

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

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The Lord, so to speak, bemoans to Moshe the lack of faith exhibited by him and the Jewish people during the moments of crisis in their encounter with Pharaoh and their Egyptian taskmasters. God points out that the previous generations of the founders of the Jewish people never wavered in their faith and belief that God's covenant would be fulfilled, no matter how harsh the circumstances of their lives were.

And now when the process of redemption from Egyptian slavery is already underway, whenever there is a hitch or a delay or an apparent reversal, the complaint immediately arises against God and against Moshe as well. Now the Torah itself clearly makes allowances for this behavior due to the bone-crushing physical work imposed on the Jewish slaves by their Egyptian taskmasters.

It is difficult to be optimistic when one's back is being whipped. Nevertheless, the Lord's reproof of Moshe and of Israel is recorded for us in strong terms in the opening verses of this week's Torah reading. God, so to speak, is pointing out to Moshe the existence of a generational disconnect. The previous generations were strong in belief and faith and possessed patience and fortitude in the face of all difficulties.

Moshe's generation, in fact many Jewish generations throughout history, demand action and that action must be immediate. Their faith is conditioned upon seeing and experiencing immediate results and the changed society and world that they desire. Otherwise they are prepared to abandon ship. That is what the prophet means when he chides Israel by saying that "your goodness and faith resemble the clouds of the morning that soon burn off when the sun rises."

Faith, to be effective, has to be long-lasting. Since mortality limits our vision and naturally makes us impatient, it is often difficult for us to see the big picture and witness the unfolding of a long-range historical process. Our generation, unlike those of our predecessors – even our immediate predecessors – has rightly been dubbed the "now generation." Instant gratification is not only demanded but is expected and when it does not happen our faith is sorely tested, if not even diminished.

Patience and faith is the essence of God's message to Moshe. Part of Moshe's leadership task will now be to instill this sense of patience and long lasting faith within the psyche and soul of the Jewish people. This daunting task will take forty years of constant challenges and withering experiences before it will see results and accomplishments. At the end of the forty year period - forty years after the Exodus from Egypt - Moshe will proclaim that the Jewish people have finally attained an

understanding heart and an appreciation of the historical journey upon which the Lord has sent them.

Both patience and faith are difficult traits to acquire and they remain very fragile even after they have been acquired. But in all areas of human life – marriage, children, professional occupations, business and commerce, government and politics, diplomacy and conflict – patience and faith are the necessary tools to achieve success. That is the message that God communicates to Moshe and to Israel in all of its generations and circumstances in this week's parsha.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Birth of History VAERA Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The parsha of Vaera begins with some fateful words. It would not be too much to say that they changed the course of history, because they changed the way people thought about history. In fact, they gave birth to the very idea of history. Listen to the words:

God said to Moses, "I am Hashem. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as E-l Shaddai, but by My name 'Hashem' I did not make Myself fully known to them.

Ex. 6:1-2

What exactly does this mean? As Rashi points out, it does not mean that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah did not know God by the name Hashem. To the contrary, God's first words to Abraham, "Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house," were said using the name Hashem.

It even says, just a few verses later (Gen. 12:7), Vayera Hashem el Avram: "Hashem appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So God had appeared to Avram as Hashem. And in the very next verse it says that Avram built an altar and "He called on the name of Hashem" (Gen. 12:8). So Avram himself knew the name and had used it.

Yet it is clear from what God says to Moses that something new is about to happen, a Divine revelation of a kind that had never happened before, something that no one, not even the people closest to God, has yet seen. What was it?

The answer is that through Bereishit, God is the God of Creation, the God of nature, the aspect of God we call, with different nuances but the same overall sense, Elokim, or E-l Shaddai, or even Koneh shamayim va'arets, Creator of heaven and earth.

Now, in a sense, that aspect of God was known to everyone in the ancient world. It's just that they did not see nature as the work of one God but of many: the god of the sun, the god of the rain, the goddesses of the sea and the earth, the

vast pantheon of forces responsible for harvests, fertility, storms, droughts, and so on.

There were profound differences between the gods of polytheism and myth and the one God of Abraham, but they operated, as it were, in the same territory, the same ballpark.

The aspect of God that appears in the days of Moses and the Israelites is radically different, and it's only because we are so used to the story that we find it hard to see how radical it was.

For the first time in history God was about to get involved in history, not through natural disasters like the Flood, but by direct interaction with the people who shape history. God was about to appear as the force that shapes the destiny of nations. He was about to do something no one had ever heard of before: bring an entire nation from slavery and servitude, persuade them to follow Him into the desert, and eventually to the Promised Land, and there build a new kind of society, based not on power but on justice, welfare, respect for the dignity of the human person and on collective responsibility for the rule of law.

God was about to initiate a new kind of drama and a new concept of time. According to many of the world's greatest historians, Arnaldo Momigliano, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, J. H. Plumb, Eric Voegelin, and the anthropologist Mircea Eliade, this was the moment when history was born.

Until then, the basic human drama was struggling to maintain order against the ever-present threats of chaos, whether through natural disasters, foreign conquest, or internal power struggles. Success meant maintaining the status quo. In fact, religion in the ancient world was intensely conservative. It was about teaching people the inevitability of the status quo. Time was an arena in which nothing fundamentally changed.

And now God appears to Moses and tells him that something utterly new is about to occur, something the patriarchs knew about in theory but had never lived to see in practise. A new nation. A new kind of faith. A new kind of political order. A new type of society. God was about to enter history and set the West on a trajectory that no human beings had ever contemplated before.

Time was no longer going simply to be what Plato beautifully described as the moving image of eternity. It was going to become the stage on which God and humanity would journey together toward the day when all human beings – regardless of class, colour, creed, or culture – would achieve their full dignity as the image and likeness of God. Religion was about to become not a conservative force but an evolutionary and even revolutionary one.

Think about this: Long before the West, the Chinese had invented ink, paper, printing, porcelain manufacture, the compass, gunpowder, and many other technologies. But they failed to develop a scientific revolution, an industrial revolution, a market economy, and a free society. Why did they get so far and then stop? The historian Christopher

Dawson argued that it was the religion of the West that made the difference. Alone among the civilisations of the world, Europe “has been continually shaken and transformed by an energy of spiritual unrest.” He attributed this to the fact that “its religious ideal has not been the worship of timeless and changeless perfection but a spirit that strives to incorporate itself in humanity and to change the world.”[1]

To change the world. That is the key phrase. The idea that – together with God – we can change the world, that we can make history, not just be made by it, this idea was born when God told Moses that he and his contemporaries were about to see an aspect of God no one had ever seen before.

I still find that a spine-tingling moment when, each year, we read Vaera and recall the moment history was born, the moment God entered history and taught us for all time that slavery, oppression, injustice, are not written into the fabric of the cosmos, engraved into the human condition. Things can be different because we can be different, because God has shown us how.

[1] Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, New York: Doubleday, 1991, p. 15.

The Importance of Having Children after the Terrible Massacre -- Revivim Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

As after the Holocaust, also after the massacre, we must pray that we understand our role in a better world, and that families will bring many children into the world * Jewish law arbiters debated whether there is an obligation to immerse electric appliances that may get damaged if made wet, and one should act leniently, and use them even without immersion * A Jew is forbidden to make a wax figure in human form, but if a non-Jew made it for him, he is permitted to benefit from it, and even keep it in his home.

The Torah tells us that even after the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites and embittered their lives with hard labor, mortar and bricks and with crushing work, instead of the suffering leading to despair and reduced births, the Israelites continued to be fruitful and multiply – “But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out.” When the Egyptians saw that despite the servitude the Hebrews continued multiplying, they intensified the labor from dawn until dusk, so that they would be forced to sleep in the fields and not be able to have marital relations, and family life. The Egyptians’ goal was twofold: to exploit their labor, and in the process, make them despair, and annihilate them.

But the Torah teaches that when the foundation of life is firm, suffering – despite all the pain and distress – does not break life, but ultimately, strengthens it. When the power of life is weak, the reaction is to withdraw from life, and diminish. But when the power of life is strong, and breeds faith that good will defeat evil, the reaction is to be fruitful and multiply.

The Promise to Jacob Our Forefather

Jacob our forefather was also very worried before going down to Egypt that perhaps his offspring would be lost among the nations, whether through destruction, or through assimilation. Therefore, God appeared to him, as the Torah says:

“And God said to Israel in a vision by night...Do not fear going down to Egypt, for I Myself will make you a great nation there! I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself, will also bring you back” (Genesis 46:2-4).

And thus, we also learned the purpose of the Egyptian exile, from which we left with great wealth, as the family of seventy souls became a great nation with material possessions, the fruits of their labor.

The Maharal of Prague explained (Gevurot Hashem, Chapter 3) that the number of 600,000 men of military age, is the basic number for the existence of a nation. Therefore, only after reaching this number, did God take Israel out of Egypt, and give them the Torah.

Today As Well

Today too, we pray that out of the suffering and mourning for all the murdered settlers and holy soldiers who sacrificed themselves to protect the Nation and Land – we will be strengthened in faith, and understand our role better. The life forces within us will prevail – singles will marry and more children will be born, thus continuing the heritage of the holy ones who sacrificed themselves for the strengthening of life.

Even today, despite the Holocaust, the State of Israel is the only scientifically and economically advanced country with a high birth rate – approximately three children per Jewish woman. In other developed countries, the birth rate is less than two children on average. The high number of children is not only because of the Haredi and religious population, but in all populations the birth rate is significantly higher compared to their counterparts in developed countries. In other words, even those called “secular” in Israel, are much more traditional than secular people in Western countries, and correspondingly, marry more, and give birth more.

Therefore, the hope that we will find comfort after the war through many children is a realistic hope, since family values and the commandment to be fruitful and multiply are honored among Jews, and on this basis, we can hope for added blessing. Just as it is said about wisdom, that one who is already wise can receive a blessing for more wisdom (Daniel 2:21), and one who is already mighty, can receive a blessing for more might. So too, a community that already looks favorably upon a family with children, can merit having more children.

Be Fruitful and Multiply

In her book “Yisrael – Eretz Ketana, Sippur Gadol” (‘Israel – Small Country, Big Story’), Sophie Shulman writes that Israel leads the world in fertility treatments. Of around six million people born from fertility treatments worldwide, 100,000 are Israelis. All this, is thanks to the special

attitude towards the commandment to be fruitful and multiply, which leads to enormous financial investment in helping women who have difficulty conceiving.

Israel is the only country in the world that funds fertility treatments for women up to age 45 as part of national health insurance, and even a woman who already has one child is entitled to treatment to give birth to a second child. Most supplemental insurances provided by health clinics also fund treatments for a third child. The next country after us in number of treatments per capita is Denmark, and there, public health insurance covers only three rounds of fertility treatment, for one child only, and for women up to age 40. In Israel, even after age 45, it is possible to get assistance for fertility treatments with an egg donation.

Incidentally, overseas it is rare for homosexual men to father children, whereas in Israel, due to the influence of faith and tradition, even homosexual men make great efforts and invest huge sums in order to have children.

Is There an Obligation to Immerse an Electric Kettle?

After discussing weighty matters, I will continue with particular questions I have been asked, which to some extent, also express optimism and faith.

Q: We bought an electric kettle that was manufactured overseas. Is there an obligation to immerse it in a mikveh, when immersion may damage it? Someone told us that to prevent damage, we need to wait three days after immersion until it dries out completely. But we are still worried that immersion may damage the kettle.

A: First, the mitzvah to immerse eating vessels that belonged to non-Jews is from the Torah (Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 31:1). Its purpose is to effect a kind of “conversion” on the vessel, to elevate it from a level of a vessel intended for mundane eating, accompanied by desires and human weaknesses, to a level of a vessel intended for preparing foods through which Jews can connect to the values of the Torah.

The poskim (Jewish law arbiters) debated whether electric appliances require immersion.

The Strict Opinion

Some poskim rule strictly, holding that electric appliances have the same law as all eating vessels, that if purchased from a non-Jew, they must be immersed in a mikveh (Minchat Yitzchak 2:82; Shevet Halevi 2:57, 3; Mishnah Halachot 9:162; Risha responsa 1:3).

If there is concern that the appliance may be damaged, and one does not rely on the advice to dry it out for several days, one can avoid immersion by giving the appliance as a gift to a non-Jew, and asking him to lend it back, with no set end-date. Since the appliance belongs to the non-Jew, and the Jew does not want to purchase it, it can be used indefinitely without immersion (see Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 31:10).

In the past, poskim who ruled strictly, suggested dismantling the appliance and reassembling it, so that it would be considered made by a Jew, and not require

immersion. Indeed, if the appliance can be fully dismantled such that it is no longer considered a vessel, it would not require immersion. But today, most appliances are molded and cannot be dismantled, so this suggestion is no longer practical. It should be noted that disconnecting the electric cord does not help, since it is external to the appliance.

The Lenient Opinion That Electric Appliances Do Not Require Immersion

On the other hand, some poskim say electric appliances are exempt from immersion, because they are operated by being plugged into a wall socket to receive electricity. There is a principle that anything attached to the ground is not considered a vessel and does not become impure, so it does not require immersion. Even if they are sometimes operated by batteries, we follow their primary use which is while plugged in. Furthermore, electric appliances are considered machines. For example, an electric kettle is a machine for heating water, and a toaster is a machine for toasting bread. The mitzvah is to immerse eating vessels, not machines (Chelkat Yaakov YD 61:43; Beit Avi 1:104; Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul; Tefila L'Moshe 5:25; Sicha Nachum 49:5; Rav Ganzel, Techumin 27).

It can also be argued that the Torah would not command immersing an appliance that may be damaged by water, since the purpose of the mitzvah is to render the vessel fit for a Jew to use, not to destroy it.

Therefore, in practice, it appears electric appliances do not require immersion.

The Wax Museum

Q: Is it permitted to make the wax figures in a wax museum? And is it permitted to visit a wax museum?

A: It is forbidden for a Jew to make the figures in a wax museum, since it is forbidden for a Jew to make a full statue of a person. But purchasing it from a non-Jew is permitted, since the prohibition against keeping a statue in one's home applies only when there is concern it may be worshipped.

If a Jew made the figures, some poskim say one should be stringent and not visit the museum, so as not to support transgressors, or benefit from their deeds (Avnei Yeshpeh 1:151). Others permit visiting, since once made, there is no prohibition to keep them (Asei Lecha Rav, vol. 5, short responsa 72). Today, in practice, the figures are made by non-Jews, overseas.

However, according to most Rishonim (early authorities), it is forbidden for a Jew to request non-Jews to make human figures for him, since in their opinion, the rabbinic prohibition of shvut (asking a non-Jew to perform forbidden labor), applies to all Torah prohibitions, just as on Shabbat (see Peninei Halakha: Shevi'it 5:9). But if a Jew transgressed and requested this of a non-Jew, he is permitted to benefit from what the non-Jew made, since some Rishonim hold there is no prohibition of shvut in other prohibited matters, and therefore, there was no prohibition in the non-Jew's actions.

“Let Them All be Killed, Rather than Hand over a Single Person”

Q: In light of the war and discussions about the self-sacrifice required from the public to save an individual, why does Jewish law rule that if a group of people are threatened to hand over one of their number to be killed – they should all be killed, and not hand over a single person to be killed (Tosefta Terumot 7:23)? Wouldn't it be better if one were killed, and not many?

Similarly, regarding incest, why did our Sages say: “Women whom non-Jews told: ‘Give us one of you, and we will defile her (rape her), and if not, we will defile all of you’ – they should all be defiled, rather than hand over to them one soul from Israel” (Terumot 8:12)?

A: The prohibition of murder is an absolute prohibition that may never be violated, therefore, even to save many, it is forbidden to transgress the prohibition against murder. However, if one of them volunteers to sacrifice himself in order to save his fellows – he is called kadosh (holy).

They Demanded Women to Hand One of Them Over for Rape

The same applies to the prohibition against incest, which is like bloodshed, and “one life may not be pushed aside to save another.” In other words, one may not be sacrificed to save others. Even when they are all married, and one is single, the single woman should not be handed over (Knesset HaGedolah, Hagaot Beit Yosef 157:28). A woman who sinned and committed adultery multiple times should also not be handed over, because rape would affect her more. Additionally, perhaps she reconsidered and repented, in which case the harm to her would be much severer (Rashba, Kesef Mishneh Yesodei HaTorah 5:5).

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

The 135th yearzeit of Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch, a man to whom each of us owes a personal debt of gratitude, is on the 27th of Teiveis.

Chumash and the Fall of the Ghetto-By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

From the time of the French Revolution and continuing into the nineteenth century, the ghetto walls that had kept the Jews isolated from the world around them gradually fell all over central Europe. A result of this was that, no longer required to be part of their insular and observant Jewish communities, many Jews began to assimilate into the world environment now open to them and to throw away their Judaism.

In Eastern Europe, although the Jews were still kept isolated from full advancement into secular society, different forces, most notably the *haskalah*, accomplished similar purposes of distancing many Jews from the observance of the Torah. Among the challenges posed by some of the more intellectual who had abandoned Judaism, was their misunderstanding that the Torah as presented by Chazal bore differences from that of the written Torah.

At this time, several new and highly original commentaries on Chumash appear. Among these are Hakesav Vehakabalah, by Rav Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, the commentaries[i] of the Malbim to Tanach, the commentary of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, and the Ha'ameik Davar, the commentary of Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, known by his acronym as the Netziv. All four of these commentaries show the impact of the tumultuous times in which they were written, although there are major differences between their treatments of Chumash.

Hakesav Vehakabalah

Rav Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, born in 1785, a disciple of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, became the rav of the city of Koenigsberg, then in Prussia, in 1831 and remained in that position until his passing 34 years later. Koenigsberg was within Germany but far to the east, and therefore Rav Mecklenburg saw both the problems of assimilation and reform that were happening in Germany and those of the haskalah and other non-religious movements of Eastern Europe. Hakesav Vehakabalah was intended as a response to attacks on Chazal's understanding of Torah. In his introduction, he discusses the issues concerning the writing down of Torah shebe'al peh, quoting both the midrashim and the explanations of the commentaries on this question. The explanations of Hakesav Vehakabalah are based on careful analysis of the root meanings and grammar of the words of the Chumash, using them to provide a clear interpretation of the pesukim, at times providing a Yiddish translation for a term. Although frequently he is highly original in his approach, he also often mentions the different approaches of the earlier commentaries and chooses the one that he demonstrates is the most accurate.

The first edition of Hakesav Vehakabalah was published in 1839. In his lifetime, three more editions were published, each including additional commentary or translation. He continued to add more to the work, and a further edition, including the author's additional notations, was published posthumously in 1880.

The Malbim

Rav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel, who became known by his acronym, Malbim, served as the rav of many different communities in Eastern Europe. A brilliant talmid chacham, a warrior against the haskalah, and a prolific author, he is remembered to posterity primarily because of his commentaries on Tanach and the essays that accompany those commentaries.[ii] His commentary on Yeshayah, which is the first volume that he produced, includes an introduction in which he elucidates the principles that form the basis for his commentary on most of Tanach. These include that there are never two terms in Tanach Hebrew that mean the exact same thing, and that there are no repeated phrases or clauses. Each word in Tanach was chosen meticulously to provide a very specific nuance of meaning and that one must delve into the depth of this meaning. His works on Vayikra and Devorim are

original commentaries to the midrash halacha on these seforim, in which he demonstrates how Chazal proved the correct halachic interpretation of each verse.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, born in 1808 in Hamburg, Germany, held rabbinic positions in Oldenberg and Emden, Germany, prior to becoming the Chief Rabbi of Moravia. Thereafter, he returned to Germany and established a Torah-committed community in Frankfurt. Towards the end of his life, after he had built a strong Torah community, he produced his commentaries to the Chumash, Tehillim and the Siddur. As he writes in his introduction, his commentary on Chumash was based on lectures that he had given on the subject, and he used the notes of attendees to those shiurim as the basis for his written commentary.

The Netziv

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin was born in the village of Mir, then in czarist Russia, in 1817. At the age of 16 he married the daughter of Rav Yitzchak of Volozhin, the son and successor of the founder and Rosh Yeshivah of the famed yeshivah in that city, Rav Chayim of Volozhin, the esteemed disciple of the Vilna Gaon. From that time until his very last months, the Netziv was associated with the yeshivah of Volozhin, where he eventually became Rosh Yeshivah, a position he held for almost forty years until the yeshivah was closed in 1892, because of the insistence of the czarist government that it secularize its curriculum. The Netziv authored many works, including a commentary on the She'iltos of Rav Achai Gaon, commentaries to all the halachic midrashim, a commentary on Shir Hashirim, responsa, and his commentary to the Chumash, called Ha'ameik Davar.

Of the four authors we are discussing, the Netziv is unique in that his primary role was that of a rosh yeshivah, whereas the other three were communal rabbonim. All four of these gedolim were renowned poskim. But the Netziv was unusual as a rosh yeshivah in that he not only taught a daily Gemara shiur in which he went through the entire Shas (not only the so-called "yeshivish mesechtos"), but he also taught a daily class in the week's parshah. His discussion and his commentary were based on his personal analysis of the pesukim or from ideas that he heard orally from talmidei chachamim such as his father-in-law, Rav Yitzchak of Volozhin.

The differences among these commentaries

Notwithstanding the similarities of purpose among these commentaries, each reflects its author's unique contributions to Torah; thus, there are major differences among them. For example, the Malbim's commentaries to the book of Vayikra and to most of Devorim are not devoted to explaining the pesukim, but to demonstrating how the halachic droshah of the Torah shebe'al peh is based on a particular way of understanding the Torah shebiksav. He developed an extensive system that provides

the underpinning of all of the halachic derivations. In his introduction to Vayikra, he writes that he had initially intended to write his commentary explaining this derivative approach to every drosah of Chazal. However, he discovered very early in the writing of his commentary that the length of such a work would become unrealistic. Instead, he wrote a separate essay that explains the principles with which Chazal operated, and in his commentary he referred to the appropriate part of this essay when necessary.

Rav Hirsch also maintained that proper study of Torah shebiksav will leave you with the conclusions of Torah shebe'al peh. He noted that the Torah shebe'al peh was actually taught to the Jews first.[iii] Moshe received all the laws of Torah shebe'al peh at Har Sinai and taught them to the Jewish people gradually. The completed Torah shebiksav was not received by the Jews until the very end of Moshe's life, immediately prior to the Jews entering Eretz Yisroel, or forty years after they had received the Torah shebe'al peh. This explains numerous passages in the Torah, including the commandment to slaughter animals ka'asher tzivisicha "as you were instructed," meaning the sets of regulations that had been transmitted to Moshe at Har Sinai and previously taught to the Bnei Yisroel.

Comparing Torah shebiksav to Torah shebe'al peh

Both Hakesav Vehakabalah and Malbim mention that a major purpose of their commentaries is to demonstrate that Torah shebiksav and Torah shebe'al peh are one. In the introduction to the first volume of commentary he wrote on Chumash, Vayikra, the Malbim mentions specifically the tragedy of the reform convention that took place in 1844 in Braunschweig (called Brunswick in English), a city in Germany about 40 miles southeast of Hanover. The Malbim writes that when he heard of what had happened at the reform convention, he decided that klal Yisroel required a new commentary on Tanach written according to the mesorah. He notes that among the points he will be demonstrating is that Torah shebiksav and Torah shebe'al peh are one.

Although Rav Hirsch's very brief introduction to his commentary does not emphasize this relationship between Torah shebiksav and Torah shebe'al peh, this foundation shows up literally hundreds of times in his commentary.[iv] Uniqueness of Ha'ameik Davar

Of the four authors we are discussing, the Netziv's commentary is actually quite original in a surprising way, which requires that we explain a bit of history concerning traditional Torah commentaries. Among the early classic commentaries on Chumash, the Ramban, Rashi and many others assume that any explanation of the written Torah must fit the conclusions of our Chazal and the Oral Torah. This approach accords well with the approaches of Hakesav Vehakabalah, Rav Hirsch and the Malbim.

However, among the rishonim this approach was not universally held. The Ibn Ezra, for example, often explains pesukim unlike the halachic conclusion. He certainly felt that the concept ein mikra yotzei midei peshuto,[v] no verse is interpreted without its most literal explanation, means that the Torah can be understood on many levels, and that the most basic understanding, pshat, does not necessarily require that it be consistent with the other levels. Many later authorities and commentaries criticize the Ibn Ezra for his approach.[vi] Yet, the Netziv also utilizes the same method, at times explaining a pasuk in a way that does not appear consistent with the halachic conclusions that we find in Chazal.[vii] Such an approach was anathema to Hakesav Vehakabalah, Rav Hirsch and the Malbim.

Uniqueness of Rav Hirsch's commentary

The most obvious difference between Rav Hirsch's commentary and those of the others is, of course, the language. Whereas the other commentaries are written in traditional rabbinic Hebrew, Rav Hirsch published his commentary on Chumash, and, indeed, all of his other works, in German. Using the vernacular to present the Torah was not an original approach of Rav Hirsch. Rav Sa'adiya Geon's commentaries to Chumash, as well as all his other writings, were written in Arabic, as were the Chovos Halevovos, the Kuzari, and many other writings of the early Sefardic rishonim. Similarly, the Rambam wrote all of his works, with the exception of the Mishneh Torah, in Arabic. However, using the vernacular as a vehicle for presenting Torah had fallen by the wayside in the hundreds of years since the era of the rishonim. With very few exceptions, Torah works were all published in Hebrew. As a young rabbi in Oldenberg, Rav Hirsch recognized the need to present the Torah in German. He certainly understood that he had a personal mission of providing Torah education to his generation, and to demonstrate that a proper understanding of Torah demonstrates its primacy over all of man's endeavors.

In Rav Hirsch's commentary there are instances when he wrote a comment in Hebrew. Invariably, these are the comments of a Torah scholar on a Talmudic discussion point that was not appropriate to the general audience for whom his work was intended. Yet, he was concerned that posterity should not lose the important halachic point he had realized. To accommodate this, he chose to write these points in scholarly, rabbinic Hebrew.

Aside from his use of German, there are many other ways in which Rav Hirsch's approach is different from the other commentaries that we are discussing. Rav Hirsch's commentary is not simply an interpretation of Chumash. He uses his commentary to demonstrate how the Torah should be used as the primary educational tool for man to grow as a human being. There is virtually not a comment of his on the Torah that is not explained as a moral lesson, what we call in our day a musar haskeil. It appears that Rav

Hirsch deliberately restricted his commentary to topics that provide us with a musar haskeil. There are many occasions where he did not comment upon questions about pshat in a verse where it would appear appropriate for him to have done so. Apparently, he refrained from providing commentary where the conclusion would not provide any lesson one can utilize for personal growth.

Thus, Rav Hirsch viewed his commentary as a means of showing how to use Chumash as a lesson guide in what we usually call musar and hashkafah. In this, his commentary is very different from the other three works we are discussing, all of which are devoted to providing a commentary on Chumash and not focused specifically on being works of ethical and moral development.

From a mussar perspective, Rav Hirsch's Torah commentary can provide a complete life-instruction manual on its own. We understand well why Rav Shraga Feivel Mendelowitz told his students at Yeshiva Torah Vadaas that it would be worth their investment of time to learn to read German just for the sake of being able to read the writings of Rav Hirsch. (At the time that Rav Shraga Feivel advised his students to do this, no translation existed of Rav Hirsch's Chumash commentary in any language, nor were most of his other writings available in Hebrew or English.)

Rav Hirsch called his Torah hashkafah by the term Torah im Derech Eretz, the details of which he developed at different places in his commentary.^[viii] Although the expression is often misunderstood and misinterpreted, Rav Hirsch used this term to mean that Torah and its observance is always the primary focus of a Jew's life, and that this can and must be done in all places, times and situations. Everything else that this world has to offer, including livelihood, education, culture, and social mores, must be subsumed within a Torah framework.

Reasons for mitzvos

One of Rav Hirsch's most innovative approaches is his explanations of the ta'amei hamitzvah. Of course, we all realize that a human being could never claim to understand why Hashem commanded that we perform a certain activity or prohibit a different one. Nevertheless, while performing the mitzvah, there are lessons that we can derive that may help us appreciate to a greater extent our role in fulfilling Hashem's mission for us on earth. The Sefer Hachinuch explains that the term ta'amei hamitzvah should be translated not as reason for a mitzvah, but as taste of a mitzvah. While observing or studying the laws of the mitzvos, an educational reason that we can utilize should assist the experience of the mitzvah.

The concept of deriving educational reasons for mitzvos certainly did not originate with by Rav Hirsch. In one place in his commentary,^[ix] Rav Hirsch quotes dozens of sources where Chazal discuss what lesson one can derive from the observance of the mitzvos, and we have several rishonim, most notably the Rambam in his Moreh

Nevuchim and the Sefer Hachinuch, who devote much time to this study. However, Rav Hirsch added several dimensions to the concept of ta'amei hamitzvah. One dimension is that Rav Hirsch's explanation of a mitzvah must always fit every detail of the halachos, the laws of the mitzvah. In this detail, his approaches vary from those suggested by the Rambam and the Sefer Hachinuch, whose reasons often do not fit all the details of the mitzvah.

Based on this approach, Rav Hirsch first develops and explains all the details of a mitzvah according to the halachic conclusion, and then weaves an explanation for the mitzvah that fits all those halachic details. At times, he must first take controversial positions regarding details of the laws of the mitzvah, something he is not afraid to do.

Frequently, Rav Hirsch presents approaches to ta'amei hamitzvos that none of the major mitzvah commentators suggest. For example, Rav Hirsch presents brilliant approaches to explain mitzvos such as arayos, keifel, arachin, and tumah and taharah, and why we disqualify blemished animals and blemished kohanim from the service of korbanos. In the case of tumah, he notes that the foundation of most religions is the fear of death, and this is when the priest assumes his greatest role. Quite the contrary, the kohen, the Torah's priest, is banned from involvement with the dead. This is to demonstrate that the Torah's goal is that we grow and develop throughout life – when we are in the heights of our best health. To emphasize this, we need to distance the kohen, whose role is to educate how to live as a Jew, from death.

Rav Hirsch uses the same concept to explain a different, seemingly baffling area of mitzvos. Why is a kohen who has a physical blemish or injury forbidden to serve in the Mishkan or the Beis Hamikdash? Similarly, why is an animal with a similar impairment prohibited as a korban? This emphasis on physical beauty or selectiveness seems to run counter to the Torah's idea of equality. Everyone is equally responsible to develop a relationship with Hashem through His Torah.

Rav Hirsch explains that religions in general become the home of those who are challenged by society and cannot find their place. The Torah needs to emphasize that everyone's goal is to grow and develop in his relationship with Hashem. The only way to convey this message fully is to demonstrate that the physically impaired cannot perform service in the holiest of places.

Rav Hirsch develops an extensive analysis of the reasons for korbanos in general, and the different korbanos in particular. Based on the nature of its species, its age and gender, each variety of animal is used to explain the message and concept of each type of korban.

Rav Hirsch explains beautifully why someone who is caught stealing is required to pay back double, keifel, whereas a robber is not. One who steals when no one is looking undermines a basic understanding that a society needs in order to function – that I can rely on a degree of

trust among my neighbors. Thus, his sin undermined not only the trust of the individual whose property was stolen but also that of society as a whole, thus requiring a double act of compensation.

Ta'amei hamikra

Rav Hirsch emphasized that his commentary is based on a careful understanding of the Chumash text. Read the verse very carefully and see what it teaches. Include in the study the ta'amei hamikra, what is colloquially called the trop, according to which we read the text and which includes rules how to break a pasuk into smaller units to understand it correctly. To Rav Hirsch, any interpretation of the verse must include a proper understanding of the ta'amei hamikra.

Grammar -- Dikduk and shorash

There are several other ways in which Rav Hirsch's commentary is different from other approaches to study Chumash. People often note his original use of dikduk, particularly his development of understanding Torah ideas based on the principle of shorashim that are phonetic cognates. This idea, used by Chazal and by rishonim,[x] is that different consonants that are articulated by using the same part of the mouth are related to one another.[xi] Thus, there is a relationship among the guttural consonants (א ה ע ח) that can be used to explain the meaning of related roots that use these or the labials (ב ו מ פ).[xii] Based on similar roots, Rav Hirsch develops a philosophic underpinning of the comparative roots, and then creates an associative meaning for each root. Often included within this system is a relationship pattern between similar consonants. For example, the tzadi often reflects a more intense version of other similar sounds, such as the sin. Thus, there is a conceptual relationship between יצר, which means to limit something for a specific purpose, and יסר, which educates, shapes and disciplines the spirit. In literally hundreds of applications of these ideas, Rav Hirsch demonstrates an entire world of educational themes, each of which teaches a Torah perspective on the world.

The shorash of a word can often explain to us not only why a specific term is used, but may sometimes provide educational and religious lessons. For example, when mentioning that Avraham Avinu moved his followers from Shechem to the mountain, the Torah uses an unusual word וַיַּעֲתֵק vayateik, which Rav Hirsch translates as He gave orders to move on.[xiii] Rav Hirsch there notes that this root is used in various places in Tanach for apparently different ideas, but whose common thread is that someone or something is moved unexpectedly or forcibly to a setting where it did not belong originally. Rav Hirsch thereby explains that Avraham realized that his followers needed to be isolated from the society around them for him to succeed in educating them, but he needed to overcome their resistance in doing so. Thus, from the proper study of the root of the word used, we gain an insight into Avraham's pedagogic approach.

Rav Hirsch later notes that Avraham Avinu indeed took his followers with him to rescue Lot. This is seemingly an abrogation of his previous decision to have his followers live apart from society. The answer is that this was an emergency, and one cannot maintain separation under those circumstances. Again, we are provided with an education on how to run one's life according to Torah standards.

Germane to this discussion, I would like to take issue with a comment made by the late Dayan Dr. Isaac Grunfeld in his beautiful essay written as an introduction to the first English translation of Rav Hirsch's commentary to Chumash, by Dr. Isaac Levy. Dayan Grunfeld's writes that the Hirsch Commentary is devoted to presenting "the unity of the Written and Oral Law as one of the fundamentals of authentic Judaism." In this introduction, Dayan Grunfeld makes the following statement, "When Samson Raphael Hirsch began his commentary in 1867, he had the works of Mecklenburg and Hatorah Vehamitzvah of Malbim in front of him." I presume that Dayan Grunfeld has some mesorah that this is true. However, from my work on Rav Hirsch's commentary, and my comparison to the other two works, I personally am not convinced that this statement is accurate. My reasons are as follows:

When Rav Hirsch felt indebted to an earlier commentator, he always quoted his source. In the course of his commentary of Chumash, he quotes a wide variety of sources, including hisrabbe'im, Chacham Bernays and Rav Yaakov Ettlinger (the Aruch Laneir), the highly controversial Naftali Wessely, and such late works as Harechasim Levik'ah. Yet, there is not a single reference anywhere in his commentary on Chumash to either Hakesav Vehakabalah or Hatorah Vehamitzvah.

The answer is simple: Rav Hirsch's thrust in his commentary was different from theirs. His goal was not to demonstrate that Chazal's understanding of Torah was the most accurate. His goal was to show that the Torah can be used as a basis for all of man's growth in Torah, his proper personality development, and his hashkafah or world outlook.

There are places that Rav Hirsch leaves us with no explanation, whereas Hakesav Vehakabalah presents approaches that lend themselves perfectly to Rav Hirsch's style of commentary. I will give one example: Rav Hirsch has almost no commentary to the lengthy list of travels that the Benei Yisroel made through the desert. Yet, Hakesav Vehakabalah has a beautiful explanation of the names and travels, which lends itself perfectly to Rav Hirsch's use of Chumash to teach musar haskeil. Rav Hirsch himself uses other similar passages to teach musar haskeil, most noticeably the list of names of the descendants of Sheis. If he was in the habit of reading Hakesav Vehakabalah as part of his weekly reading, as Dayan Grunfeld implies, I cannot fathom why he did not use the opportunity to include these lessons in his Torah commentary and attribute them to

Hakesav Vehakabalah, as he so often attributes explanations to earlier commentators.

Conclusion

Most of the innovations that have kept Torah alive in the last century are directly attributable to Rav Hirsch. Although Sarah Shenirer is the founder and basis of the Beis Yaakov movement, the originator of organized chinuch for women was Rav Hirsch, and his influence on everything related to the beginnings of the Beis Yaakov movement is axiomatic.

In most countries of the world, the majority of our Torah elementary schools and high schools include secular studies in their curriculum. This approach to Torah education is completely based on the framework of Rav Hirsch's education system.

The extensive use of the vernacular for teaching Torah is another gift to us from Rav Hirsch. Certainly, the success of the numerous publishing houses that print and distribute Torah literature written in English, French, Spanish, Russian and other languages is completely based on Rav Hirsch's producing his material in German. The existence in the modern marketplace of highly trained professionals, as uncompromising in their professional standards as they are in their Torah observance, is directly attributable to the teachings of Rav Hirsch.

Rav Hirsch was the quintessential borei'ach min hakavod. Clearly, he saw his mission in life as educating the Jewish world with the beauty of Torah and its mitzvos. Leaving Moravia for what appeared to be a moribund Frankfurt may have been a disastrous move professionally, but for Klal Yisroel it has been the savior, not merely of the central European Torah world, but of virtually the entire contemporary Torah world. Yehi zichro boruch.

[i] I refer to the commentaries of the Malbim because, although he wrote on the entire Tanach, a rare accomplishment, his treatment of the different parts of Tanach is so varied as to make it difficult to refer to it as one commentary.

[ii] On Chumash, the Malbim follows two different styles. As I mention in the article, his work to Vayikra and parts of Devorim is an explanation of the midrashei halachah, the Sifra and the Sifrei, in which he delves into Chazal's method of understanding Torah Shebiskav. On the other hand, his commentaries to other parts of Chumash bear close similarity to the commentary of the Abrabanel – he presents many questions on the topic at hand, and then weaves an explanation to answer them. Yet another style is presented in his commentaries to Esther and Shir Hashirim, in which he presents his own midrashic-style approach to these works. [iii] Commentary to Bereishis 1:19 [iv]

This point is the main thrust of Dayan Isaac Grunfeld's introduction to Rav Hirsch's commentary, which I will quote later in the article. [v] See Yevamos 28a [vi] See, for example, the second introduction of Yam shel Shelomoh of the Maharshal to Tractate Chullin. [vii] For

examples of this, see his explanation of the law of shifchah charufah, Vayikra 19:20 and of the pasuk velo setamei es admasecha, Devorim 21:23. See there how the other three commentaries we discuss deal with this topic. [viii] See, for example, his commentary to Vayikra 18:4. [ix] Devorim 24:18 [x] For example, see Rashi, Vayikra 19:16, where he explains that the word רכיל stems from the word רגל. [xi] A language specialist calls these words homorganic consonants. [xii] Those interested in seeing a systematic dictionary of Rav Hirsch's work in this area are referred to Matityahu Clark's Etymological Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew, Feldheim Publishers, which Rabbi Clark writes is "based on the commentaries of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch." [xiii] Bereishis 12:8. Translation is from the Haberman edition.

Rabbi YY Jacobson

The First Commandment: Find the Courage to Heal

"Let My People Go!" But Can They Let Themselves Go?

Three Boys -- Three boys are in the schoolyard bragging of how great their fathers are. The first one says: "Well, my father runs the fastest. He can fire an arrow, and start to run, I tell you, he gets there before the arrow." The second one says: "Ha! You think that's fast! My father is a hunter. He can shoot his gun and be there before the bullet." The third one listens to the other two and shakes his head. He then says: "You two know nothing about fast. My father is a civil servant. He stops working at 4:30 and he is home by 3:45!"

The First Commandment -- The Biblical account of the Jewish Exodus from Egypt has been one of the most inspiring stories for the oppressed, enslaved and downtrodden throughout history. From the American Revolution, to the slaves of the American South, to Martin Luther King's Let Freedom Ring, the narrative of the Exodus provided countless people with the courage to hope for a better future, and to act on the dream. Moses' first visit to Pharaoh demanding liberty for his people only brought more misery to the Hebrew slaves; the Egyptian monarch increased their torture. The Hebrews now would not listen any longer to the promise of redemption. Now let us pay heed to this seemingly strange verse in Exodus, in the Torah portion of Vaeira:

So G-d spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and He commanded them to the children of Israel, and to Pharaoh the king of Egypt, to let the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

[1] G-d is charging Moses with two directives: Command the people of Israel and then command Pharaoh the king. However, the verse is ambiguous: What did G-d command Moses to instruct the people? The message for Pharaoh is clear: Let the children of Israel out of Egypt. But what is it that Moses is supposed to command the people themselves?

The Jerusalem Talmud[2] says something profoundly enigmatic: G-d instructed Moses to command to the Jewish

people the laws of freeing slaves. The Talmud is referring to a law recorded later in Exodus:[3] If a Jew sells himself as a slave, the owner must let him go after six years. He is forbidden to hold on to the slave for longer. This was the law Moses was to share with the Israelites while they were in Egyptian bondage.

The Basis for the Commentary -- The Talmud bases this novel and seemingly unfounded interpretation on a fascinating narrative in the book of Jeremiah: [4] Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: So says the Lord G-d of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers on the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves, saying: "At the end of seven years you shall let go every man his brother Jew who has been sold to you, and when he has served you for six years you shall let him go free from you."

The question is, where do we find a covenant made by G-d with the Jewish people when they left Egypt to free their slaves? In a brilliant interpretation, the Talmud suggests that this is the meaning of the above enigmatic verse, "G-d spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and He commanded them to the children of Israel, and to Pharaoh the king of Egypt, to let the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." The commandment to the children of Israel was to set free their slaves.

Yet this seems like a cruel joke. The Children of Israel at this point were crushed and tormented slaves themselves, subjugated by a genocidal despot and a tyrannical regime, enduring horrific torture. Yet, at this point in time, G-d wants Moses to command them about the laws relevant to the aristocrat, the feudal lord, the slave-owner?![5]

What is more, as the Torah puts it: "G-d commanded them to the children of Israel, and to Pharaoh the king of Egypt to let the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." It seems like the two instructions—the one to the Israelites and the one to the Egyptian king—are linked. And furthermore: the commandment to the Israelites preceded the commandment to Pharaoh. But what does the commandment to the Jewish people that they free their slaves one day in the future have to do with the mission to Pharaoh to set the Hebrews free from bondage?

Who Is Free?

The answer to this question is profoundly simple and moving, and is vital to the understanding of liberty in Judaism.

Before Pharaoh can liberate the Jewish slaves, they must be ready to become free. You can take a man out of slavery, but it may prove more challenging to take slavery out of a man. Externally, you may be free; internally you may still be enslaved.

What is the first and foremost symptom of being free? That you learn to confer freedom on others.

The dictator, the control freak, or the abusive spouse or parent, does not know how to give others freedom. He or she feels compelled to force others into the mold that

he/she has created for them. Uncomfortable in his own skin, he is afraid that someone will overshadow him, expose his weaknesses, usurp his position or make him feel extra in this world. Outwardly he attempts to appear powerful, but inwardly his power is a symptom of inner misery, insecurity, and confinement.

When I am living in active trauma, my relationships and emotions are guided and shaped by the trauma--the need to survive in a scary and unsafe world. How can I give up control? How can I celebrate otherness? How can I even connect with someone in a genuine and authentic way when I needed to put my heart on lockdown in order to survive?

I am simply not capable of truly celebrating another person's life and individuality, because I am desperate each moment for emotional oxygen; all I can think of is how to remain protected in a world that is dangerous.

Who is powerful? He who empowers. Who is free? He who can free others. Who is a leader? He who creates other leaders.

"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power," Abraham Lincoln said. Ask yourself, do you know how to celebrate the soaring success of your loved ones and constituents? Do you encourage them to spread their wings and maximize their potentials? Can you allow others to shine?

Pharaoh may set you free physically. But former slaves can become present tyrants. People who were abused sometimes become abusers themselves. It is what they know about life; it is the paradigm they were raised with. They grew up in abuse and slavery, so they continue the cycle with others. The first Mitzvah the Jews had to hear from Moses before even he can go to Pharaoh to let them go free was: One day you will be free. Remember that freedom is a gift; use it to free others.

As it turns out, this is a remarkable Talmudic insight. The first commandment ever given to the Jewish people was: Don't internalize what the Egyptians have done to you. Find the spark of freedom, the inner Divine core, that no trauma can tarnish or paralyze; that part has remained free and will cherish conferring it upon others.

On a personal note, this week I attended the shivah of Avrumi Schapiro, Reb Avraham Yehoshua Heschel (son of the Noraler Rebbe from Benei Berak), 61, who passed away suddenly last Friday night in his home in Boro Park. Talking to his wife, Shoshi, and their beautiful children, I could viscerally feel the image of the person whom I knew for many years. Someone who felt empowered by empowering others; a person who came to life by bringing life, joy, and fulfillment to others. He mastered the secret of freedom and celebration – letting go and enjoying the laughter of others. Footnotes [1] Exodus 6:13. [2] Rosh Hashanah Chapter 3:5. See the commentary of the Karban Heidah ibid. See at length Torah Shleimah Parshas Vaeira for all the commentary on this Talmudic statement. [3]

Exodus 21:2 [4] 34:12-14 [5] See Meshech Chachmah (By Rabbi Meir Simcha Hakohen, the Rabbi of Devink and author of Or Samach) to Parshas Vaeira for his novel explanation, that there were Egyptian Jews at the times who owned Jewish slaves. Moses instructed them to set their slaves free. Cf. Torah Shleimah ibid for additional explanations.

Parashat Vayera by Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Transformation from Moses to Moshe Rabbeinu

Last week's parashat Shemot ends with Moshe emotionally complaining to HaShem for sending him to Paro to demand the release of the Jewish slaves; the result of which only angered Paro more, increasing their torment and suffering.

This week's parasha Va'ai'ra begins with HaShem castigating Moshe for speaking out of turn.

Question: Was Moshe correct in voicing his grievances over the failed result of his missions?

I will return to this.

Shemini Atzeret (October 7, 2023): The Pogrom on the Jews Living Close to Gaza

In order to understand what happened on that grievous day when Israel's technically advanced security system was so easily breached, and 1400 Jews were brutally tortured and massacred, one has to understand the two parshiot Shemot and Va'ai'ra.

The Emancipator

When the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov sent his beloved Jews into slavery, He had already set the scene for their future emancipation and the personalities who would be empowered with its implementation.

The emancipator would have to possess three characteristics:

- 1- An affiliation with the Jewish people (which leaves out an Egyptian).
- 2- He would have to be immune and invulnerable to the pomp and elegance of the royal court.
- 3- He would have to be able to admonish and castigate Paro without fear that it might cost him his life.

Enter the episode of the child Moshe. He was placed among the reeds of the river, found by princess Batya, returned to his mother Yocheved to be nursed, and at two years old was returned to Batya to raise him as a prince in the palace "under the nose" of the ruthless Paro.

The next time we encounter Moshe he is eighty years old. From the Midrashim we learn that Moshe filled important positions in the Egyptian government, including many outside of the land of Egypt. It would be logical to say that Moshe was aware of his Jewish background but was consciously an Egyptian.

Parashat Shemot relates that "one day" Moshe set out from the palace to inspect the outlying regions removed from the capital. He saw an Egyptian taskmaster smiting a Hebrew slave. Moshe was seized with wrath, killed the Egyptian, and escaped to the land of Midian.

Questions:

Why was Moshe shocked by the sight of an Egyptian smiting a Jew? Did he not know that millions of Jews were being beaten daily?

If Moshe believed that he behaved properly in killing the Egyptian, why did he not bring the matter before Paro, instead choosing to flee the country?

Was it just a "coincidence" that in Midian Moshe found himself in Yitro's home, among in the vast expanses of Midian?

In the miraculous episode of the burning bush that was not consumed, our sages say that for seven days and nights Moshe was commanded to return to Egypt to intervene in the violation of the Jews' "human rights" and Moshe refused. Is that possible?

How did it happen that Moshe could come and go from Paro's palace as he pleased? What is more, how could it be that Moshe severely rebuked Paro in an insulting manner, yet Paro did not lift a finger to punish him?

In Moshe's first encounter with Paro upon his return from Midian, he warned the King: "I have told you to let My son (Am Yisrael) go and serve Me. If you refuse to let him leave, I will [ultimately] kill your own first-born son" (Shemot 4:23). Yet isn't it a fact that Paro had no first-born son, with the nearest thing to it being Moshe himself!

I suggest:

Moshe, as Paro's adopted grandson, was heavily ensconced in Egyptian culture. He had studied in excellent military and civilian academies, and all the "right people" in Egypt wanted to "rub elbows" with him.

We can assume that Amram and Yocheved, his biological and halachic parents did not receive visitation rights to teach Moshe the rudiments of Judaism, as it had been received from Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. Moshe was brought up as the beloved son of Batya and grandson of Paro and many in the royal court were probably aware of his Hebraic background.

Out of his love for Moshe, Paro distanced him from the harsh reality of the Egyptian regime that enslaved millions of Jews under heinous conditions. He had further appointed Moshe to run "his household" so Moshe would concentrate totally on the palace and royal court and not on what was happening outside. He did not want Moshe to wake up one morning and discover that his beloved grandfather Paro, was the "Commandant of Dachau".

Between Shemot 2:10, in which Batya adopts Moshe as a son, and the very next verse Moshe "is grown and begins to go out to his own people," spotting the Egyptian smiting the Jew.

What emerges from the text is that Moshe had been unaware that the Jews were being cruelly enslaved, and that on a daily basis many were being beaten to death. As noted, Paro had taken pains to distance Moshe from the harsh reality that reigned in Egypt due to the decree of Paro, himself.

Moshe's world was about to collapse. Not because he had killed an Egyptian but because of the sudden awareness that the man who had been like a father to him, who had educated and provided him with all of the world's bounty, Paro, was in fact a cruel despot who was subjugating an entire nation; and what is more, it was the nation of Yosef, who had saved Egypt.

Moses understood that he must approach Paro and chastise him. Yet that was a mission impossible for two reasons: Moshe understood now that the Egyptian economy was based on slavery, and all of Egypt's military and political power derived from its strong economic situation.

Moreover, Moshe was incapable of castigating Paro because he loved Paro and Batya and identified himself as an Egyptian. Moshe was left with no choice but to flee Egypt to escape the reality in which he was indirectly a partner due to his associations with the monarchy.

Moshe fled to Midian and without any intent found himself in the house of Yitro. Who was Yitro? The Talmud in Sotah relates that Paro had three advisors who were privy to the plan to enslave the Jewish People: Yitro, Bilam and Iyov. When Paro presented his plan, Bilam agreed immediately, Iyov remained silent, and Yitro fled to Midian.

Here "hashgacha pratit" (Divine Providence) directed Moshe, the escapee, to the home of Yitro, the escapee.

Yitro knew Moshe from Paro's palace, and Moshe knew Yitro, as well. In the cold nights of Midian, as Moshe and Yitro sat around the warm hearth, Yitro thought to himself that the only person who could influence Paro was his beloved Moshe, the man sitting across from him, yet Moshe had fled from his moral responsibility. Moshe thought to himself that the policy of slavery was largely facilitated by Yitro's not having opposed it, instead preferring flight. Moshe and Yitro were two men who had fled from their moral responsibilities, expected of anyone with a spark of integrity and fairness.

One day, Moshe was herding Yitro's flocks on Mount Chorev, i.e., Mount Sinai. Suddenly he noticed a wondrous sight – a burning bush that was not being consumed. When Moshe drew near to the strange sight, he heard a voice telling him to return to Egypt, to approach Paro, to identify himself as a member of the Jewish People and to demand that Paro release the Jewish people. For seven days and nights he stood firm in his refusal, arguing by various means that he was not the right man for the mission.

And how indeed was it possible to refuse HaShem for even a moment, let alone seven days and nights?

As a rule, HaShem does not force spirituality on a person. Everyone is given free will to choose between good and evil. What happened there on the mountain did not involve HaShem's immediately commanding Moshe to undertake the mission, but rather His arousing Moshe's pure conscience. For an entire week, Moshe's conscience

weighed upon him to do the right thing, to approach Paro and demand freedom for the Jewish People.

Moshe struggled to block out the truth within his conscience, but ultimately gave in and decided that he must return to Egypt. Once he made that decision, HaShem revealed Himself and appointed Moshe as His emissary until the day of his death on Mount Avarim.

Moshe returned to Egypt, to the palace of his childhood, to his "mother" Batya and to his "grandfather" Paro whom he so much loved.

One can only imagine what occurred when Moshe entered the royal palace after being away for decades. Paro hurriedly summoned Batya. Moshe approached them, and Batya ran to hug and kiss him, tearfully exclaiming, "Moshe, my son! Moshe, my son! Where have you been?" Yet Moshe did not respond. Then Paro alighted from his high throne and with a penetrating gaze said, in a tone of anger and pain: "Where were you? Not a letter! Not a single message! Look at your mother Batya who raised you from when you were an infant. Her eyes are red from crying over you!"

Paro waited for an answer that did not come. So, he said to Moshe, "What do you have to say, Moshe?" Moshe looked at Paro and at Batya, and with tears in his eyes, declared, "Let my people go!"

Paro was shocked by what he heard. "Let my people go?" What are you talking about? We are your people!"

Moshe gazed directly at Paro, raised his voice, and proclaimed, "The Hebrew slaves are my people! If you do not free them, the God of the Hebrews will kill your first-born son!" But Paro had no sons. In fact, Moshe was announcing that if Paro did not free the Israelites, he would no longer be able to view Moshe as part of the royal family. Paro could not bear the threat that Moshe would be cut off from him, but to the same extent he could not sabotage the economic infrastructure of his kingdom – his Hebrew slaves.

In order to free the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, Moshe would have to trample Paro's glory and humiliate him in the extreme. But how could Moshe trample the man who had given him his life as a gift, and had raised and educated him as a son?

Moshe had come a long way to being the liberator of Am Yisrael, but there was one more hurdle that Moshe would have to overcome – the way Moshe related to Paro.

Moshe's attitude would have to sink from the heights of love to the depths of hatred. Paro's reaction to Moshe's request to allow the Israelites a number of days of rest, "in order to serve HaShem" (Shemot 5:1), was to increase the suffering:

"You are indolent!" retorted Paro. "Lazy! That's why you are saying that you want to sacrifice to HaShem. Now go! Get to work! You will not be given any straw, but you must deliver your quota of bricks." (Shemot 5:17-18)

At that moment, Moshe understood just how evil Paro had become. Moshe said: "All your officials here will come and bow down to me. They will say, 'Leave! You and all your followers!' Only then will I leave.' He left Paro in great anger" (11:8).

At this point, Moshe turned full circle and was now in the position to smite the Egyptians with ten plagues, after replacing his deep feelings of love for Paro with a deeper feeling of disgust and hatred for the man.

At that moment the Egyptian called Moses became Moshe the messenger of HaShem and soon to become "Moshe Rabbeinu".

The connection between the Moshe episode and the killing spree on last Shemini Atzeret

Until October 7th there were many in the country who believed that peace between Jews and Arabs can come about if we would be a little more forth coming in our policies to them. Their position was based on the belief that people are basically good, and the two states can live in peace and harmony, like America and Canada.

The US State Department has traditionally been anti-Jewish even in the horrific years of World War Two when the gates to the "Golden Land" were double locked, and its opposition to the establishment of the Jewish State, and their present policy of two states between the river and the sea. Every thinking person understands that such an arrangement would spell the end of the Jewish state and all its inhabitants. Even now after the Arabs of Gaza and Judea-Shomron have shown their poison fangs the Secretary of State (A Jew, what else!) is demanding that we agree to the establishment of this terror state.

HaShem brought about the horrific events of Oct. 7th to exhibit the profound hate that the Arabs possess for the Jews, no less than that of the Germans. Interesting fact: there is no documentation of a Nazi committing suicide in order to kill a Jew, but the Arabs are proud of their suicide bombers. So, there is no amount of compromise that could overcome their enmity.

Our "leftists" had a shocking awakening when it became disclosed in a survey that nearly all of our Arabs support Hamas and the atrocities they committed.

Moshe had to experience the evil in the heart of Paro as a pre-condition to becoming the leader who would free the Jews, and our Israeli leftists had to experience the ingrained evil in the hearts of our neighbors.

We know now that there is no room for our Arab enemies in this country. The question we will have to deal with in the near future is if our political and military leaders have the courage to remove these devils from our midst, as did our father Avraham did when he expelled Yishmael and Hagar from his home.

Conclusion: Even the events of Shemini Atzeret 5784 can be led by the precedents set down in the Torah over 3000 years ago.

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov,

Nachman Kahana

Drasha By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vaera Hitting Pay Dirt

There is a certain sensitivity displayed in this week's portion that serves as a lesson to mankind.

The first two of the 10 plagues that befell Egypt evolved around water. In the first plague, the waters of Egypt turned into blood. The second plague had frogs emerge from the water. In order to generate those miraculous events Moshe's staff struck the waters. Moshe, however, did not strike the water. He was told that his brother Ahron should do the smiting. After all, as a three-month-old child the waters of the Nile were Moshe's refuge as he was hidden in a reed basket from Pharaoh's soldiers who were drowning all Jewish males. It would not be fitting for one who was saved by the water to strike it.

The next plague, lice, emerged from the earth. After striking the earth with his staff, lice emerged, afflicting all of Egypt. Again Moshe was told not to be the agent of transmutation. After all, he must be grateful to the earth that hid the Egyptian whom he had killed.

Of course, the great ethicists derive from Moshe's behavior the importance of gratitude. "Imagine," they point out, "Moshe had to refrain from striking inanimate objects because he was saved by them years back! How much more must we show gratitude to living beings who have been our vehicles of good fortune."

Such morals deserve a homily to themselves, and there are countless stories of gratitude to accompany such essays. However, I am bothered by the simplicity of that message and the derivations that lead to it. Why is striking water or earth a display of ingratitude? Was it not the will of Hashem to have the dust and waters converted? Would it not be a great elevation to those waters or the dust to be transformed to higher components of G-d's glory? That being the case, wouldn't it be most fitting that Moshe be chosen to elevate simple waters or lowly dirt into objects that declare the open presence of an Almighty Creator who shouts together with his humble servant, "Let My people serve Me"?

Rabbi Nossan Schapira of Krakow (1585-1633) once told of his most difficult case.

A wealthy businessman from Warsaw would do business each month in the Krakow market. On each visit he noticed an extremely pious widow huddled near her basket of bagels reciting Psalms. She only lifted her eyes from her worn prayer book to sell a bagel or roll. After the sale she'd shower her customer with a myriad of blessings and immediately she'd return to the frayed pages of her prayer book that were varnished with teardrops and devotion.

Upon observing her each month, the Krakow businessman came to a conclusion. "This pious woman should not have to struggle to earn a living. She should be able to pursue her prayers and piety with no worries."

He offered to double her monthly earnings on one condition: she would leave the bagel business and spend her time in the service of the L-rd. The woman, tears of joy streaming down her face, accepted the generous offer and thanked the kind man with praise, gratitude and blessing.

A month later, when the man returned to Krakow, he was shocked to find the woman at her usual place, mixing the sweet smell of bagels with the sweet words of Tehillim. As soon as he approached, the woman handed him an envelope. "Here is your money. I thought it over I can't accept your offer."

"A deal is a deal," he exclaimed. "We must see Rabbi Schapira!"

After the businessman presented his case, the woman spoke. "The reason this generous man offered to support me was to help me grow in my spirituality and devotion. From the day I left my bagel business I've only fallen. Let me explain.

"Every day that it would rain, I would think of the farmers who planted the wheat for my bagels. I would sing praises for the glory of rain as I felt the personal guidance of Hashem with each raindrop. When the sun would shine I would once again thank Hashem from letting the farmers harvest in good weather. When I would grind the flour and then sift it again I'd find countless reasons to thank the Almighty. When the bread would bake golden brown I'd thank Hashem for the beauty of the product and its sweet sell. And when a customer would come I'd thank both Hashem for sending him and then bless my patron, too! Now this is all gone, I want no part of a simple, all-expense-paid life."

Moshe had a very personal relationship with the water and the dust. Each time he saw the Nile or tread upon the ground, he remembered the vehicles of his good fortune and used them to praise Hashem. Blood, frogs, and lice are surely miraculous, but they were not Moshe's personal salvation. Striking the water or earth may have produced great national miracles, but Moshe would be left without the simple dirt that yielded piles of personal praise. When one forgoes marveling at a lowly speck of dust and chooses to focus instead upon huge mountains, he may never hit pay dirt. He may only bite the dust.

Dedicated in memory of A. Milton Brown by Mr. & Mrs. Ben Brown

Rabbi Yissocher Frand -- Parshas Vaera

Reconsidering Long Held Beliefs Made Moshe Appropriate for Leadership

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1277 – Snow Shailos. Good Shabbos! I am well aware that this week is Parshas Vaera, and therefore I really should speak about Parshas Vaera. I am also very aware that last week for Parshas Shemos, I said a pshat in the very same pasuk that I will now focus on

again, but on Friday morning I listened to a shiur from the Tolner Rebbe that he had given the previous Thursday night. The Tolner Rebbe has a whole different approach to the same pasuk. I think it is a brilliant mehalech, and I think the message that he takes out of this is a very important message.

In addition, the parshios of Shemos, Vaera, Bo and Beshalach are the parshios of Yetzias Mitzraim. I always consider them one entity, so therefore it is legitimate for me to speak about Parshas Shemos again this week.

The pasuk says, "And the Angel of Hashem appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush. He saw and behold! The bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed. Moshe thought, 'Let me turn aside now and see this great sight – why will the bush not be burned?' Hashem saw that he turned aside to see, and G-d called out to him from amid the bush and said, 'Moshe, Moshe,' and he replied, 'Here I am!'" (Shemos 3:2-4)

This is a seminal moment in Jewish history – the beginning of Moshe Rabbeinu's career. Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest of all nevi'im (prophets) and this is the first time that Hashem speaks to him. Why does Hashem speak to him? It is because "He saw that Moshe turned aside to see."

The Tolner Rebbe of Yerushalayim asks four questions:

1. Rashi, on the words "asura nah" (Let me turn aside now) writes: "asura m'kan l'hiskarev sham" (I will turn from here to approach there.) Is this a kind of elaboration we need Rashi to provide? Why does Rashi need to provide this obvious inference, which really adds nothing to our understanding of these words?

2. The whole expression in the pasuk "And Moshe said, 'Let me turn aside now' to investigate" – only indicates that Moshe was talking to himself. Why is it important for us to know that Moshe had this conversation with himself before approaching to check it out?

3. The word nah in the expression asura nah indicates a bakasha (request). It is as if Moshe is saying (to himself), "Please, let me check this out." Moshe is not asking anyone else to do him a favor here, so why does Moshe use the word please (nah) in this sentence?

4. Finally, the pasuk says "And Hashem saw that Moshe turned to investigate." What is the import of this statement? Obviously, this strange incident merited investigation. People watch fire scenes even when they do consume because watching a burning fire is an interesting spectacle. Certainly, a miraculous fire that did not consume is worth checking out. The pasuk appears to say that the fact that Moshe went to check out the Burning Bush was the factor that motivated the Ribono shel Olam to speak to him. What is that all about?

In order to understand the answer given to these questions by the Tolner Rebbe, we need to know a little bit about the history of Moshe Rabbeinu: Going back a bit in time, Moshe went out and saw an Egyptian beating a Jew, one of

Moshe's brethren. Moshe looked around, saw that no one was watching and he killed the Egyptian. The next day, Moshe encountered two Jews fighting with each other. He said to the attacker, "Why are you beating a fellow Jew?" The man answered, "Who made you the boss around here? Do you intend to kill me like you killed the Egyptian (yesterday)?"

Moshe became afraid and said, "Behold, the matter is now known!" (Shemos 2:14) Rashi interprets: Moshe feared that if there could be such wicked people in Klal Yisroel that they threaten me that I will be reported to the authorities for saving a fellow Jew from violence, then they are not worthy of being redeemed. They speak Lashon HaRah (slander) and they beat each other up so they are unworthy of G-d's redemption. Rashi explains the expression "achein, noda ha'davar" (behold, the matter is now known): I now understand the matter that I had long been wondering about: Why are Jews suffering in exile all these years? Now I get it! I see that they deserve it!

Rabbeinu Ephraim al haTorah, who was an early commentary, makes this point in an even stronger fashion: Moshe Rabbeinu could not understand why Klal Yisroel should not be destroyed for being so contentious and slanderous vis-a-vis one another. According to Rabbeinu Ephraim, after witnessing these incidents, Moshe came to the conclusion that not only would Bnei Yisroel remain in Mitzraim and not come out, but that they would ultimately disappear.

Now, unlike the impression we get from a simple reading of the opening chapters of Sefer Shemos, Moshe did not flee to Midyan directly after killing this Egyptian. The Ramban writes that this incident of Moshe going out and killing the Egyptian took place when he was just twelve years old, or slightly older. When Moshe Rabbeinu came before Pharaoh, he was already eighty years old. What happened to those sixty-plus years in between, from the time he was twelve until the time he was eighty? Rabbeinu Tam writes in his Sefer haYashar that Moshe ran to Eretz Cush (Ethiopia) in between, and stayed there for sixty years. Then, he went to Midyan, and that is where we pick up the story. For all that time, Moshe has nothing to do with Klal Yisroel. This matter of "He went out to his brethren and saw their suffering..." (Shemos 2:11) seemed to be merely a passing moment of concern. Then, for the next sixty-plus years, "It is not my problem!" Is this the Moshe Rabbeinu who is so concerned about the fate of his fellow man?

The explanation is that Moshe had concluded (as Rashi and Rabbeinu Ephraim mentioned) that Bnei Yisroel were doomed! His interaction with those two Jews that second day convinced him that the Jews were not worthy of redemption. That is why he could stay away for so much time with the firm belief that the Jews would never get out of Mitzraim.

Moshe came to Midyan and then saw the Burning Bush. He saw that it was not being consumed. This was a miraculous event. There was a message over here. Klal Yisroel are like this thorn bush. Anyone who starts up with them is going to suffer! Hashem was sending Moshe a message via this miraculous sight: Against all expectations to the contrary, a thorn bush, representing the Jewish people, was not being consumed. Suddenly, Moshe Rabbeinu has an epiphany. Moshe says: Do you know what? Maybe, I was wrong! Maybe, my operating assumption for the past sixty-plus years that Klal Yisroel will never get out of Mitzraim was incorrect.

It is not easy for a person to change a deeply ingrained belief or assumption that has guided his life for the last twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years! Moshe Rabbeinu was confronted with a challenge here that is very difficult for human beings to face. Should I change my mind? It is possible that I was wrong all these years?

Moshe Rabbeinu said to himself "I will turn aside and investigate" (Asura nah v'er'eh). Moshe needs to talk to himself. He needs to convince himself. "Please, Moshe, check this out because maybe I have been mistaken. Maybe I am wrong!" This is why Rashi provides the seemingly unnecessary elaboration "Turn aside from here and go to there." (Question #1) This is not just a matter of moving six feet. This is a very important life changing moment. (Question #2) This is a matter of changing an entire philosophy and world vision. This is why Moshe uses the word nah (please) (Question #3), because Moshe needed to convince himself. People find it very difficult to admit that they have been wrong.

Finally, that is also why the next pasuk says "And Hashem saw that he turned to investigate." The Ribono shel Olam saw that Moshe Rabbeinu was investigating. We asked, "What's the big deal about checking out a fire?" (Question #4) Sure. We would all check out such an incident. But if it meant having to reassess and possibly retract that which we have strongly believed for the last half century, that is not such a simple matter. This made an impression on the Ribono shel Olam because this proved to Him that Moshe Rabbeinu had the quality to be a manhig Yisroel (Jewish leader). The quality to be a manhig Yisroel is the ability to admit "I may be wrong. Maybe there is another way of looking at things. Maybe I made a mistake."

At this moment in time, Moshe Rabbeinu becomes the leader of the Jewish people. We pointed out the same concept a couple of weeks ago (in Parshas Vayechi), when we discussed the bracha that Yaakov gave to Yehudah – the blessing of leadership. Onkelos explains that the reason why Yaakov picked Yehudah for the role of Jewish leadership was because he admitted (in the incident with his daughter-in-law Tamar) that he had made a mistake. "She is more righteous in the matter than I." (Bereshis 38:26) Yehudah also admitted "I may be wrong. Maybe there is another way of looking at things. Maybe I made a

mistake.” Since Yaakov saw that Yehudah had this quality, he proclaimed “The scepter will not depart from Yehudah.” (Bereshis 49:10)

This happens to us as well. We have certain opinions, certain presumptions in life. There are certain things that we believe in throughout our lives. Maybe, just maybe, we are wrong. Everyone has opinions. They have opinions about Eretz Yisroel. They have opinions about secular education. They have opinions about women. People have deeply ingrained presumptions about all different matters. We are all opinionated. And of course, we are always right. “It is my way or the highway. There is no other way!”

If we are always right and the other guy is always wrong, we become intolerant of other people. Because they are wrong. Because they are silly. Because they are stupid. Because they don’t get it! This intolerance that is so prevalent today stems from this inability to ever reassess long held personal opinions, which just might be wrong!

The ability to say “Guess what? I was wrong!” is an attribute that everyone needs to have.

The Tolner Rebbe mentioned that the Gerrer Rebbe in Poland had 100,000 chassidim. The Gerrer Rebbe in pre-War Poland held that Orthodox Jewry must support Agudas Yisroel. If the Gerrer Rebbe held that everyone must support Agudas Yisroel, then automatically 100,000 chassidim supported Agudas Yisroel. Then, the Gerrer Rebbe heard that there was a Jewish leader, named Rav Yissachar Dov Rokeach (the Belzer Rebbe), who disagreed.

Now imagine that you are the Gerrer Rebbe with 100,000 chassidim and there is another distinguished Chassidic leader, who does not have nearly as many followers, who disagrees with you. What should be your reaction? “I’m right. He’s wrong!”

But what did the Gerer Rebbe do? He sent two people to the Belzer Rebbe to better understand what he held and why he held that opinion. The delegation went to the Belzer Rebbe and explained their mission. The Belzer Rebbe asked them “And what is your opinion about the matter?” They responded, “We have no opinion about the matter, we are just here on a mission from the Gerrer Rebbe.” The Belzer Rebbe explained to this delegation the reason for his opposition.

They came back to the Gerrer Rebbe and reported on their conversation. The Gerrer Rebbe responded, “Yes. There is such an opinion and it is important that there should be such an opinion.” The Gerrer Rebbe explained: We are all nogeah (biased) in our decision-making processes. We need to consult with someone on the outside who can hear our side of an argument and tell us “Do you know what? You’re wrong!” A leader cannot be surrounded by “Yes-men.” We need people around us to tell us when we are wrong. Everyone needs such a person. Our wives often fill this role.

This one act of reassessment and reevaluation – Why is the bush not burning? – vaulted Moshe into the position where he was deserving of becoming the Manhig Yisroel. He demonstrated that he had the quality of saying “I was wrong!”

לע"נ שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה