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Fate or Destiny? Man's Role in Shaping his Life

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered January 18, 1970)

Two great ideas have been contending with each other in the religious consciousness of the Jew during most of the millennia of Jewish history. The first one maintains that geulah (redemption) is wholly the act of God, and man is nothing but a passive observer and the lucky beneficiary of His guidance of history. Man may hope for redemption, but not work for it; pray for it, but not precipitate it; await it, but not anticipate it. It is, as we would put it in today's vernacular, all God's show; He is the only actor, and man merely the appreciative audience.

The second idea denies that God ever becomes a substitute for human effort. It is true that without God, no work can prosper; but without man, there is no work available which can either succeed or fail. God neither expects nor wants man to abdicate his creative role in his own destiny. Man may not be the playwright, but neither is he a puppet; he is an actor in the drama of life.

The first theory may be characterized as that of quietism, the idea that only when man is silent and passive does he manifest his acceptance of divine sovereignty. Human initiative in redeeming himself is a gesture of defiance against God and faithlessness in Him. The second view is far more activist, and holds that man's freedom implies God's will that he assert himself in all spheres, including the achievement of his political dignity. It suspects quietism of wishing upon man not destiny, but fate.

These two views of our human role in our own affairs and future are the forerunners of what in our days have been formulated as, on one extreme, the approach of the Neturei Karta, and, opposed to it, that of Religious Zionism.

Actually, both have respectable precedent in Biblical history. The quietist view, which sees Redemption as a completely divine act, has its source in the Exodus from

Egypt. "Thus saith the Lord: about midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt" (Ex. 6:4). It is God Himself Who redeems Israel. As the author of the Haggadah put it: "I and not an angel... I and not a seraph... I and not a messenger." Neither a general nor a diplomat, neither a politician nor a statesman will participate with Me; only I, God, am the Redeemer of Israel.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik often points to the painful paradox of the omission of the name of Moses from the Passover Haggadah. We mention Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, we mention Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Tarfon, we even mention Laban and Esau – but except for an insignificant, passing reference, there is no mention of the one man who gave all his life to realize the Exodus, the one man who suffered untold spiritual agony in order to mold this heterogeneous conglomeration of ex-slaves into a great people of mission and dignity – Moses! Is it not an act of historic injustice that we perpetrate against him, that we deny him any place at all on the one night dedicated to the liberation of Israel from Egypt? The question itself is one that Rabbi Soloveitchik relates to a Midrashic comment on the verse from the Song of Songs (3:1): "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth; I sought him but I found him not." The Midrash (Sh. R. 3:2) identifies this lost beloved as Moses. Rabbi Soloveitchik interprets the reference of the Midrash as a complaint over the absence of Moses from the Passover Haggadah.

Why, then, have we so mistreated Moses? What we are being taught is that no one, not even Moses, can share the glory of God as the Redeemer of Israel. Moses' greatness is not as a statesman or military hero. It is as Mosheh Rabbenu, as Moses the Teacher of Torah. There, in the realm of the spirit, man can excel and achieve his personal fame. But in the national political liberation from Egypt,

only God is the Redeemer, not man, not even Moses.

The activist conception of the role of man finds its source in another national Redemption of which the Bible speaks – the shivat Zion, the Return to Zion under Ezra and Nehemiah. This too was a geulah (Redemption). It was the fulfillment of a 70-year old prophecy. But it was engineered by Jews who, though they were possessed of great religious zeal and idealism, played the game of international politics quite skillfully. The Bible speaks of this national redemption in natural, almost “secular” terms. It sees it, of course, as part of an overall Divine plan, but it allows events to speak for themselves, and the events are humanly initiated and executed. Man is active, and while God is never really passive, He awaits man’s initiative and does not pre-empt the stage in the drama of redemption. The Return to Zion was destined, but not fated. Man had to risk his commitment to action before the prophecy could be fulfilled.

Hence, these two views as to our role in the future of Jewish history, the quietist and the activist, even while they contradict each other, are both legitimately Jewish, for they have adequate Biblical source. The Egyptian redemption emphasizes the Divine role, the Babylonian – the human role.

Yet it would be a mistake to overdraw the lines and overstate the case. The Return to Zion must not be seen purely as a secular, political act. It would be an error of the first magnitude to attribute to the Bible the philosophy of secularist nationalism. Secular Zionism makes of religion the private matter of the individual Jew. By removing history and nation from the concern of religion, and vice versa, it trivializes Judaism, and reduces it into insignificance. It would be intellectually outrageous to identify the Bible as a source for such an ideology. It is true that shivat Zion is described by the Torah in human terms, but it is self-understood that the Divine component is ever-present.

More important, the Exodus from Egypt should not be seen as advocating a totally passive role for man. The Exodus was miraculous, but not magical. Even Moses cannot share in the glory, but the work and the suffering and the exertion cannot be taken off the shoulders of his people. The first Makkah was not the plague of blood by God; the first blow against the Egyptians was (as Dr. Israel Eldad has pointed out) by Moses himself who, when he was scandalized by the injustice of the Egyptian striking the Hebrew, struck the Egyptian. Va-yakh et hamitzri is the first makkah, which evoked divine assistance and brought

on the eser makkot (Ten Plagues) against the Egyptians. Tradition tells us that the sea did not split until the Prince of Judah jumped into the water and the water reached his nostrils – for without the human willingness to risk martyrdom, God performs no miracles. Rabbi Judah the Prince reads the verse that is usually translated as: “The Lord will fight for you, and you will hold your peace” (Ex. 14:14) with a question mark: Do you really expect that the Lord will fight for you while you sit by with folded arms and do nothing? (Mechilta; see Torah Sheleimah to this verse, no. 86). “Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel and let them go forward, let them take upon themselves the dangers of the great desert, while you “lift up thy rod” (ib. 15, 16) and exercise initiative in leading your people out of slavery.

Similarly, in the space of ten verses we find two similar descriptions of the actual Exodus, both of which indicate the opposite parts of this paradox. One verse reads: “It was on this very day that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt” (Ex. 12:41). The second verse reads: “It was on this very day that the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts” (Ex. 12:51). One verse has the Lord doing all, bringing the Israelites out, and the other has the Israelites going out by themselves. Both are true – and even though the Israelites took the initiative, they remained “the hosts of the Lord.”

The two Redemptions, the Babylonian and the Egyptian, both individually and especially taken together, represent, as does all of life, an interpenetration of the divine and the human, an intersection of destiny and choice.

Nevertheless, while there is never any purely divine or purely human activity, there is a strikingly different emphasis on each of these historic events: the Egyptian highlights the divine role, the Babylonian stresses the human role.

Which one ought we choose as the model for our own lives and activities? We can make this decision only if we determine why each redemption was different, and why it was right that each one took place the way it did.

There was good reason why the Egyptian redemption reflected mostly Divine initiative, while the Babylonian redemption featured human exertion.

The Egyptian period characterized the childhood or even infancy of our people. Like a child who needs his father and mother to do things for him if he is to survive, Israel needed the “outstretched arm” and the “strong hand”

of the Almighty. It could not survive without the Manna falling from Heaven. But maturity requires gradually increasing personal effort on the part of the child, and this independence implies investment and risk and exertion. That is why when Joshua entered the Promised Land, that very first Passover the Manna stopped falling. A mature people must work and sweat and labor – and bless God – for *lechem min ha-aretz* (bread from the earth), and not keep its palms upturned waiting for *lechem min ha-shamayim* (bread from heaven) to fall into them gratis. Furthermore, the immaturity of Israel in the Egyptian period was not only psychological but also spiritual. They had to be weaned from the pagan faiths to which they had assimilated, and taught a new vision, that of One God of all the world, above nature and controlling it. Hence God had to intervene directly and make His absolute independence from man and nature manifest to Israel.

However, the Babylonian redemption was one of human daring and initiative. Certainly it involved religious experience and religious direction and gratitude to God. But it was a more nationally and psychologically mature people which now returned, and also a people which understood, as our ancestors in Egypt did not, that the God of Israel is radically different from the gods of the nations. The Jews who returned with Ezra and Nehemiah were expected to be responsible, and they fulfilled that expectation.

The lesson of the Babylonian redemption is part and parcel of normative Jewish life. So it is with health, for instance. Of course our health is in the hands of God; but He desires that we spare no effort to preserve and improve our health. He may, if He so chooses, decide to withhold His blessing, and then we are in trouble. But unless we do something, unless we do enough, He will not help us. That is why the Talmud locates in the verse “and he shall cause him to be healed” (Ex. 21:19) permission for the physician to practice the art of healing. One might think that it is forbidden to interfere in the divine governance of the universe by healing the sick man. The Torah, however, permits it. And once it is permitted, it becomes mandatory to enhance health in order to preserve life.

The same principle applies to sustenance. We must have faith that God will provide for us, but that does not excuse us from working for a living. True, strong faith would at least keep us away from over-exerting ourselves and amassing far more than we need at the expense of other goods. But at the same time, “and thou shalt gather

in thy corn” (Dt. 11:14), we must make every effort to keep ourselves and our family provided for. This holds true in even greater measure for the poor; we recognize it as cynicism rather than piety when a rich man refuses food to the hungry because of faith that God will no doubt take care of the downtrodden.

Without God, there is neither health nor wealth. That is why we pray in the Amidah both *Refa’enu* and *Barekh alenu*, both for health and prosperity. But without man, there is no use praying. God does nothing for us if we do not have sufficient interest to begin on our own. And the prayers for *geulah* and *kibbutz galuyot* (redemption and the ingathering of the exiles) are surrounded by the blessings for health and sustenance. They are all of one piece. The divine and the human do not contradict each other. On the contrary, they need each other.

These thoughts and this conclusion about the vital and indispensable role of man in his own destiny are occasioned not only by thoughts of the eventual *geulah* or reference to the State of Israel.

I have in mind as well our own Jewish community. An appreciation of the human role in human destiny means that if we are not going to exert our own leadership and offer our sacrificial participation, our community cannot prosper. We cannot, we may not, we dare not leave it to God. God must not be used as simply a psychological device to excuse our own indolence.

In recent years there has been a perceptible decrease in lay leadership and participation in many of the most important Jewish organizations. If a lapse from gallantry be permitted, it is especially noticeable in the case of the ladies. Women’s organizations play an extremely important role in the Jewish community, from Sisterhood to Day School, from Mizrahi to Yeshiva University to the Mikvah. And if this lack of leadership initiative and this reluctance to participate in communal work will continue, we will all be in trouble.

We live in strange times. Our history is a stormy one. When we consider the fate of our Jewish community, we must remember that we can no longer count on that great and once seemingly unlimited reservoir of Jewish talent and leadership, the Jewry of Europe. Six million of them have been done to death. We cannot rely on Russian Jewry, for three million of them are behind the Iron Curtain and it is they who look to us for leadership. We cannot even count on the millions of our fellow American Jews to do our

communal tasks for us, for unfortunately so many of them have dropped out of the Jewish community through the attrition of assimilation and intermarriage. At a time of this sort there is no one to rely upon but ourselves. God will not help us unless we are first willing to help ourselves. Our historical situation challenges us to redouble and intensify our efforts as never before.

An appropriate illustration of the nature of this challenge was offered by Prof. Dov Sadan of the Hebrew University in his Erna Michael Memorial Lecture at Yeshiva University several weeks ago. In responding to the introduction, in which mention was made of his prolific writing – Prof. Sadan is the author of over 40 volumes and hundreds of articles – the speaker told the following story which explained his unusual creativity. He was born in a tiny shtetl in Eastern Europe. Throughout his youth, his father impressed upon him the story of his birth. When his mother was about to deliver, the doctor presented her with a cruel choice: either she could live, but the baby must die; or, if she chose life for the baby, then she would have to die. She chose the latter alternative, and she perished. He was that baby. And his father always told him: Dov, you must work hard, not only for yourself, for you are responsible as well for the life of

your young mother, and for the children she might have had after you, had she chosen her own life over yours. You must live not only for yourself, but also for her and for all those others. It is this thought that always remained etched in his mind, which gave him no rest, and which motivated him to produce this enormous amount of scholarly material.

The same thought must inspire us, even obsess us, in determining our contribution to the community effort. We must work not only for ourselves, but also for what could have been accomplished by European Jewry had it survived, what might be accomplished by Russian Jewry were it not for its imprisonment behind the Iron Curtain, what ought to be accomplished by other American Jews were it not for their dreadful assimilation. We must act not only for ourselves, but for others as well.

Not only may we not fatalistically leave everything to God and, instead, forcefully play our own role, but we must also embrace the additional burden – and glory! – of the roles of others in achieving our own destiny.

Let us do so with pride and with dignity, and in response God will give us all three: *geulah*, *refuah*, and *berakhah* – redemption and health and the blessing of prosperity.

Read more at www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage.

Leadership and the Prayer Community

Dr. Erica Brown

Crisis makes leaders and breaks leaders.

In this week's sedra, Bo, the very mention of a locust plague sent Pharaoh and his courtiers into a tailspin. A swarm of locusts is not only unsightly, it can ruin crops for an entire harvest season, decimating an economy and heightening starvation. I learned from a National Geographic website, that locusts in the ancient world were both feared and revered. Locusts can travel up to 81 miles in 24 hours and can stay in the air for days at a time. No wonder when Moses and Aaron threatened Pharaoh with a plague of locusts, Pharaoh was initially willing to accommodate their request to go to the desert and worship their God.

So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh and he said to them, "Go, worship your God! Who are the ones to go?" Moses replied, "We will all go—regardless of social station, we will go with our sons and daughters, our flocks and herds; for we must observe the Lord's festival" (Ex. 10:8-9).

Moses, who had the upper hand in this negotiation, pushed his luck and asked that everyone be allowed to leave. Pharaoh was having none of it. He permitted only the Israelite leaders to leave.

But he said to them, "God will be with you—the same as I mean to let your dependents go with you! Clearly, you are bent on mischief. No! You gentlemen go and worship God, since that is what you want." And they were expelled from Pharaoh's presence (Ex. 10:10-11).

Nahmanides explains Pharaoh's ire. Moses asked for too much so he was left with nothing: "Pharaoh's anger was then kindled on account of the sons and daughters, and he said that under no circumstances will he send the little ones, for they take no part in the offerings. Instead, he would send all the adult males because of the feast which Moses mentioned, while the little ones and the women will remain [in Egypt]." If Moses and Aaron led all the Jews out of Egypt, they would have no intention of coming back.

The Midrash Lekach Tov on Exodus 10:9 explains

Moses' request as an expression of justice: "Just as we all serve you, so must we all serve our God." The same word in Hebrew for slave is also the word for a worshipper, a servant of God. If Pharaoh had the audacity to enslave children, the elderly and cattle towards his ends, this same group should be allowed the freedom of worship. It seemed only fair.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch on the same verse explains Moses' words: "We have no intermediary, no priests, no representative before our God. If we are to go, we must all go; the tiniest baby in the cradle, the last sheep of our possessions. Each and all are integral parts of our community. None and nothings may remain, for we are all to form a 'circle about God.' God calls us together around Him, and when God calls us, He wants to see us with every member of our family and will all our possessions, about Him."

Moses needed to explain to the head of a spiritually hierarchal Egyptian society that the nature of a Jewish worshipful community is not based on the intercession of a high priest alone but on the call of a child, the pleas of a young mother, the requests of a farmer, and the petition of an old woman. To deny them the right to pray is to deny them a basic human need. In that communal space filled with the diversity that travels across ages and gender, the Israelites could articulate their pain to God while in the presence of each other.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks captures this beautifully when he describes why we pray in the plural:

Prayer is like a protective wall, and praying together is more powerful and effective. We do not need superhuman piety – merely enlightened self-interest – to realise that our destinies are interconnected. When we are blessed, we are blessed together. Prayer is community made articulate, when we delete the first-person singular and substitute the first-person plural ("The Priestly Blessings," Naso, Covenant & Conversation).

Moses understood the protective wall that is prayer. Today, as we try to rebuild community post-COVID, we do not always focus on bringing everyone back to our prayer spaces. In some communities, the emphasis is on a minyan of men. In others, attention is paid to youth and not to seniors. We've become experts at fragmenting our communities of worship long before COVID. We have teen experiences, beginner's services, and tot Shabbatot. While these are all important ways we serve different communal

needs, we risk doing what Pharaoh wanted and what Moses decried: we limit prayer to one segment of society instead of creating sacred spaces where all have a voice. Because we suffer together, we must celebrate together. Because we share a world, we have to see each other. No one can be invisible. Everyone is integral.

I once asked each member of a group of leaders to write a prayer for his or her leadership. Not one person in the room had ever done such an exercise. Many neither attended synagogue regularly nor prayed alone with any frequency. The very word 'prayer' seemed alien and archaic to some leaders in the room. But as they sat in silence with pens in hand, I watched their faces soften as they wrote diligently. The results were stunning. People asked for wisdom to make good decisions. They asked for patience. They wanted the fortitude to handle difficult situations that required them to stretch and grow. They wanted comfort for the lonelier moments and help when they struggled to delegate. They prayed that when they were done with their work, they would be succeeded by people who could carry on what they built with responsibility and integrity. They prayed for those they led. And they realized, in processing the activity, that when you're a leader, there is an awful lot to pray for.

As we turn back to our Torah reading, Pharaoh denied Moses' demand so God told Moses to lift his staff, and with that sweeping gesture, the locusts came on an East wind and covered the land. "Locusts invaded all the land of Egypt and settled within all the territory of Egypt in a thick mass; never before had there been so many, nor will there ever be so many again" (Ex.10:14). I learned something else about locusts. When the rainy season returns, and the earth is moist, locusts reproduce rapidly. They then shift from solitary insects to group behavior. In this capacity, they have greater endurance, and their brain size actually increases.

In Exodus 1:7, when the Israelites grow prodigiously, the term swarming is used. Perhaps Pharaoh saw in this plague of locusts a metaphor for the Israelites themselves: a small but mighty nation who covered the land. They endured and became wiser with time until they posed an actual threat that would only be relieved when they could travel home together as a worshipful community.

So what do you pray for as a leader? What do you hope your leaders pray for? Take a few minutes to formulate your own leadership prayer.

Shine On

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z"l

In this week's parsha, the first mitzvoh of the Torah, that of sanctifying the new moon (Kiddush HaChodesh), whereby the advent of the new moon is witnessed and the beginning of the new month is scheduled, is communicated by God to Moshe and Aharon. Immediately after that mitzvoh is given to them, the mitzvoh of slaughtering the Pesach sacrifice is given, along with the many laws ancillary to it. Thus, we read: And God said to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt, saying, 'This month shall be for you the beginning of months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year. Speak to the entire assembly of Yisroel, saying, 'On the tenth of this month they shall take for themselves - each man - a lamb/kid...' (Shemos 12:1-3). Why are these two mitzvos juxtaposed to each other? A simple answer could be that since the Pesach sacrifice needed to be separated on the tenth of Nissan and slaughtered on the fourteenth of that month, there was a need to know when those dates would actually occur. This, however, is a very technical answer, and I would like to find one which teaches us something about the essence of the two mitzvos, in order to understand their messages more fully.

Rabbeinu Ya'akov ben Asher, the author of the halachic compendium the Tur, writes, in his longer commentary to the Torah, that God commanded the people to take a sheep for their offering because the mazal, or astrological sign, of the lamb, is at its height during the month of Nissan, and, so, by slaughtering the lamb, the nation would show the Egyptians the powerlessness of the god that they worshipped. Thus the Torah first mentions the mitzvoh of sanctifying the new moon and declaring Nissan as the first month, and then commands us to slaughter the lamb, which was a god of the Egyptians, during that first month, to sharpen the message that was to be delivered to them. Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Lunshitz, in his *Keli Yakar*, gives a somewhat similar answer. He says that since the Jewish nation was redeemed from Egypt in Nissan, that month was made the first month of the year, so that the miracles of the redemption will be before our eyes constantly. However, since the mazal of the lamb is regnant in that month, and we don't want people to think that it was

because of the importance of the mazal of the lamb that Nissan was made the first of the months, the nation was commanded to slaughter a lamb on the tenth of Nissan to show that the mazal of the lamb has no absolute power. They were commanded to take the lamb on the tenth day of Nissan, because that is when the mazal is at its strength, and, thus, by taking it then for the purpose of slaughtering it, they would demonstrate that its mazal has no independent power at all, and that there is a God in the world Who is above all other powers, and controls them. In order for the nation to know when the tenth of the month occurred, they were given the mitzvoh of sanctifying the new moon. While these explanations do give us some insight into the deeper meaning of the mitzvos of Kiddush HaChodesh and Korban Pesach, they focus on the significance of the mazal of Nissan in the mind-set of the Egyptians, which may not be as meaningful for us today. Therefore, I would like to suggest another explanation for the juxtaposition of these mitzvos.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 42a) tells us that whoever blesses the new moon in its proper time is considered as if he received the divine presence. The rabbis derive this from a 'gezeirah shaveh,' an equivalence of expressions, between two verses, namely, "This month shall be for you the beginning of months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year," in our parsha, and "This is my God and I will beautify Him" in parshas Beshalach (Shemos 15:2). In both verses, the word 'this' occurs, and the rabbis explain that just as, in parshas Beshalach, it refers to the experience of the divine presence, so too does it refer to such an experience in parshas Bo. Most commentators explain the blessing of the new moon referred to by the rabbis in this passage as meaning 'Kiddush Levonoh,' the monthly blessing and prayer said upon seeing the new moon. However, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Kasher, in his intriguing work, "HaAdam Al HaYareach" (Man on the Moon), written shortly after the historic 1969 moon landing, argues that it is difficult to say that this rabbinically enacted blessing has such tremendous repercussions, and, therefore, he brings midrashic sources to show that the Talmudic statement applies to the mitzvoh of Kiddush HaChodesh. Only

later in that Talmudic discussion, continues Rabbi Kasher, when Abaye says, 'therefore it must be said while standing,' is the reference to Kiddush Levonoh. However even if we do not accept Rabbi Kasher's theory, we can still argue that if Kiddush Levonoh is tantamount to receiving the divine presence, then Kiddush Hachodesh certainly is!

Why is an encounter with the new moon of such significance? Rabbi Kasher connects this Talmudic statement to another Talmudic statement, that bringing in guests is greater than receiving the divine presence (Shabbos 127a). He explains this by saying that a human being, who is made in God's image, is a reflection of the greatness of God. In the same way, the moon, which is a creation of God and was given, by God, control over certain aspects of the world, is a reflection of God, who gave it those powers. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, in his commentary to Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 426:2), Aruch HaShulchan, writes that the moon which has no light of its own, but only reflects the light of the sun, symbolizes the Jewish people, who are a reflection of God's light in the world. On a wider level, Rabbeinu Bachya, in his commentary to parshas Bo, writes that someone who sees the moon when it is at its monthly point of renewal, after its period of invisibility, is, through it, able to discern that God created the world. Rabbi Moshe of Premesla, in his halachic work, *Match Moshe*, writes, in the name of Rabbeinu Hertz, that this is the meaning behind the midrash, cited by Rashi in the beginning of his Torah commentary, which says that the Torah, by right, should have begun with the mitzvoh of Kiddush HaChodesh, since this mitzvoh has the ability to teach us that God created the universe, just as the Torah's account of the actual creation does.

We still need to understand, however, how the sanctification of the new moon, with all its religious significance, has any relevance to the mitzvoh of Korban Pesach. The Midrash Tanchuma (Vayeira 4) says that as a reward to Avrohom for using the word 'na' - please - when he said, to his guests, "Let a little bit of water be taken, please" (Bereishis 18:4), his descendants were given the mitzvoh of Korban Pesach of which it is said "do not eat of it (in a state of) 'na'" (i.e., in a raw state) (Shemos 12:9). Rabbi Ya'akov Shlomo Weinberg, a student of the late Rabbi Ya'akov Shmuel Weinberg of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, explains this enigmatic midrash on the basis

of the approach of the Maharal of Prague to the mitzvoh of Korban Pesach, as presented in his work *Gevuros HaShem*. Maharal writes that the major message of the Korban Pesach is the unity of God. That is why the korban must be roasted whole, and not cooked, since the cooking process tends to break up the animal. The korban must also be eaten in one house, and no bones can be broken while consuming it. The detailed laws of the Korban Pesach thus focus on the need to maintain its unity, because through this korban we learn of the unity of God, which was rejected by the Egyptians. Avrohom, too, taught his guests the unity of God, as exemplified by his request to bring them water, with which, the rabbis tell us, he washed their feet from the dust that he feared they had been worshiping. On a wider scale, we can say that when Avrohom showed honor to his guests, he was showing them that he valued them, because, as creations of God made in His image, they reflected God's unity. Receiving guests is a dignified way, moreover, gives the guests themselves a heightened sense of self-esteem, and impresses upon them their own significance as creations of God and reflections of His unity. This aspect of hospitality to guests was driven home to me a week ago in Omaha, Nebraska, when I spent Shabbos at the home of a long-time subscriber to Netvort, who was being honored, together with his wife, by their synagogue, Beth Tephilah, for all the chesed they have done over the years. This couple had a guest book, which they asked all who stayed at their home to sign before leaving. I had never seen this before in any home where I had stayed, and I felt it conveyed a sense that the hosts felt honored by the presence of their guests in their home. When Avrohom treated his guests in a dignified manner, then, he taught them of the unity of God, and, as a reward, his descendants were given the mitzvoh of Korban Pesach and its surrounding regulations, which also teach us of the unity of God.

Thus, the blessing of the new moon, which is really directed to God, acknowledges God's control of all the forces in the universe, and, thus His unity, just as the Korban Pesach and its surrounding laws do. For this reason, these two mitzvos are juxtaposed, as the first mitzvos given to the Jewish people, the bearers of God's name in this world.

The Strength of Humility

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Jan 21, 2021)

At the end of this week's Parsha, we have the Mitzvah of Tefillin—two of the four parshios of Tefillin. In the first instance the pasuk says: *Ve-hayah lecha le-os al yad'cha u'le-zikaron bein eineicha*. And in the second, the Torah phrases it a little differently: *Ve-hayah le-os al yad'chah u'le-totafos bein eineicha*. And Chazal point out that not only is there a difference in the Tefillin Shel Rosh (not for now) but even in the Tefillin Shel Yad. The first pasuk says *ve-hayah lecha le-os al yad'cha*, spelled *yud, dalet, and khaf sofis*. However, the second pasuk, spells it in an unusual way *yud, dalet, khaf, hei*. And we darshen from this that we must put the Tefillin Shel Yad on the *yad-keiha*—the left, weaker arm. (Yad means arm, not hand.) Ok a . Rav Lichtenstein once asked: Why would Hashem want us to davka put the tefillin on the weak arm? We have a rule in kol ha-Torah kula, in Shas and Halacha, that we do everything with the right hand or on the right side first. So why does the chashuv mitzva of Tefillin, which is keneged all our ma'asim, davka needs to be on our weaker arm? And if we say because it should be keneged the heart, what does that have to do with the weakness of the arm?

So Rav Lichtenstein asks: How did Chazal know to darshen the weakness of arms? How did they know that the extra *hei* of *yad'chah* implies the weaker arm? So you can say that they had some hidden reason. But maybe they got it from pshat of the pasuk: *Ve-hayah le-os al yad'cha u'letotafos bein eineicha, ki be-chozek yad hotzianu Hashem mi-Mitzrayim*. The psukim discuss the strength of the arm. And what is the point? Because arms represent koach and might. The Torah is concerned lest you say: *Kochi ve-otzem yadi asah li es ha-chayil ha-zeh*—you might attribute your success to your power. What does the pasuk tell us? Why do we put the Tefillin on our weak arm? It teaches us that *be-chozek yad hotzianu Hashem mi-Mitzrayim*. Who has a strong arm? Hashem! He is the one with the true *yad ha-chazakah*. We, the human beings, are with the *yad keiha*—with a weak hand. Ultimately, when you have to do something with your left hand—like if I tell you to sign your name with your left hand—you would feel awkward and powerless. You feel like you don't know what you are doing and really struggle to accomplish what you want to do. Ultimately, Tefillin reminds us that this is true, regardless of which hand you

use. We are human beings who are limited. We might fool ourselves into thinking that we are in charge, have the power to do whatever we want, and impose our will on the world in an unlimited fashion. But it is not true! There is only One with the *chozek yad*—that's Hashem! We put on the Tefillin to remind ourselves of our weakness.... However, if so, what is the source of our remarkable success? Look around today. Why are a tiny number of Jews, after surviving thousands of years, sitting here in Israel—a tiny place, hard to find on the map, yet one of the most militarily powerful countries in the world, etc.? We pat ourselves on the back all the time for all our great accomplishments. It's not because our *yad* is strong—because it's weak. Hashem's *chozek yad* is holding and moving ours and giving it power so that we can succeed in whatever we do. And specifically, tying this idea to Eretz Yisroel, Rav Lichtenstein said: Why does it only come up in the second pasuk? Because the first pasuk talks about *ve-hayah ki yeivi'echa Hashem el Eretz ha-Kena'ani ve-ha-Chiti ve-ha-Emori ve-ha-Chivi ve-ha-Yevusi asher nishba la'avoseicha lases lach Eretz zavas chalav u-devash* etc.—when you go into the land that Hashem promised to give you. It has to do with Eretz Yisroel. The second parsha, however, goes a bit further. *Ve-hayah ki-yeivi'echa Hashem el Eretz ha-Kena'ani ka-asher nishba lecha ve-la'avosecha u-nesanah lach*—and He did give it to you! They must bring Pesach Gilgal—even before kibush ve-chiluk. As soon as you enter Eretz Yisroel, certain chiyuvim technically apply and are delineated in the first parsha. But in the second parsha, Hashem already gave you Eretz Yisroel. You conquered Eretz Yisroel, and you are strong, have a big army and a great economy—you have succeeded, and you have everything. That's davka when you need to remember the lesson of *yad keiha*—that it's really *asher Hashem nasan lach*—when you are so excited about your success. Obviously, this is true in everyone's life—even if you live in Australia. We all have our successes in life. How do you make sure to remember that it's *asher Hashem nasan lach*, and you did not accomplish it by yourself? The answer is that every morning (and in the old days, all day long) *ve-haya le-os al yad'chah* (read: *yad-keiha*). You put Hashem's *yad chazakah* on your *yad keiha* (in the form of Tefillin), and you will remember who is behind all that you have “accomplished” in the world. Shabbat Shalom.

Pharaoh's Thrice Hardened Heart and Triplicate Redemption

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

At the beginning of Parshas Bo, Moshe asked Pharaoh to let Bnei Yisrael go. Pharaoh responded with a question: "Whom do you want me to release? Whom should I allow to leave Egypt?" Moshe replied, "*B'nareinu u'vizkeineinu neileich, b'vaneinu u'vivnoseinu b'tzoneinu u'vivkareinu neileich ki chag Hashem lanu*, We will go with our old people and young people, with our sons and daughters, with our sheep and our cattle, for it is our holiday for Hashem." Pharaoh responded with his blessing for the men to leave but not more than that, and definitely no children. He then chased Moshe out of the palace.

After this exchange, Hashem punished Pharaoh with the plague of arbe, the eighth of the makkos, and then choshech, the ninth of the makkos. After the black darkness enveloped Mitzrayim for three days, Pharaoh said to Moshe, "Yes, you can take your children, But I will not allow you to take cattle." Moshe asserted, "We will take everything we need, all of our livestock." Pharaoh said, "I will let you take the children, but not the cattle." Pharaoh again drove Moshe from the palace. Then, after makkas bechoros, Pharaoh finally relented and sent out Bnei Yisrael together with their children and their cattle.

Pharaoh changed his mind several times. What is the meaning of this progression? At first, Pharaoh allowed men but not children, then children but not cattle, and then in the end he freed all adults, children, and cattle. What are we to make of this?

Why Did Hashem Take Away Pharaoh's Free Will?

Hashem told Moshe from the very beginning of his mission, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart. I will strengthen his heart so that he will not give in to the plagues." Over the course of the plagues, especially the last five, the Torah says that Hashem interfered in Pharaoh's decision-making process, strengthening his heart. Hashem gave Pharaoh the resilience to resist the pressure of the makkos. The commentaries on the Torah address a basic question. In Torah, the principle of free will is fundamental to the human experience; all adults are free to choose between good and evil. Adam and Chava were first given free choice to choose to eat from the Eitz Hada'as or to refrain. We could say the whole Torah is about people choosing between good and evil. "*R'eih nasati l'fanecha hayom es hachayim v'es hatov v'es hamaves v'es hara*, I have placed in

front of you the choice between good and evil, between life and death" (Devarim 30:15). "You should choose life!" (ibid. 19). It is as if Hashem said, "I will not force your choices. I enable and charge you to choose." The moral choice is left completely up to people.

If so, how and why did Hashem interfere with Pharaoh's response to the moral dilemma of whether or not to free the Jews? This freedom of choice is Hashem's gift to humanity. Had Pharaoh been left alone, he probably would have released the Jews after the fifth or sixth plague. Why did Hashem break the cardinal rule of giving man free choice?

The Shem Mishmuel offers three answers. The first is from the Rambam. In Hilchos Teshuva (6:1-2), the Rambam writes that the core of repentance is freedom of choice. We have freedom to choose whether or not to sin, whether or not to do a good deed. Even after sinning, we maintain an amazing freedom of choice. We have the choice to repent and thus retroactively revoke the bad deed. This is an amazing kindness of God. If we regret our sin and decide never to do it again, the sin can be wiped out or even turned into a good deed. This power of choice remains even after the sin.

The Rambam then asks: how did Pharaoh lose the power to repent? Pharaoh was condemned to remain evil until Hashem delivered the final punishment to Pharaoh and his people. The Rambam explains that there is an exception in very rare cases for particularly evil people such as Pharaoh. When a person reaches such extraordinary levels of evil, Hashem revokes the power to repent. Hashem will not accept his teshuva and, in fact, He won't even allow him to do teshuva. Hashem will not let him change, and he will remain evil to the very end. Similarly, in our times, Hitler died as Hitler, unrepentant. The Rambam explains that this is a punishment from Hashem, because He is so disgusted by the person that He takes away his power to change. The extreme sinner then becomes like an animal who cannot repent past deeds. These evil people have made themselves into animals, and Hashem takes away their freedom of choice. This is why Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart.

The Ramban offers a second answer to this question. He writes that people sometimes repent for different reasons. In the best case, a person realizes the evil of his deeds. He

is ashamed and regretful, so he asks God to forgive him. This is an appropriate, higher level of repentance. This is cognitive repentance, that of the neshama and seichel, in which a person truly understands how evil he has become and wants that evil expunged from his personal history.

Sometimes, though, a person repents out of fear of punishments that will come in response to his evil deeds. Pharaoh was not repenting because he recognized the evil of his deeds. If you would have asked him if it was wrong to enslave an entire nation, if it was wrong to throw babies into the river, he would have said, "It is not wrong at all. We have the right to subjugate them, they are our possessions." Pharaoh still believed in the moral correctness of his actions. Why would Pharaoh want to release the Jews after the fifth or sixth makka? He himself didn't want to suffer and didn't want his people to suffer so much. This kind of teshuva is not morally motivated. It is just accommodating a superior force. The Ramban says that sometimes Hashem will interfere with this kind of teshuva. Sometimes, Hashem will place an irrational obstinacy in the person to withstand the punishments that Hashem is sending his way. Pharaoh was given a superhuman stubbornness so that he retained the ability to maintain his immoral beliefs. He did so, in fact, until the very end. The Ramban explains that this is not an exception to the rule of free will. Pharaoh chose to keep his evil perspective even amid the horrible punishments. It is as if Hashem said, "I will not let him bend as a stick being broken in two. I will let him keep his immoral choice, because I want to punish the Egyptians some more. I want the world to learn more about My justice. I will not let Pharaoh give in due to practical considerations. As long as Pharaoh is committed to evil, I will not help him repent."

To summarize, the Rambam says God took away Pharaoh's capacity to choose good. The Ramban says the moral choice always was there. If he would have chosen to recognize that his ways were immoral, God would have given him the choice to repent. But Pharaoh wanted to repent only for practical considerations, because he was being bullied and battered. Therefore, God bolstered him so that he wouldn't feel compelled to give in to outside pressures.

A third explanation was given by the father of the Shem Mishmuel, the Avnei Neizer. The human being is a combination of intellect and emotion. Emotions are dynamic, and they fluctuate. A person can fluctuate

between hatred and love, between goodness and wickedness, between kindness and selfishness. The emotional makeup of a man or woman is kaleidoscopic. There are different phases and shades. Emotions are continuously changing; they are not monochromatic. The seichel of a person, on the other hand, does not change. An intellectual concept, such as the equation two plus two equals four, does not change. Whether or not I like you can change in a moment because it is an emotional concept.

Pharaoh and his intellect asserted that slavery was an important backbone of the Egyptian economy. The country was built on the work of the slaves. With slave power, Egypt was able to build pyramids. It was able to become the strongest empire on the planet. If Egypt were to free the slaves, it would collapse. This was an issue of politics, economics, and national security. Pharaoh said, "Egypt cannot bend on this issue of slavery, no matter the disasters that befall us in the form of the plagues of Moshe. The alternative, a total collapse of our empire, is worse. It is a fundamental existential threat to our way of life." Pharaoh said, "I will not free slaves, no matter the price. Freeing the slaves would be national suicide."

This was an intellectual stance. Intellect is stubborn and unchanging. If intellect believes that something is true, it does not change. Pharaoh said that the whole logic and concept of his country was built on the work of the slaves. Without slave power, there would be no Egypt. He was therefore ready to suffer any and all plagues to keep the slaves. The mind is stronger than outside circumstances. This was the stubbornness of Pharaoh, the stubbornness of seichel. Hashem merely helped his seichel be stronger than his emotional fears.

Three Levels of National Soul

We find three different terms in the Torah when referring to Pharaoh and Mitzrayim. Sometimes, the Torah refers to Pharaoh by name: Pharaoh. Other times, the Torah refers to him as melech Mitzrayim, the king of Egypt. And sometimes, the Torah refers to Mitzrayim as an acting entity. What is behind these different terms?

"Pharaoh" refers to the person who sat on the throne. "Melech Mitzrayim," according to the Zohar, refers to the archangel of Egypt. Every nation has an angel that represents its national energy. The word Mitzrayim refers to the people of Egypt. Every nation, just like every individual, has three levels of existence. These levels are related to the three levels of the soul: nefesh, ruach, and neshama. Nefesh refers to the

fundamental, physical life force. Ruach refers to the spirit, the emotional life of a person. Neshama refers to seichel, the intellectual life of a person.

This multi-level existence is true about nations as well. Every nation has an instinctive life force, a nefesh. Every nation has a ruach, a certain spirit and emotional style. Every nation also has a neshama—beliefs, values, and intellectual ideas that drive that nation.

Pharaoh represents the neshama, the highest level of intellectual life. Melech Mitzrayim, the archangel, represents the ruach, the spirit of Egypt. The people of Egypt are the fundamental life force of the nation, corresponding to the nefesh.

Three Main Sins

The three main sins of human beings—idolatry, licentiousness, and murder—stem from these three levels of human existence. The nefesh, the fundamental biological life force, is corrupted by the sin of murder. The higher, spiritual life force is corrupted by giluy arayos. And the sin that corrupts the human intellect is idolatry. Egypt corrupted all three levels. There was much murder in Egyptian society. We know this all too well, because we were the victims! Egypt also had a corrupt spirit, full of licentiousness, as stated in the book of Yechezkel (chapter 23). At the intellectual neshama level, Pharaoh refused to acknowledge the existence of God. Instead, Pharaoh insisted and said, “I have made myself.”

These three levels of Egyptians were all corrupt. Therefore the plagues attacked the country on all three levels—the basic life force, the spiritual, and the intellectual values.

Kabbala and Chassidus explain the split in the parshiyos that detail the makkos. Parshas Va'eira recounts seven plagues, while Parshas Bo has the last three. Kabbala teaches that there are ten levels of spirituality in the world (sefiros), divided into two sections. The higher section consists of mochin, the three intellectual manifestations of God in the world. The lower section consists of middos, the seven emotional states of God's interaction with the world. These seven represent the nefesh and ruach. The higher three mochin represent Hashem's intellect as it comes into the world. Together, these sefiros represent God's creative, life-giving energy on three levels: as a life force, as a spiritual drive, and as an intellectual power.

Interestingly, the plagues worked backwards. The first plagues started by attacking the life force of Egypt. Then

they worked their way up to the spirit. The last three makkos, the ones mentioned in Parshas Bo, attacked the top three intellectual sefiros of keser, chochma, and bina. Thus, the plagues attacked and deconstructed the defiled intellect, spirit, and physicality of Egypt.

Three Hardened Hearts

We find three terms in relation to Pharaoh's obstinate refusal to release the Jews: 1) *hiksha*, Pharaoh's heart was hard; 2) *vayechezak*, he strengthened his heart; and 3) *kaveid lev*, his heart was heavy.

The Shem Mishmuel explains that these three terms relate to the different levels of Pharaoh's soul. At the level of nefesh, Pharaoh should have instinctively responded to the first makkos. But *kaveid lev Pharaoh*, his instinct was dense and dead, like a finger that has lost too much blood. Even if damaged, the body doesn't respond. This is why Pharaoh didn't respond like any normal person would have responded to the pain of the makkos.

Sometimes, people respond to emotional stimuli. Pharaoh should have been overwhelmed by fear when he saw the wild animals, locusts, and other plagues. Normal people would have been terrified. But he wasn't, because Hashem gave him bravery, *hiksha es libo*. No matter what was happening around him, Pharaoh had courage. The Shem Mishmuel calls this courage *k'shei ruach*.

Finally, Hashem gave Pharaoh strength of heart, meaning Hashem empowered Pharaoh's intellect to maintain his stance. Pharaoh held his conviction that the slaves must remain in Egypt under all costs. This is *chazak lev Pharaoh*, strong conviction of mind.

Thus, we see that Hashem strengthened Pharaoh on all three levels: nefesh, ruach, and seichel.

Pharaoh's Debate with Moshe

During the eighth plague, the sorcerers said to Pharaoh, “Don't you know that Mitzrayim is doomed?” They appealed to his reason. Even with Pharaoh's beliefs about what was necessary for the survival of Egypt, it didn't matter. Egypt was being utterly destroyed. Pharaoh's nefesh and ruach had already been defeated by the earlier plagues. Now, Pharaoh's own intellect was beginning to wonder. “Maybe I was wrong? Maybe the country actually is being destroyed?” So, he called to Moshe and asked, “Who will leave?” “Men and children,” Moshe responds. Pharaoh accepted that the men could go, but not the children. “If you are going to celebrate a holiday for your God, what do little children know about God and celebrations? They

are wearing diapers; how can they celebrate with God?! This is an illogical request, you must be tricking me. I will not accept this illogical request, even though I am already willing to release you and relax the slavery demand.” Moshe insisted, though, that the people must take their children with them.

Moshe could have brought the adults to Har Sinai to receive the Torah and then returned to take the children. Why did Moshe need to take the children out of Egypt? The Jewish People in Egypt were completely enveloped by the society of that country, like a fetus in its mother’s womb. Moshe reasoned, “How can we bring Torah to children who are completely absorbed in Egypt? If they would remain inside that country, we would not be able to reach them.” Moshe therefore insisted, “We must take them out of this environment so they will have a chance of knowing what Torah is. We can’t train them in this country.”

Pharaoh had no grasp of the human soul. We already analyzed his failure at the levels of nefesh, ruach, and seichel. But there still are two more levels: *chaya* and *yechida*, life and oneness. These two levels of the soul are outside of the body. Most people are aware of their instincts, emotions, and their intellect. But there are things beyond instinct, emotion, and intellect. With instinct, we act. Emotion makes us feel. We think with intellect. But who is the identity who employs these faculties and acts in these ways? This is our *chaya* and *yechida*. They are us, but they are beyond our awareness. The Shem Mishmuel calls this a *makif*. A *makif* surrounds us. It is beyond the individual details of who we are as we understand ourselves. There is something beyond each of us that we don’t understand.

Many people ponder the question: Who am I? What is the central it that is I? It is difficult to come to the essential I. I am more than my instincts, emotions, and intellect. I exceed all three and am deeper than them. This essential I is called the *chaya*. As much as I search for this part and I know it is there, it still is beyond me. The Shem Mishmuel sometimes refers to this level as *tzelem Elokim*, the image of God. Obviously, the image of God cannot be contained completely within the human body. My *tzelem Elokim* is of a much greater magnitude. I know that I am more than my thinking, emotions, and instincts. It is a deep, broad, undefinable identity. This is me, myself. This is *chaya*.

Moshe told Pharaoh, “We must take our children. You cannot understand it.” This is a *makif*, a concept beyond logic. We cannot fully explain the commitment of a parent

to a child, even though it has many factors of intellect, instinct, and emotion. The commitment of Jewish parents to their children is especially difficult to explain. Our children are more important to us in some ways than we ourselves are. They are a *makif*, an enveloping, overarching purpose for our lives. This dedication is beyond our understanding, but it is essential to who we are as Jews. It is at our core identity as God’s people. As the Torah states about Hashem’s choice of Avraham to begin the Jewish People, “*Ki y’dativ l’ma’an asher y’tzave es banav v’es beiso acharav v’sham’ru derech Hashem*. I have recognized him and know that he will train his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem” (Bereishis 18:19).

After the next plague, Pharaoh asked, “Why would you need to take the animals? Don’t take them!” The Shem Mishmuel explains that the second *makif* is called *yechida*. *Chaya* envelopes me and includes my children with me. But there is an even greater envelope, that of the *yechida*. At this level, everything is interrelated, connected in a mysterious, cosmic connection. We are all connected; not just parents and children, but all people, animals, inanimate objects, and the whole world.

Moshe proclaimed to Pharaoh that freedom is not just for adult people. Freedom must include children, animals, and all things. The freedom from *Mitzrayim* extends into the possessions and surroundings of the Jewish People. Everything has to be free.

This is why Moshe insisted that we must take our animals out with us. This may also explain why Hashem instructed the Jews to take things from the Egyptians. The Exodus from Egypt brought everything out of Egypt, thereby bringing freedom to the entire world.

This lesson of the *makif* carries amazing implications. Beyond our basic interests and experiences, there are greater, unfathomable elements that are eternal. This aspect of *yechida* unites all elements of creation. This is a sacred value and a secret of Torah, Kabbalah, and Chassidus. We should recognize the existence of things that are beyond us. The great Chassidic Rebbes would experience the *chaya* and *yechida* in their daily lives as they walked through the world, and so can we.

May we make good choices and develop all the levels of our individual and communal souls, the soul within us and the soul around and beyond us. May we merit the universal redemption of the world and all of its peoples, especially the Jewish nation and each individual Jew.

Don't Tell

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The night had finally arrived. After centuries of persecution and brutal tyranny the night of our liberation was finally here. Moshe hastily delivered divine instructions for this dramatic evening of independence. To transform this evening into the anniversary of Jewish identity, ceremonies and rituals were necessary. That night in Egypt, the first seder was conducted, and since then, every annual Pesach seder across the globe and across time has recreated that epic night of Jewish nationhood.

In addition to observing rituals such as the Pesach sacrifice, and the unleavened matzo bread, we were also instructed to solicit gold, silver and linens from our Egyptian “friends” and neighbors. Oddly, these essential materials were supplied by our former Egyptian nemeses rather than directly by Hashem Himself. In a mere few days, Hashem would deliver daily bread from Heaven and would draw sweet drinking water from desert boulders. He could have easily supplied us with gold and silver from supernatural desert quarries or furnished linens from passing desert caravans. Yet, for some reason, on the eve of the great Exodus, despite all the frantic activity, we were expected to solicit these gifts from our Egyptian “friends”.

Enemies Become Audiences

Our relationship with the rank-and-file Egyptian citizenry was undergoing a remarkable transformation. For two centuries we had been persecuted, dehumanized, and depicted as a sub-race of slaves, unworthy of freedom or dignity. After a yearlong cycle of supernatural plagues, punishing Egypt but completely bypassing the Jewish population, it became clear that we were favored by a Higher being. Moshe was fast evolving into a national celebrity and Jewish popularity surged. By the night of the actual Exodus, most of the Egyptian population was strongly in favor of releasing the Jewish slaves. Egypt wasn't being defeated, it was being slowly persuaded.

Education, Not Defeat

Our Exodus from Egypt was more than just a political revolution or an emancipation of slaves. The Exodus was a religious revolution introducing

Hashem to the ancient pagan imagination. This night was the grand debut of monotheism in a world darkened

by pagan superstition and persecuted by human brutality. Knowledge of Hashem would first spread through Egypt, the cradle of ancient civilization, and, eventually, would circulate throughout the Mediterranean basin. For two centuries the average Egyptian was a willing accomplice in the heinous crimes of human slavery, but, at this point, they began to appreciate Hashem and respect His chosen people. They weren't defeated as much as they were converted.

Requesting gold and clothing from the Egyptians assured that they would be psychologically invested in our journey and in our welfare. By donating these necessities, the Egyptians would view themselves as sponsors of our trip to Israel and as underwriters of our national project. In their minds, our journey would become their journey, allowing our discovery of Hashem to influence their cultural evolution.

Evidently, this tactic was successful as, over the next 900 years, Egypt remained a staunch ally of the Jewish state formed by their former slaves. Shlomo Hamelech married an Egyptian princess, and although his marriage was sharply criticized, it reflected the overall warm diplomatic relations between the two empires. One of the Egyptian Pharos donated large tracts of land he had conquered in Israel, to what would become an immense Jewish palace complex. In the end of the First mikdash era, Jews fled to Egypt for safe haven from the raiding Babylonian mercenaries. Beginning with its founding in the 3rd century BCE, Alexandria became a leading Jewish population center, as Egypt, in general, hosted Jewish communities for over 2300 years.

On this night we didn't extinguish our enemies but inspired them to collaborate with us in our great project of human history and religion.

Revenge is Dark

Soliciting these materials from the Egyptians also assured that the newly freed slaves wouldn't commit spiteful crimes of retribution toward their former oppressors. Typically, the overthrow of political systems are violent events as years of pain and suffering lead to vicious revenge attacks against the previous oppressors. There was a real danger that the night of the Exodus would turn into a bloodbath, as angry slaves rampaged throughout Egypt, butchering

lives and looting homes. To preempt retaliatory violence, we were directed to kindly request provisions rather than violently seizing them. Soliciting gifts prevented darker and more violent forces from emerging.

In fact, Hashem never actually commanded us to solicit these materials, but rather, requested of us to procure these materials. By not imposing His authority upon us, He set an example that we shouldn't unilaterally impose our newly attained authority upon the Egyptians. From a legal standpoint, we were owed substantial wages for two centuries of manual labor, yet these reparations were voluntarily handed over, rather than forcefully confiscated.

It is always preferable to achieve results through joint measures rather than through unilateral imposition. Furthermore, acting with brute force and without agreement, cultivates aggressive tendencies in our own personalities and corrodes our relationships. It is always tempting to wield power to quickly and effortlessly achieve our goals, but this approach rarely ends well for either party. Agreement is always preferable to force, both in politics and in our personal lives.

Politics of Extinction

Many modern democracies have degenerated into the politics of retaliation. Severe political polarization has eroded the spirit of collaboration, creating a culture of victimhood in which the minority feels aggrieved by the policies of the majority. When the victimized minority ultimately regains power, it quickly abolishes previous policies and unilaterally imposes its own agendas, without securing larger social consensus. Each camp looks to "extinguish" their political enemies rather than to build unity and accord.

In Israel, we are currently experiencing a wave of retaliatory politics, as a new government, which had felt victimized by the previous one, looks to rapidly reform the judicial system and to overhaul the policies of law enforcement. The current government feels aggrieved by the policies of the past administration, and feels morally justified in unilaterally correcting those injustices and unfair policies.

Without debating the merits or demerits of these new policies, one thing is clear: this form of unilateral imposition erodes social unity. In the short term, it may appear advantageous to the current majority, but in the long term, it is counterproductive, as large sectors of the population feel dispossessed of a sense of shared national

enterprise. Sidelining sectors of the population incites anger and invites future cycles of political retaliation. Additionally, people who feel deprived of their voice are unlikely to contribute to the common good of society. In the long term no one benefits, not even those currently in power.

A Culture of Triumph

Not only do these tactics create social division, but they also set unhealthy examples for individual behavior. What happens in the political arena trickles down to personal behavior. Verbal aggression by politicians will always lead to a more hostile and violent social interactions. Similarly, triumphalism in the political sphere will inspire copycat behavior and the unhealthy use of authority and force in our relationships. Tactics which celebrate the use of power, rather than aiming for consensus will yield a society which respects power rather than honoring cooperation. Societies and communities built upon power are not healthy.

A Bad Image for Religion

Imposing religious policies is particularly corrosive to religion itself. Religious Jews desperately seek a religious society, but legislation of religion can be counterproductive in the long term. There may be certain national "spaces" such as Shabbat, kashrut or marriage which require legislation to preserve the Jewish nature or identity of our public state. However, widespread imposition of religion can boomerang.

While religious Jews appreciate that serving Hashem enhances the human experience, secular Jews don't always see it that way. Sadly, religion is widely viewed as restrictive of human freedom and obstructive of individual expression. Religious Jews must demonstrate the beauty and dignity of a life of divine commandment and moral commitment. Imposing religion exacerbates negative associations with religion and poisons public attitudes about religion. Legislation can secure and enrich our own religious experience, but it will not inspire a broad spectrum of the Jewish population toward the beauty of religion.

Ask don't tell. It usually is more successful in the long term. So it was in Egypt and so it has been throughout history.

The Dignity of Old Age

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, after two hundred and ten years, the Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt. Parshas Bo begins with the eighth plague, Makkas Arbeh - the locust swarm. As was done before each plague, Pharaoh was warned that if he did not let the Israelites leave, G-d would strike Egypt with Heavenly wrath. Even Pharaoh's advisors have had enough, and they said to Pharaoh: *עד-מתי יהיה זה לנו למוקש - ויעבדו את-יהוה אלקיהם; הקטרם תדע, כי אבדה-שלח את-האנשים, ויעבדו את-יהוה אלקיהם - until when will this (nation) be for us a snare? Send the men and they will worship Hashem their G-d; do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed!?* (Shemos 10:7).

Moshe and Aharon were brought before Pharaoh and he said: go and worship Hashem your G-d... (But) who and who is going? (10:8). And Moshe famously answered: *בנערינו ובזקנינו גלד; בבנינו ובנותנו בצאננו ובבקרנו, גלד--כי חג-ה' לנו - with our youth and our elders we will go; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our cattle we will go, for a festival to G-d it is for us* (10:9).

When Pharaoh heard that Moshe wanted the entire nation to go, he rescinded permission, and said that only the men could go. This was unacceptable to Moshe, and the plague of the locust-swarm inundated the land. For Am Yisrael, our survival, continuity and eternity lies in the beauty of the bridge that spans the ages. The mesorah of the past - our elders - reaches forth into the future - our youth. Only with our youth and our elders, with our sons and our daughters, can we have a festival to G-d.

Whereas in some other cultures, the elders are seen as obsolete and past their prime, not in the "know" and "antiquated and outdated", in Yahadus, they are accorded the greatest respect. We know our past, present and future lies in the wisdom, Torah and truisms that they pass on to us. Rather than denigrate our elders, chalilah, we respect and revere them. This is codified as a mitzvah d'Oraisa incumbent upon all: *מפני שיבה תקום, והדרת פני זקן - before a hoary head you shall rise, and give glory to the face of an older person, and you shall revere your G-d, I am Hashem* (Vayikra 19:32).

It is our elders who teach our youth how to live with dignity, how to cling to the mesorah, how to recall the past to build the future, and how to remain respectful and respected at every age. Without the youth and the elderly, Moshe said to Pharaoh, we will not go. Either we all go, or

no one goes. On aging and ones impact and mission in old age, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, teaches [related by the Rav at YU in 1981]: "Interesting is the sentence authored by King David: *ימי-שנותינו בהם שבעים שנה ואם בגבורת שמונים שנה - The days of our years are seventy years, or by reason of special courage they are eighty years* (Ps.90:10). Not everyone lives to be seventy, only some do. If one has courage, he may attain the age of eighty... What does this actually mean? It means that in order to reach eighty and to live with dignity, you have to be a courageous person. How does this courage express itself? First of all, in admitting that you are eighty years old. Some people do not admit their age. They act as if they were still twenty. First of all, admitting one's age. Secondly, in having the courage to carry on, even though certain faculties are indeed affected by one's age. One must go on! It is even more than that; it is the courage not to get frightened whenever one feels a pain. Usually, an old man develops hypochondria. Any change that occurs in him frightens him. The same is true intellectually. An old man should not say that he cannot create anymore, that he cannot carry on; that he has to retire (from life) now. This is also cowardice.

"...Old age in modern life is basically cowardice and laziness.

"That is why the psalmist tells us that if you have courage you will achieve a much more pleasant old age than the modern concept. Nowadays, the greatest problem for the aged is what to do with their time. Years ago, man also got old, but then there was no question about what to do with time. They used to go to shul and study a blatt of Gemara. I knew people who were eighty-five or ninety. They used to come to the beis medrash where I learned. They came regularly every night. They used to take out a Gemara, light a candle, and study for a couple of hours. They had a feeling for time. Time was precious to them, as it is to everyone. There was no problem, for the elderly, of what to do to pass the time.

"One old man recently told me that, thank G-d, he today has no financial problems. This has always been his main preoccupation, and now he does not know what to do with his time. This is his main problem. I told him that with your time you can do a lot. Just be careful that the Almighty does not take time away from you!" (The Rav, v.2, p.3-4).

On Sunday night, the eve of Taanis Esther 5746 (1986) Hatzalah was called. Rav Moshe (Feinstein) zt'l had to be rushed to the hospital immediately. As the ambulance went speeding through the streets, he felt his strength waning. He then said, "*Ich hob mehr nisht ken ko'ach* (I have no more strength)." Those were his last words.

"How much strength had he had for the last several years? Very little, but whatever strength was left in him was devoted to Hashem, to Torah and to the klal. As long as he had strength - any strength - his service continued. He would not stop working at his full capacity, as he had for ninety-one years. And then, he had no more strength... It has been pointed out that the 5,746th verse in Torah reads:

The Subtle Secrets of the 10 Plagues

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week's Torah portion, parashat Bo, describes the last three of the ten plagues that struck the Egyptians in Egypt. While the order and nature of the Ten Plagues seems quite straightforward, they are anything but that.

One of the basic operating principals of the Torah is that nothing in the Torah is ever accidental or arbitrary. Everything is ("Divinely") well thought out, organized, and planned. A second important principal of the biblical narrative is that all actions and deeds in the Torah operate on the basis of *מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה*—*midah k'neged midah*—a measure for measure. No act is ever unaccounted for—no good deed is ever uncompensated, and no evil deed ever goes unpunished. Take, for example, the story of Cain, who kills his brother, Abel. Cain's punishment (Genesis 4:12) is that he will always be a wanderer on the face of the earth. The reason for this particular punishment is due to the fact that Cain polluted the earth with the blood of his brother. Consequently, the earth rejects him, and will always tremble under his feet.

Similarly, we learn that Judah deceives his father, Jacob, with a he-goat, dipping Joseph's coat of many colors into the blood of the goat and sending it to Jacob, asking (Genesis 37:31-32): "Is this the coat of your son? Do you recognize it?" Likewise, Judah himself (Genesis 38:20-23), is deceived with a he-goat, when he attempts to pay the harlot, (actually, his daughter-in-law, Tamar), and cannot find her. Another instance of this symmetry is the fact that Jacob is separated from his parents for 22 years when he

And it came to pass after Moshe had finished writing down the words of this Torah in a book to the very end (Devarim 31:24). Appropriate words for the gadol who was named after Moshe Rabbeinu, and who passed away in the year 5746" (Reb Moshe, 25th yartzheit edition, Artscroll, p.490).

The psalmist beseeches G-d: *אַל-תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי, לְעֵת זְקֵנָה כְּכֹלֹת אֶל-תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי בְּחַי, אֶל-תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי* - Do not cast me away at the time of old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me (Ps.71:9). Not only do we ask G-d to support us, but we must make use of every day, hour and moment, to serve Hashem and His people as best as we can in the time we are allotted. For our nation depends on the youth and the elderly, and the bridge between the past and future, so we can build in the present.

runs to Laban. Joseph is similarly separated from Jacob for 22 years when he's sold by his brothers. Indeed, there's no deed that's unaccounted for, *midah k'neged midah*—measure for measure—there's always a balance.

When we carefully study the ten plagues with which the Egyptians were struck, we discover an uncanny sense of balance that is abundantly amplified upon in the Midrash (the legendary interpretation of the Bible). The Midrash analyzes the purpose of each specific plague. Why did the Nile turn into blood? Because the Egyptians forced the Jews to haul water from the Nile. Hence, the water is punished along with the Egyptians. Why do the frogs strike the Egyptians? Because the Egyptians made the Jews serve as porters, and now frogs ruin all the merchandise in Egypt, so Jews can no longer serve as porters. *כְּנִים*, *Keenim*, lice—the the Jews were forced to serve as farmers, so the earth was overridden with lice, and the land could no longer be farmed.

עָרֹב, *Arov*, which is often interpreted as a plague of wild animals, is visited on the Egyptians because the Jews were sent to the forests to trap wild animals for the Egyptians. Now the wild animals overrun all of Egypt. The plague of *דָּבָר*, *Dever*—death of the animals, is due to the fact that the Jews were made into shepherds, and now all the flocks die. Boils—since the Jews were forced to serve as bath-house attendants, now the Egyptian's bodies are covered with boils. The reason for the hail is due to the fact that the Jews were never paid for their agricultural work in the fields. Now the hail comes to break the trees and the orchards,

rendering the fields valueless. Arbeh—the Jews were forced to labor in the vineyards, the locust now consume all the vines. The Egyptians unfairly placed the Jews into prison, now intense darkness comes and “imprisons” the Egyptians wherever they may be. And, finally, of course, Pharaoh sought to drown the Jewish boys in the Nile River, now the first born of the Egyptians are killed in retribution.

Again and again, we see an accountability, where not only are the Egyptians punished, but the punishment is linked and corresponds to the specific evil deeds of the Egyptians.

There is a most intriguing, even “exotic,” statement recorded in the Zohar. The Zohar states that the Torah is written *אש שחורה על גבי אש לבנה*, black fire upon white fire, implying that the black letters of the Torah are “black fire,” while the parchment itself is “white fire.”

Since there’s nothing arbitrary in the Bible and everything is carefully balanced, the statement of the Zohar, of course, conveys a profound message. The Zohar maintains that the Torah is so holy and so full of profound meaning, that not only do the letters themselves have meanings, but the white spaces in between the letters of the Torah have profound meaning as well.

This, perhaps, explains the enigmatic passage that we read in the Passover Haggadah about the ten plagues. It reads: *רבי יהודה הוזהר הוזהר ונתן בהם סמנים*, Rabbi Judah provided “signs” concerning the ten plagues. Rabbi Judah in fact provided a triple acronym to help us recall the ten plagues, *שצד”ף ע”ד”ב*—each letter representing another of the ten plagues. With this acronym, Rabbi Judah divides the ten plagues into three groups of three. While the death of a first born is included in the last triplet, it really is in a class by itself.

Why does Rabbi Judah divide the ten plagues in such a manner and why the need for the mnemonic reminder in the first place? One of the central moments in the book of Genesis is undoubtedly the *ברית בין הבתרים*—“Brit

bain hab’tarim,” the Covenant between the Pieces. In this covenant, recorded in Genesis 15, G-d promises Abraham that within the next 400 years, the Jews will experience exile, servitude, and severe persecution, but they will eventually depart from the land of their travails with great wealth.

The “signs” that Rabbi Judah provides, in effect divide the ten plagues into three parts, each triplet corresponding to one of the three major elements of the covenant between the pieces: exile, servitude, and persecution. Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch brilliantly underscores that the ten plagues serve as “payback” for the Egyptians. How so? In the first plague of each triplet (plagues 1, 4 and 7) the Egyptians who exiled the Jewish people, will experience exile themselves: Plague 1: The Nile—the most identifiable feature of Egypt will turn to blood—Egypt will no longer be Egypt! Plague 4: Wild animals will overtake Egypt, Plague 7: Hail will fall in the warm climate of Egypt. Exile for the Egyptians: Egypt is no longer Egypt.

In the second plague of each triplet (plagues 2,5 and 8) the Egyptians will experience “enslavement.” Plague 2: The Egyptians will be subservient to the timorous frog, Plague 5: The animals will die, and the Egyptians will have to clear the land. Plague 8: The locust will enslave the Egyptians. The Egyptians themselves experience enslavement.

In the third plague of each triplet (plagues 3,6 and 9) the Egyptians will experience physical “persecution,” they will be subjected to Plague 3: Lice. Plague 6: Boils. Plague 9: Darkness—incarceration!

Thus, we see that the external structure of the ten plagues actually reflects an internal symmetry that is a fulfillment of the covenant between the pieces.

Nothing in the Torah is arbitrary. To the contrary, it is an extraordinarily meaningful text whose secrets are revealed to the discerning eye, through careful and devoted study.

These secrets clearly speak volumes about the Divine authorship of the Bible.

The Home as the Center of Religious Life

Rabbi Efram Goldberg

A large section of Parshas Bo is dedicated to the korban pesach, the sacrifice which Benei Yisrael offered on the night of Yetzias Mitzrayim, and which is to be brought each year in commemoration of this miracle, on the 14th of Nissan.

Significantly, the word *בית* – “home” – appears fourteen

times throughout this section. Indeed, the home and the family play a crucial role in this korban. Benei Yisrael were commanded to take a *שה לבית אבות שה לבית* – a sheep for each household (12:3). Moreover, they were commanded to remain home throughout the night (*לא תצאו איש מפתח* 12:22 – *ביתו עד בוקר*).

When we consider the way the korban pesach was performed on the night of Yetzias Mitzrayim, we will discover that the home was treated like the Beis Ha'mikdash. The blood was placed on the doorposts (12:22), paralleling the זריקת הדם, the sprinkling of the blood of the korban on the altar. And, whereas normally korbanos must be eaten in the Beis Ha'mikdash, or within the walls of Yerushalayim, the meat of the korban pesach was to be eaten inside home. The home became the Beis Ha'mikdash, the place where the blood was sprinkled and where the meat was consumed.

Significantly, this mitzva – to turn the home into a Beis Ha'mikdash – was given to Benei Yisrael right at the beginning, as they were about to become a free nation, teaching us that from the Torah's perspective, the center of religious life is the home. The heart of Jewish practice is found not in the shul, not in the yeshiva, not even in the Beis Ha'mikdash – but the Jewish home.

Rav Aharon Lewin, the Reisha Rav, noted that when a gentile enters a Jewish home, what does he notice? Bookcases full of sefarim, a shtender, pictures of rabbanim on the walls, and kiddush cups and other religious articles displayed in the breakfront. To him, the Jewish home resembles a synagogue – which it indeed should.

The Reisha Rav explained on this basis the famous pasuk in Sefer Yeshayahu (56:7), כי ביתי בית תפילה יקרא לכל, – “for My home shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.” This may be understood to mean that ביתי, the Jewish home, will be looked upon by כל העמים, other nations, as a בית תפילה, a shul. In other faiths, the center of religious life is the house of worship. But for us, it is the home. The most important place where we put our values and ideals into practice is within the family unit.

For good reason, then, the korban pesach, the mitzva given to our ancestors as they prepared to become a free, independent nation, revolved around the home and the family, because the home marks the focal point of religious life.

A similar notion is expressed earlier in the parsha, where we read that before the plague of locusts, Pharaoh was prepared to allow Benei Yisrael to go and serve Hashem, and he asked, מי ומי ההולכים, – “Who are the ones who are going?” (10:8). Pharaoh had assumed that since Moshe demanded that the people be allowed to leave to serve God, only members of the clergy needed to go. For a religious service, he figured, only the religious figures were

included. Moshe replied, ... בבננו ובבנותנו, בנערינו ובזקננו נלך, – “We shall go with our young and with our elderly, with our sons and with our daughters... for we have a festival to God.” Avodas Hashem is a חג, a joyous experience, and so it includes everybody. If serving Hashem was only a burden of responsibility, an arduous task, then indeed, it would be reserved for the spiritual elite. But avodas Hashem is about living with joy, with meaning and purpose, and so it is something in which everybody, not just the clergy, is included.

Torah life is for everybody, and thus the primary setting in which the Torah is to be practiced is the home, where we live and interact with one another. We are bidden to transform our homes into a Beis Ha'mikdash, and to live our lives as a חג לה, as joyous servants of the Almighty, together with our sons and our daughters, as a strong family unit devoted to avodas Hashem.