna and establish himself elsewhere.

A year later, Rav Shmuel was analyzing a section of the Talmud and opened a volume he had used sometime in the past. He could not believe his eyes when he saw a thick envelope with Reb Zalman's return address, containing 300 rubles. Quickly, he ran to find the hapless tailor who had been so besmirched. After unsuccessfully searching Vilna, he found that the tailor had moved. Rabbi Shtrashan traveled to Reb Zalman to beg forgiveness. The tailor, a broken man, explained that there was no way that anyone would believe the true story. They would just say that the pious scholar had shown mercy on the unscrupulous tailor. Finally, they decided that the only way to truly atone and give back the tailor his reputation was for the scholar to take Reb Zalman's son as his son-in-law. The shocked town of Vilna rejoiced at the divine union that helped re-establish a reputation.

Hashem understood that after 210 years of hard labor there was hardly a way to give the Jews true wealth. Showering them with miraculous gifts and treasures would in no way compensate for years of degradation. Abraham would not find that reward acceptable. The only way for a slave to gain true wealth is to discard his subservient mentality, knock on his master's door, and proclaim, "I want and deserve your gold and silver!" The Egyptians complied by showering their former captives with an abundance of wealth. The Jews walked out of Egypt with more than just gold. They left with the pride and power to demand what they deserved. They received one of the most important gifts the Jews would treasure throughout their sojourn in exile — their pride. Even Abraham was happy.

*This version of the story was adapted from "The Magid Speaks" by Rabbi Paysach Krohn c1987 Mesorah Publications *Good Shabbos!*

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Parshat Bo
The Day After Gaza

"And this is how you will eat it..." (12:11)

It seems to me that there is no natural solution to this current military clash in Israel's war of self-defense. One side says they will not settle for a state unless it's from the river to the sea. And Israel isn't going to allow itself to be given a set of

water wings and happily paddle out into the Med with Tel Aviv fading into the distance.

This is a war of the clash of ideals. From the messianic ideals of the chalutzim, the Jewish settlers on the so-called West Bank in Judea and Samaria, to the ideals of the Muslim Brotherhood and its scions, Hamas and Hezbollah, who believe in the coming of the final Caliph and the entire world subject to Sharia law.

As a believing Jew, it's clear to me that the only solution to this situation will be the coming of the Mashiach, the Messiah, who we daily hope and wait for. And never in the last seventy years has it been easier to expect his imminent arrival.

"And this is how you will eat it."

Hashem instructed the Jewish People to eat the Korban Pesach, the Pesach offering, with their 'loins girded,' the belts tightened, and ready to go out on the road to exile.

However, Moshe refused Pharaoh's pleas for them to leave at night and they didn't leave till the following morning, so why was it necessary to dress in this manner?

We are taught that the Jewish People were not worthy of a miraculous redemption. They were hovering above the lowest level of spiritual corruption in Egypt, but had they not been redeemed at that moment, they would have been consumed by Egypt's contamination.

Their imminent demise was brought home to them by the manner in which they were to eat the offering, to remind them that they were only being redeemed by an extraordinary act of Hashem's mercy.

In Nusach Sefard, we say in the Kedusha of Mussaf on Shabbat Morning: "Behold, I have redeemed you at the end as at the beginning to be to you as a G-d."

Right now, do we, the Jewish People, deserve a miraculous rescue from the fury of our enemies? Nobody knows. But we can be sure that just like at the beginning in Egypt, when Hashem redeemed us when we were not worthy, He, in His infinite Mercy, will redeem us again. May it be speedily, in our days!

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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

In this week's parsha the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt reaches one of its most climactic moments. Pharaoh finally succumbs to the pressures of the plagues and to the demands of Moshe and of the God of Israel. The last three plagues that are

discussed in detail in this week's parsha are those of the locusts, darkness and the slaying of the firstborn.

These plagues represent not only physical damages inflicted on the Egyptians but also, just as importantly, different psychological pressures that were exerted on Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

The plague of locusts destroyed the Egyptian economy, or whatever was left of it after the previous seven plagues.

Economic disaster always has far-reaching consequences.

Sometimes those results can be very positive, such as the recovery of the United States from the Great Depression.

Sometimes they are very negative, as the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s could not have occurred if it were not for the economic crisis that enveloped the Weimar Republic.

Here the economic crisis engendered by the plague of locusts brings Egypt to its knees, so that it is only the unreasoning stubbornness of Pharaoh that keeps the drama going. The next plague of darkness is one that affects the individual. Cooped up in one's home, unable to move about, blinded by darkness unmatched in human experience, the individual Egyptian is forced to come to terms with his or her participation in the enslavement of the Jewish people.

For many people, being alone with one's self is itself a type of plague. It causes one to realize one's mortality and to reassess one's behavior in life. This is not always a pleasant experience. Most of the time it is a very wrenching and painful one.

The final plague of the death of the firstborn Egyptians, aside from the personal pain and tragedy involved, spoke to the future of Egyptian society. Without children no society can endure - and especially children such as the firstborn, who are always meant to replace and carry on the work of their elders and previous generations. We all want to live in eternity and since we cannot do so physically we at least wish it to happen spiritually, emotionally and psychologically.

The plague that destroyed the Egyptian firstborn destroyed the hopes of eternity that were so central to Egyptian society. The tombs of the leaders of Egypt were always equipped with food and material goods to help these dead survive to the future. Even though this was a primitive expression of the hope for eternity it nevertheless powerfully represents to us the Egyptian mindset regarding such eternity.

By destroying the firstborn Egyptians, the Lord sounded the death knell for all of Egyptian society for the foreseeable future. It was this psychological pressure - which is one of the interpretations of the phrase that there was no house in Egypt that did not suffer from this terrible plague - that forced Pharaoh and his people to come to terms with their unjust enslavement of Israel and to finally succumb to the demands of Moshe and the God of Israel.

We should remember that all of these psychological pressures, even though they do not appear in our society as physical

plagues, are still present and influential. The trauma of life is never ending.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Berel Wein