The Marcos and Adina Katz
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The Northwind At Midnight

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered January 24, 1953)

Va'yehi Ba'chatzi Ha'lailah - and it was midnight." How well these words describe the feelings of our people this day. We need no Prophet of doom to tell us that these weeks have so unnerved us, so shaken us, so outraged and horrified us, that we have not felt as we do since that terrible day at the end of World War II when the headlines announced that mass obituary - "Six Million Jews Perish In Europe." For us, the hour hand on the clock of Western Civilization has turned a complete circle - and we are back at midnight, deep in the gloom of despair at the fate of 3 million of our brothers and sisters behind the Iron Curtains.

At a time of this sort it is the business of a Rabbi neither to lecture nor to preach, but to speak from the heart and to offer a shimmer of Hope and Faith to brighten the blackness of midnight.

According to a Masorah, or Tradition, recorded by the Baal Haturim, at that fateful hour in the history of Egyptian Jewry, *chardu charadah g'dolah*, that midnight on the eve of the Exodus found the Israelites a frightened people, whose horizons were blackened by despair and gloom. The Israelites at that midnight were heavy-hearted indeed. Behind them were the slave-labor camps of Pithom and Rameses; in front of them – the dreaded Sahara, a wide, blazing, parched and sterile desert stretching on endlessly. They had just emerged from a plague of Darkness which took its toll among the Hebrews as well as Egyptians; they were entering into an era of bitter waters and golden calves. The Jews in the middle of that night certainly had reason for despair and gloom. He had reason to feel that this time was his midnight. *Vayhi ba'chatzi ha'lailah.*

But just then, at the very moment of midnight, when the occasion for gloom and melancholy was greatest, G-d bared His master-stroke of the liberation of Israel – the plague of the first-born – and it came just at the twelfth hour. For as dark as things may seem, G-d does not forsake His people.

Our sages of the Talmud relate that this sort of last minute deliverance at midnight continued for the 40 years they spent in the desert – and perhaps even all through Jewish History. *Kol arba'im shanah she'hayu yisroel ba'midbar lo nashvah ruach tz'fonis ela ba'chatzi ha'lailah.* During the forty years Israel was in the desert, it never failed that the North wind blew at midnight. Now, this North Wind had some very special qualities. It had the ability to give healing to the sick. It was a *ruach marpei*, a wind of healing. Just when the pain was strongest, when death seemed most imminent, when the night seemed darkest, just then the redeeming Northwind blew to soothe the pain, drive away the spectre of Death and Destruction, and bring with it the wings of the coming down. "Israel," our Rabbis meant to tell us, "even at the midnights that inevitably envelop a person and a people, even then do not give up hope, for there is always a Northwind that G-d sends your way, a Northwind which can break the back of your enemy and kill off his first-born, a North wind which can at the same time warm the huddling bodies suffering from the chill of the desert night and cool the feverish brow of the sick, the North wind which brings promise of a new dawn to calm, the North wind of Healing.

And that same North wind that blew at midnight in the desert came to our people at every midnight since. It came in the form of a Samson when our people were threatened by Philistines, and in the form of a Solomon when their existence was jeopardized by internal dissention and civil war. That North wind spoke as a *Bas Kol*, as a voice emanating from Heaven, and reconciled Hillel and Shammai, when their differences threatened to break the backbone of Jewish Law. It came in the shape of a Chassam Sofer, when drastic and heretical reforms threatened to undermine the entire structure of our Faith. Always G-d arrived, so to speak,

just in time to blow the North wind at Midnight. Our own State of Israel, which came right after the Holocaust in Europe, when thousands upon thousands of refugees had no place to turn to, is the most recent proof that the North wind retains its old powers of *marpei*, of healing.

Every man has his personal midnight too, and G-d provides for individual men their individual North winds. Only this week I saw a remarkable example of that special kind of Divine meteorology. A young man walked into my study, a young man of 19, who was visibly on the verge of total collapse. He could pronounce his own name only with the utmost difficulty. He was gripped by a horrible fear, a fear which blackened all his emotions and submerged his soul in the tangible dark of the midnight of a personality. He was terribly afraid of being arrested for a crime he did not commit, and planned either jail-break or suicide should that occur. He was a boy entirely alone in the world - he had never known a home, only one orphanage after another - and was "on his own" since he was 14 years old. The light had gone out of his eyes. He could see no glimmer of light on the horizon. He literally stumbled into my office after bumping into one of the poles of the canopy in front of the building. He had come to tell me, he said, that he had nothing left to live for. He was born, and now he was going to die-probably by his own hand-and he had not even lived in between. I have never come across a more pathetic case, one where a human being was groping aimlessly in total darkness. I myself did not think that that person would ever see the break of dawn.

And yet, one special delivery letter and three days later, he was a new man. A North wind was blowing for him. The police authorities assured him that he had nothing to worry about. A Jewish counselling service promised to look into the case. An employer complimented him on his good work. And he had found solace and friendship and warmth in an office situated right in the busiest section of the busiest city of the world. *Vayehi ba'chatzi ha'lailah*. It was midnight. But then the North wind blew and dawn came.

How interesting that when a person is in mourning, at the time of his grief and despair and melancholia, he recites the words of the Kaddish: *ve'yamlich malchusei be'chayaichon u've'yomechon u'vechaye d'chal beis yisroel*-May the Kingdom of G-d, the reign of Peace and Tranquility and Eternal life, be realized in our life-times and in our days, and in the life-times of all the House of Israel. Yes, in the lifetime of he who now mourns in grief the scourge of midnight, a North wind will yet waft in happiness.

We, my friends, find ourselves this moment in the midst of a terribly dark and ominous midnight. So many of us thought that the Red Revolution, with its proclamation that anti-semitism is a crime, would, despite its many evils, herald a new dawn in the relations of East Europe to Jews. And how tragically disappointed we are. No, no dawn indeed. Quite the contrary, we find that the hour hand of the clock of Western Civilization has been moved back to the midnight of Nazi Germany. When Hitler rose to power and just before he dealt the death-stroke to those millions of martyrs, the Hebrew poet, Zalman Shneur, cried out a warning to the world, a warning that came from the depths of the agonized and tormented soul of World Jewry, a warning which resounded 'round the world in lines of pain and verses of calamity: *Yemai Ha'bainayim k'rayvim u'vai'im*- "The Middle ages are coming back." And today, my friends, we must raise a greater cry of protest and warning, for something worse than the Middle ages is approaching - *Chazi ha'lailah karev uva* - The Middle of the Night is coming back, that the same dreaded midnight which blinded the eyes of the worlds' democracies and gave them an excuse for not stopping the demons of Germany from building their Majdaneks and Treblinks and Dachaus and Buchenwalds! No one will have any excuse if this midnight strikes. Neither those demonic Jewish communists and spies who are besmirching our good name - so that a good number of the replies to my sermon of two weeks ago read, "All Jews are Traitors," or "Murder Inc. has become Traitors Inc."- nor those who pooh-pooh the British arrest of ex-Nazi conspirators, nor those who in criminal ignorance lightly dismiss the U.S. High Commission's startling report of the number of pro-Nazis in West Germany- none of them will have clean hands, their very souls will be blood-stained, and the ghost of the martyrs of our people from Rabbi Akiva through the martyrs of the Inquisition through the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto and to the slave laborers in the camps behind the Urals will return to haunt them to and beyond their graves.

Yet what good does all this screaming and protesting accomplish? The stark fact remains that we are now at one minute to midnight. The vicious racism of Red Europe, the new Nazism of both parts of Germany, the reviving

anti-semitism in our own country as a result of the diabolical Communist spies of Jewish origin - these are the components of the new cloud which has eclipsed the proud sun which began to shine in Israel. It is Midnight and dawn seems so far off. How desperate things seem.

No one has easy solutions for problems of such magnitude. I have not even a complex solution. Only this remains - our silent Hope that G-d will yet intervene and send his North wind which did not fail our ancestors at their midnights. A wind which will shatter the Red Empire Red because it feeds on blood - and loosen the shackles of our enslaved brethren; a wind which will in one gust do in Germany, that accursed land, what must be done, so that it will be called "The Morgenthau Plan Wind," and a wind which will clear the name of our people in the great democracies.

An ancient aggada quoted in the Talmud relates that before King David would go to sleep, he would hang his *kinor*, his harp, upon the wall. And then, at midnight, the Northwind would come and its gentle breeze would pluck upon the strings of his harp, and that beautiful melody would awaken David, who then would take his harp and "*recht up chatzos*", he would compost his saintly Psalms for the glory of G-d.

Many of us Jews also tend to sleep. We go to bed when it is still light, we feel assured when "things are going good," and we retire from worries about the welfare of our people. Once a State of Israel is founded, we forget about a UJA, about a Yeshiva University, about all day-school education. We begin to slumber. And ordinarily we would slumber on, oblivious to the black clouds and the disappearing daylight, we would sleep through the midnight. But the Jew has a harp, a beautiful and wonderful soul, which, though it has no eyes and is at times blind to Light and Dark, yet has very sensitive strings. And when midnight comes, it is not frightened into paralyzing despair. For out of the North comes a G-dly wind which plucks these strings, and composes saintly psalms. And so, with this Northwind playing upon his soul, the Jew wakes up, takes the harp, that soul, into hand, and returns to his G-d and his people.

Perhaps some of us are guilty of over sleeping. But with the oncoming midnight, G-d will yet send a *yeshuah*, and the soul of our people will respond like a harp to the wind, and return to G-d we surely will.

The night has come and the night will go. But once the Northwind plucks the strings of our harps, we shall take them into hand and never thereafter cease to give thanks and glory to the Name of G-d. In the words of Yehuda Ha'levi: *Ani kinor le'shirayich*- "O Zion, I am a harp for thy songs".

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Look Up

Rabbi Ari Zucker

Look up at the moon—it's beautiful, majestic, and so far away. During the space race of the 1960's, the moon was the embodiment of achievement and supremacy for nations across the globe. Yet neither grandeur nor beauty create holiness, so how does observing a fanciful orb become our first mitzvah? Why would Hashem ever want us to keep track of the movement of the moon, no less make it the introductory, formative, and first mitzvah?

To complicate matters, the Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah (2:8) teaches that anyone who sees the moon has to go to Jerusalem and inform the Sanhedrin. Without a witness, the Jewish Supreme Court has no ability to begin the new month; so much so that a person can break Shabbos in order to get there! This is very odd. We know precisely when the new moon will appear. We have calendars printed years in advance, and despite the surprise announcements each month in shul, "the molad" has been the worst kept secret for over a millennium! If we can calculate the new moon, why do we need witnesses to testify for the court?

Let's look back at the moon. Even after landing men on the moon, it still remains out of reach. To date, only 12 people in history have walked its evanescent surface. It's larger than life. It's out of reach. The moon dictates the tides and slows the rotation of the earth. In times past, we relied solely on the moon for light in the dark of night. It is easy to ask: what relationship could I possibly have with the grandeur of the moon?

Enter the first mitzvah: We look up at the vast sky and see the moon sitting hundreds of thousands of miles away. In that moment, scholar or student, old or young, healthy or healing, anyone seeing this overwhelming sight, has a

mitzvah to perform. This first mitzvah communicates that although the world is so much bigger than we can fathom, Hashem cares about our little mitzvah. When confronted with something so intimidating, Hashem commands us to perform a mitzvah and assert our place in the world. And that initial mitzvah sets the tone for every mitzvah the Jewish people will fulfill.

Over three thousand years ago, this message resonated with the newly released slaves, and today that relevance only grows. The modern world is so much bigger, and we appreciate even more how small we are. We are equally in need of this reminder and this encouragement—that what we do matters. And this first mitzvah, found in our parsha, is just the beginning.

The Most Precious Commodity

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted from a shiur given in the Gruss Kollel on January 22, 2015)

One of the more better known parts of of this week's Parsha is the pasuk of: החודש הזה לכם ראש חדשים. Rashi in the beginning of Chumash makes it famous by saying: לא היה צריך להתחיל את התורה אלא מהחודש הזה לכם. It's the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people. There is a classic question in drush: Why is this so "chashuv" that it should be the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people? It's all a matter of the calendar and we remember Yetzias Mitzraim at certain times of the year. But it doesn't seem to be so fundamental that there would be a "hava amina" of making it the beginning of the entire Torah. A few different answers have been suggested.

Al pi classic drush, the Midrash tells us that Klal Yisroel is davka moneh על פי החודש — uses a lunar calendar — because the yesod of the "chodesh" is "hischadshus." The Moon waxes and wanes. It goes up and it goes down. The Rosh Chodesh occurs when the Moon has completely disappeared. But, technically, the Rosh Chodesh is not when the Moon disappears. The real Rosh Chodesh is when the Moon has disappeared and came back again — as soon as you can see it even a little bit. It actually occurs when the witnesses come to testify or when we calculate, "al pi cheshbon," when it should be seen. That's the time of Rosh Chodesh. Of course, that's the whole yesod of Klal Yisroel. We had ups and downs in our history. We don't always expect everything to go well. We hope that eventually we will have yeshuos and things will go well. But we know that in Jewish history we had "churban" and we had all kinds of other suffering. And while some other nations could sit "b'shalva" for hundreds of years, the Jews have always been persecuted. We have spiritual tzaros and we have physical tzaros. If you are a Jew, if you want to start the Torah with the expectation that ירבו ימיכם וימי בניכם, if you just try to keep the Torah when everything goes well — and you have no tzaros, no changes, and no problems — then it's not even worth starting the Torah this way. A Jew has Emuna even though we do have problems. We look around the world and see that everyone hates the Jews and everyone is trying to kill the Jews. Sometimes you could even get depressed from all the negative news. But we know that even though our fortunes wane, they eventually wax once again. And no matter what happens, we have to have Emuna that there will be "hischadshus" and that Hashem will resurrect us just like the Moon always makes a comeback. And this is why I think it is "rauy" for this pasuk to start the Torah. Even before all the other mitzvos, you have to have Emuna that you may do the mitzvos and things will not necessarily work out, at first. Things will go down. But in the end you will come back and be redeemed. I think this is relevant in personal life as well, since everyone has ups and downs. And when there are difficult times, remember the hischadshus of the Levana. If for whatever reason Hashem has it planned that things do not go well immediately — as much as we would like them to — in the end the rebirth will come.

Another classic answer is given by the Baalei Mussar. According to them, החודש הזה לכם ראש חדשים means that you should have a calendar. You should have a luach zmanim. So you would know that you have to do certain things at certain times. It's very nice to have the whole Torah. You have 613 mitzvos and, in theory, you are committed to all of them. They are all very important and they are all very "positive." You wish you could do them all. But you never get around to doing them all. You get distracted by a little something and say: "I'll do it later..." Or maybe, there is a big game going on. Or you say: "I don't have time for the mitzvos," etc., etc. A person could be committed to all the mitzvos, theoretically. But if they don't make their own calendar. If they are not "sholet" on their own time. How will they be able to accomplish

something? Therefore, al pi Mussar, comes the pasuk of החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים to tell you that you could have the whole Torah — 613 mitzvos. But the first thing before you start these mitzvos, realize that you have to have a calendar. Your life and your time is gifted to you. And it's the only resource that Hashem gives to you that if you waste it, you can't get it back. If you loose money, you could still get it back by winning a lottery. But unlike money, if you waste a day, it's never coming back. Time is the most precious commodity. You have to think that you are using your time in order to accomplish. And that's what Hashem is telling the Jews. Until now you didn't have any time. You were slaves. You had no control over you own time. Now, I'm giving you the Torah. But before the Torah I'm giving you this precious gift — Time. Make yourself a calendar. Recognize the goal that you have to meet and what you have to do to get to that goal. This lesson was immediately implemented in the process of preparing for korban Pesach. First, Rosh Chodesh. Then, you have to know what to do on the 10th of the chodesh. Then, on the 10th you have to prepare for the 14th. And then, on the 14th, you have to do something which will enable the next step, on the 15th. Im yirtze Hashem, we will all try to rule over our time. And if we are mekayem ..החודש הזה, we could do what we need to do in the other 613 mitzvos, and thereby realize to the best extent we can the mission that Hashem gave us when He gifted us with the Torah.

Our Story

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Redemption was well under way as the entire country of Egypt had been ravaged by interminable calamities. Once a superpower capable of supporting the entire planet, the Egyptian empire was gradually reduced to rubble. Moshe's fame was quickly spreading throughout Egypt as popular opinion swung against Pharo's inflexible policies. However, despite all this rapid change, the Jews remained muted and sidelined. Before the makkot began, the Jews were incapable of rallying around Moshe's call to freedom; they were burdened by their bondage and their spirit was too compressed to believe in a future vision. During the first seven makkot they were invisible. How would this incapacitated people be awakened to the accelerating redemption?

The opening verses of parshat Bo provides the solution: the Jews are directed to study the final three makkot, and to retell this "story" to their children and grandchildren. Somehow this promise of "storytelling" awakens the spirit of the slaves, frees their imagination, and galvanizes them into redemptive mode. By the end of parshat Bo, the Jews have defied their tormenters by sacrificing a Pesach offering, and they ultimately march from Egypt with arms stretched to heaven in triumph. Telling their story has transformed them.

People are always transformed when they sense that their lives are part of a 'larger story'. Generally, stories are told about and epic events with consequential outcomes; stories rarely speak of common or humdrum moments of daily life. By viewing our lives as part of a larger story we realize the value or import of our behavior and the magnitude of our decisions.

Additionally, stories contain a "narrative flow" of related chapters. A snapshot provides an isolated image whereas a story is a presents a current of different sections. A particular chapter in a story is shaped by previous chapters and will determine the arch of future chapters.

Framing our lives as part of a larger story connects our individual lives to the heroes of the past and the unknown inheritors of our future. Living life as part of a "story" lends heft as well as verticality to our personal experiences.

The midrash comments upon the lukewarm attempts of Reuven to rescue Yosef from murderous brothers. Rather than swiftly spiriting Yosef out of harm's way, Reuven tarries, and, ultimately, Yosef is unloaded. Had Reuven realized that the Torah would document his efforts to save Yosef, the midrash asserts, he would have carried his brother on his very own shoulders to safety. Sadly, Reuven didn't realize that this moment was historic and that his decision would shape a larger story. Had Reuven sensed the gravitas of the moment he would have acted more courageously and more definitely.

Retelling this dramatic story of slavery and redemption transformed their 'empty lives' of slaves into historic lives of freemen. Slaves exist in perpetual "survival mode" empty of any larger meaning. Telling their story to future generations of Jewish conferred meaning and historical sweep to the lives of this newly minted nation. Hearing that they would bear

grandchildren signaled the launching of a process which would ripple far beyond their lifetimes and far beyond the sands of the looming desert. This idea that their lives were in fact a "story" liberated their crushed spirits, unleashed their trapped imagination, and instigated their role in the redemption from Egypt.

Each generation has its distinctive challenges. One hundred years ago, immigrants arriving in the West struggled to observe Shabbat in a six-day work week. Subsequent generations battled against trends of secularization and the weakening of Halachik fidelity. Thankfully, the past 30 years has witnessed a revival of religious interest and an uptick in religious observance. Perhaps our current struggle lies in acknowledging that our lives are part of a larger story of the Jews. In past generations, persecution of Jews created an immediate "alliance" with past chapters of the Jewish story which also were characterized by discrimination and suffering. Thankfully, the world has turned friendlier toward Jews making it difficult for many to sense the contemporary chapter of this story of the Jews. Furthermore, Jews have now become part of many 'alternate' stories: Jews now see themselves as authors of the story of democracy, of science, of modern culture, of social justice, and of many other stories. Many of these 'agendas' can be viewed as part of the larger "Jewish story", but often they are 'read' as separate storylines, unrelated to our common Jewish story. An additional challenge to viewing our lives as part of the Jewish story is the wealth and comfort which our communities has acquired. Wealth and material comfort impact our personal lives and certainly empower us to achieve more important goals. However, the pursuit of material comfort per se, isn't part of any "larger story". It is a very fleeting and individual value and threatens to sever us from any larger story beyond our own narrow lives. Perhaps, our generation should give some thought toward restoring our ability to place our lives within this larger story.

In some ways the corona crisis (and the hopefully conclusion of this pandemic) can help us appreciate that our lives are part of a story. This experience will be studied extensively over the next twenty years and this story will profoundly impact our culture, our economics our politics and many other sectors of our society. Living through an event of this sweep and magnitude should help us envision our lives as part of a larger story of human history.

A few weeks ago, our generation lost its greatest spokesman of Judaism- Rabbi Sacks z"l. He reminded Jews that "our" story is also "their" story. For the past two thousand years our eternal story seemed peripheral to the more "prevailing" story of humanity at large. Rabbi Sacks eloquently articulated that the Jewish story was a microcosm of the larger story of humanity. The Jewish odyssey provided vital messages for the larger narrative of humanity. Rabbi Sacks reminded us that Jews live an eternal story which is also a universal story. This reminder should also make it easier for us to align our lives with the story of the Jews. This is the story of all humankind throughout all eras; we are expected to be part of this grand story.

Of course, having returned to the land in which this entire story began also helps. Recently Rabbi Yehuda Henkin, an important Israeli Rabbinic leader passed. Tragically, in 2015, his son and daughter-in-law were murdered in a terrorist attack in front of their four children. I visited his wife Chana during her shiva. Having pioneered women's learning through her institution called Nishmat, she was visited by many 'comforters'. A group of seminary girls visited, and Mrs. Henkin addressed the group by asking how books of Tanach were written. A girl responded correctly that there were twenty-four. At which point Mrs. Henkin corrected her "There are now twenty-five books. Our people are writing a new book and it details the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland. My children are written in that book". Living in this new era of Jewish history we must be able to view our lives as part of that Book.

Strong-arm Tactics and Tefillin

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

The very end of our parshah includes two quick paragraphs, each detailing an important mitzvah. The first is the command to eat matzah on Pesach and the prohibition against owning chametz. The second is redemption of firstborn animals and children. G-d tells Moshe that all the firstborn are to be consecrated to Him, and subsequently, a process of redemption is required. The descriptions of these mitzvot share a peculiar detail: they

are both incorporated into the mitzvah of tefillin. We are told to make them "a sign" on our arms and a "memorial" between our eyes. (Shemot 13:9, 16) In both cases the reasoning for this is that G-d took us out of Egypt with a "strong arm".

Putting these mitzvot into the larger context of our parshah, we can begin to raise some questions:

- These are not the only "memorialization" mitzvot we encounter. Both the Pesach sacrifice and eating of marror are designed to have us recall elements of the Pesach story. However, those mitzvot are not included in our tefillin. What makes matzah and redeeming the firstborn different?
- The description of the Jews being taken out with a "strong arm" is also unique to the end of the parshah. What is its significance?

Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 421) explains that tefillin are part of a series of mitzvot designed as a check against the coarser elements of human nature.

The presence of these items reminds us constantly of basic elements of our faith, enabling us to incorporate them into our general consciousness. This way, the nobler aspirations of the soul can overcome base desires. Given this explanation, it seems that the story of the Exodus left us with different types of mitzvot. Some of these, like the Pesach sacrifice and marror, recall historical events which need to be commemorated. Others, like matzah and redeeming the firstborn, evoke eternal truths which require the constant reminder of the tefillin.

There is a debate amongst commentators about the identity of the "strong arm" involved in the Exodus, and its purpose, but the overarching message is the same according to all: the extreme and abrupt nature of the Jewish people's departure from Egypt was an event that could only be interpreted as G-d's direct action.

The simplicity of this fact threatens to mask its profundity. Of course G-d caused the Exodus! Everyone knows that! But consider in our own lives, and in recent history, how much we waffle and equivocate about whether different events were really examples of G-d's involvement. Our propensity to second-guess Divine providence underscores the power of a moment where everyone, even our Egyptian antagonists, unconditionally recognized G-d's manifest Will.

Two fundamental lessons regarding that Will emerged from this event. The first is symbolized by matzah, a bread which most directly portrays its ingredients without the human intervention that would (literally) inflate them and alter their appearance. According to Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (Ha'ameik Davar to Shemot 13:3) this is a message about Jewish survival. No matter the great, usually very necessary, lengths to which we go to survive and thrive, these efforts only ever amount to chametz. The basic ingredient of Jewish survival is G-d's consistent providential Hand.

The second lesson is G-d's love for us. When explaining the mitzvah of redeeming the firstborn to inquisitive children, the Torah tells us to say that "when Pharaoh was obstinate in sending us out, G-d killed every firstborn in Egypt". (13:15) This description hearkens back to the very first message G-d sent to Pharaoh. "So says G-d, Israel is My firstborn son. I say to you, send out My son and he will serve Me, and if you refuse to send him, I will kill your firstborn son". (4:22-23) Notwithstanding everything the Exodus accomplished, it was, at its core, the story of a Father coming to rescue His son. This faithfulness and love are not always apparent. They weren't during the years of Egyptian slavery, nor during many years of painful exile since then. It is therefore our duty to take the shining example of the Exodus and bind it to our hearts and minds. Becoming conscious of G-d's special care for us, we can learn to see it in the tumultuous world around us and respond in kind.

A Reason to Rejoice

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Bo, after centuries in Egypt, the Children of Israel leave the country of their enslavement, a triumphant and hopeful nation. With Egypt now destroyed as a result of the Eser Makkos (The Ten Plagues), of which the final three occur in this week's parsha, and with G-d's Strong Hand and Outstretched Arm, the nation will now march to Har Sinai, and ultimately, to the Holy Land.

The celebration and commemoration of Yetzias Mitzrayim - the Exodus from Egypt - was not for that generation alone! It is a celebration and commemoration for each and every generation. וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְחָק לְךָ

וּלְבָנֶיךָ עַד עוֹלָם, *and you shall observe this matter as a decree for yourself and for your children forever* (Shemos 12:24). And on the cusp of their freedom, Moshe commands the people, saying: וְהָיָה כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְהוָה לָכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת - *And it shall be, that when you come to the Land that Hashem will give you, as He has spoken, and you shall observe this service*; וְהָיָה כִּי יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם, and it shall be that when your children will say to you: 'What is this service to you?'; וַאֲמַרְתֶּם זֶבַח פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל בָּתֵּי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּנָגְפּוֹ אֶת מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת בָּתֵּינוּ הִצִּיל וַיִּקֹּד הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ, *You shall say, 'It is a Pesach feast-offering to Hashem, Who skipped over the houses of the Children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, and our households He saved,' and the people bowed and prostrated themselves* (ibid, v.25-27).

Why did the people rejoice by bowing down and prostrating themselves upon hearing this news from Moshe? Rashi explains: ויקד העם. עַל בְּשׂוֹרַת הַגְּאֻלָּה וּבִיאַת הָאָרֶץ וּבְשׂוֹרַת הַבָּנִים שֶׁיִּהְיוּ לָהֶם - *And the people bowed - Upon (I) the tidings of the impending redemption, and (II) their coming to the land of Israel, and (III) the tidings of the children that would be born to them* (Rashi to Shemos 12:27).

Upon hearing that redemption was at hand, and that they were going to the Promised Land, and that they would have children, the people were overcome with gratitude and rejoicing, and they fell before G-d with great thanks. While this is surely understandable and wonderful tidings, a question can be asked.

We know that this question: מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם, *what is this work to you* (12:26), is the question of the ben ha'rasha, the wicked son! Why, then, did the people rejoice upon receiving these tidings?

In his beautiful, thought-provoking, easy to read and enlightening new sefer, Rav Yaakov Bender on Chumash (Artscroll/Mesorah, 2021), Rav Bender shlita, Rosh Yeshiva Yeshiva Darchei Torah, writes as follows: "We know from the Haggadah shel Pesach that the question quoted in this pasuk is that of the ben harasha - the wicked son. 'What is this service to you?' he asks, removing himself from the equation. So what were the parents so grateful for?

"They were filled with thanks because these future parents realized something (which was of fundamental importance). This conversation (this assurance of Moshe that children would be born to them), happened before Matan Torah. The people knew that there was a great gift awaiting them, an inheritance and a legacy that would change everything. Even someone who appeared to be a rasha or acted in a way that might be considered wicked would have a ladder that could lift him up and cleanse him.

"The Torah would be theirs; and its holy words, the sanctified air of the yeshivah and hallowed air around talmidei chachaimim, would have the potential to purify and uplift.

"We have all seen children and teenagers struggle and fall. We have seen adults struggle and fall! However, there is always a way back if you believe in the essential purity of the neshama, (the holiness of our Torah ha'Kedosha), and one's ability to become cleansed (and purified by Torah).

"Every morning, we announce that the neshama (the soul) within us is '*tehorah hi*', pure, without blemish. Whatever we may have done, (our soul) remains pure. It is crucial to convey that to our children - their mistakes will make them smarter and their challenges will make them stronger…

"If you believe in the power of Torah, if you believe in the power of a neshama, and if you are able to show every child that you consider them 'good news,' worth giving thanks for, then they will justify that faith. (And that) is a besurah tovah!" (Rav Yaakov Bender on Chumash, p.132-134).

The following vignette is related by Simcha Raz: "The poet Uri Tzvi Greenberg celebrated his son's bar mitzvah in the Shul on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. The well-known tzaddik, Rav Aryeh Levine zt'l (1885-1969), was among the guests. One of the participants recalls: I was a young child, and I saw the elderly tzaddik making his way with difficulty up the dust path that led to the top of the mountain. I approached him and greeted him. Rav Aryeh took my hand and caressed it, as was his custom, and asked me where I was studying, and which chapter of the Talmud I was studying. In the course of conversation, we arrived at the top of the mountain.

"Rav Aryeh said to me, 'Do you see, my son, when people are occupied with words of Torah, one does not feel any difficulty in climbing. One can go to the top of a mountain easily in spite of the difficulties'" (Tales of the Righteous, p.188).

Just as the Israelites rejoiced over their good fortune: the redemption, their coming to the land, and news of children that would be born to them, may we too, be similarly blessed. May we merit the ultimate and final redemption in our days and our time, may we be brought to our Land with peace for all, and may we merit doros yeshorim, children and their children, whose lives are immeasurably enriched by immersion in Torah and mitzvos.

Fake it Till You Become it

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

Sometimes a task seems too difficult, daunting, or incongruent with our personality that we elect to be passive. We may garner some motivation for action from phrases such as "fake it till you make it," but still feel resistant because we feel inauthentic or disingenuous to make it by faking it. In one of the most popular Ted Talks and in her bestselling book "Presence: Bringing your Boldest Self to your Biggest Challenges," social psychologist, Amy Cuddy, encourages us to adapt the phrase from "fake it till you make it" to "fake it till you become it." She makes her case for this subtle, yet significant, difference, based on her research on body posture. When people change and "fake" their body posture from reflecting being closed off and timid to an open, power posture (think a Superman pose), they feel more confident, are more willing to act courageously, and even their body chemistry changes. Their cortisol (the stress hormone) decreases and their testosterone (the assertiveness hormone) increases. "Faking" their body posture doesn't just help them succeed, it actually changes their personality until they "become" it.

As Bnei Yisrael prepare to leave Egypt, they are given many laws related to the Korban Pesach, one of which is that it is forbidden to break the bone of the sacrifice. Commentators struggle as to the meaning and depth behind this commandment. Ralbag suggests that there is no deep significance to not breaking the bones, it is just another example of something we do differently on Pesach night so that the children will ask why this night is different from others. Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann bases his interpretation on both the historical context and the thematic context of the verse. The verse begins by commanding that the sacrifice must be eaten within one house and cannot be taken out of the house, and concludes by prohibiting the breaking of any bones. Rabbi Hoffmann argues that the custom during regular, non-Pesach meals was to break off part of the portion of the animal and send it to a friend's house so they could partake as well. Since sending the food out of the house is prohibited for the Korban Pesach, the Torah explicitly prohibits even the breaking of the bone in order to prevent someone from sending it to someone else's house.

However, other commentators argue that there is a deeper significance to not breaking the bones. Some suggest that not breaking the bones reflects a rushed mentality that was essential for leaving Egypt. People in a rush don't have time to break a bone and suck out the marrow. They quickly eat the meat and throw away the bone (see Rashbam and Bechor Shor). Others see a character flaw within the act of breaking the bones. It can be seen as gluttonous and excessive to break a bone to suck out the marrow, which reflects poorly on the eater, is degrading to the honor befitting of the sacrifice (see Ralbag), and calls into question the validity of the sacrifice, which needs to be eaten when one is full (see Chizkuni).

It is within the context of this mitzvah that the Sefer HaChinuch presents his famous thesis that our personality is influenced by our actions ("acharei ha-peulot nimshachim ha-levavot"). Preempting his son's question as to why the Torah would provide so many laws related to the Exodus, the Sefer HaChinuch explains that the purpose of this mitzvah, and mitzvot in general, is to provide us with actions that inculcate character. By not breaking the bones we are demonstrating our break from slavery and our new existence of freedom. It is not proper, he argues, for people of stature to break bones while eating. Therefore, when exiting servitude, Bnei Yisrael are called upon to act like royalty, even if they don't feel like royalty. They—and by extension, we—are encouraged to not just fake it till we make it, but fake it till we become it.

Egyptian Morality

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg

Back in the beginning of the book of Shemot, God gives details to Moshe concerning his missions. He speaks of the future plagues, culminating with the Exodus. He then promises as follows (Shemot 3:21-22):

"And I will put this people's favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and it will come to pass that when you go, you will not go empty handed. Each woman shall borrow from her neighbor and from the dweller in her house silver and gold objects and garments, and you shall put [them] on your sons and on your daughters, and you shall empty out Egypt."

The fulfillment of this guarantee seems to be clearly laid out when recording the Jews leaving from Egypt (Shemot 12:35-36):

"And the children of Israel did according to Moses' order, and they borrowed from the Egyptians silver objects, golden objects, and garments. The Lord gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and they lent them, and they emptied out Egypt."

Seems like a fairly simple sequence. However, in the Torah portion of Bo, prior to the Exodus but after the initial promise, we see a verse that raises a flag (ibid 11:1-3):

"The Lord said to Moses, 'I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go from here. When he lets you out, he will completely drive you out of here. Please, speak into the ears of the people, and let them borrow, each man from his friend and each woman from her friend, silver vessels and golden vessels.' So the Lord gave the people favor in the Egyptians' eyes; also the man Moses was highly esteemed in the land of Egypt in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants and in the eyes of the people."

The final verse is very problematic. First, it would appear the promise noted above is being fulfilled in this verse. If so, what then was taking place one chapter later? If this is not fulfillment of said promise, what is this verse referring to? The use of the word "favor" is found in each of the three, and the context certainly appears as if there is one overarching idea. Furthermore, if this is like the other uses of "favor", why is there mention of Moshe's grandeur in this specific verse?

Ramban senses this problem, and offers an explanation:

"The explanation of the Lord gave the people favor in the Egyptians' eyes is that the people of Egypt did not hate [the children of Israel] because of the plagues; rather, [the Egyptians] loved [the Israelites] more and more, and [the Israelites] found favor in their eyes. Saying ' We are the evil ones, perpetrating violence, and it is only right that the God would show you favor'. And moreover, the man Moshe, [despite being] the one who brought the plagues upon them, was very great in all the land of Egypt, in the eyes of Pharoah's servants, his antagonists."

Ramban turns to the mention of the "eyes of the people", and explains this refers to the Jews. They had not believed Moshe's initial words, "because of shortness of breath and hard work". However, now they saw "he was a faithful prophet to God".

Ramban is offering an innovative explanation for the idea of "favor" and its current usage. The Egyptians appear to be changed to a high degree, forgoing any hatred against the Jews; rather, they profess love. They regard Moshe in the highest possible way. Furthermore, the Torah notes the view the Jewish people had of Moshe, overcoming their previous resistances.

It would appear, then, that the all was set for the Exodus. True, Pharaoh was the "lone" holdout, but Ramban seems to describe a reformed population. Furthermore, there were no lingering issues with the Jewish people. The Exodus should have happened at this moment, except that God had promised one more plague. Therein lies the rub. If the Egyptians, as described by Ramban, had repented, why did God proceed with the final plague? It would be tempting to see the final plague as an attack on Pharaoh, but the Torah makes clear every Egyptian first born was killed.

Why did God proceed with the final plague effecting the entire Egyptian population? As well, why is the Torah recording for us, as per Ramban, the view the Jewish people had of Moshe at this very moment in the story?

The Egyptians, at the end of the book of Bereishit, seemed to be good people. Yet by the beginning of the book of Shemot, they devolve into enslaving the Jewish population. Pharaoh cleverly was able to recalibrate the moral compass of his Egyptian citizenry, slowly convincing them that the moral good was to subordinate the Jewish people. One can picture (using a modern-day lens) a typical Egyptian family sitting down for breakfast, father and mother teasing their children, a scene of familial bliss. Dad then leaves for his long day of brutally oppressing the Jewish people. The concept of this apparent dissidence is difficult to comprehend.

The immoral had become the moral standard for the Egyptians, part of their defect and deserving of punishment. After the ninth plague, Ramban presents a picture of a morally reformed population. The constant barrage had demonstrated to them the error in their ways. The Jews were no longer hated, but even loved. The moral justification for slavery had been eradicated, and they returned to the days prior to this entire enslavement travesty. Moshe was looked upon in the most positive way possible. In fact, one could surmise Moshe was now viewed as the Pharaoh equivalent. The Egyptians could very well

see Moshe as their new leader, ready to take over as king.

The Torah then contrasts the Egyptian view with the Jewish view of Moshe. Ramban notes how they saw Moshe as the true prophet of God, His messenger. The psychological burdens of slavery had prevented their ability to relate to Moshe in the proper way. At this point, the Jewish people had overcome that, and saw Moshe properly. The key here is that Moshe was reflecting the will of God. The Jewish people had the proper relationship to God, understood Moshe's role.

This is the point where the Egyptians and Jews are contrasted, and how we might understand the upcoming plague. The Egyptians had flipped the moral script, but it was rooted in a subjectivist view of behavior. Right now, they saw they were wrong, and corrected themselves. But there was no objective moral standard they were following, no belief in God and His guidance as to how humans should behave. The Egyptians could turn to Moshe – he was great - and allow him to demonstrate the good. But when the next leader came along, they just as well could re-introduce a terrible defect into their social fabric. A moral outlook not anchored to God is merely a temporary reprieve from the next immoral mistake. The ideological flaw still present meant there was still the necessity of another plague. There was "favor" to be found, but it was incomplete.

The Jewish people, though, understood God, using Moshe has His messenger, as the guide moving forward for the ideal way for humans to live. There was no room for a subjective view, just the word of God. The Egyptians had been convinced for the time being their ways were wrong. The Jews were changed permanently, preparing to serve God. They would follow Moshe solely because he was the messenger of God.

In today's world, subjective morality has taken on a new level of absurdity, where an individual's thought that what they think is good or fair must be taken seriously. Outside of Judaism, morality ebbs and flows, and what is the good today will be the bad tomorrow. Judaism's ideology thinks otherwise. Humanity is given a blueprint of how to live our lives, and our sense of morality must always be tied to the good as presented in the Torah.

Rational Love and Emotional Love: A Lesson from Tefillin

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Bo, we read about the last three plagues of the Ten Plagues: locusts, darkness, and the Death of the Firstborn. It is after the final plague strikes that the story of the Exodus comes to a dramatic conclusion as Pharaoh personally dashes through the streets of Egypt to seek out Moses and Aaron and urge them to take the Hebrew slaves and leave the land of Egypt as soon as possible.

Parashat Bo is also the parasha in which the Jewish people receive their first commandment as a nation–the commandment of observing Rosh Chodesh, of setting up a Jewish calendar. The Jewish people are also instructed to prepare for the Pascal Sacrifice and the first seder, which will take place in Egypt.

Parashat Bo concludes with chapter 13 of Exodus, in which G-d proclaims the holiness of the firstborn male children, and the need to redeem the firstborn at a פִּדְיוֹן הַבֵּן —Pidyon Haben ceremony, 30 days after birth. This final chapter of parashat Bo also features two portions, which speak of the obligation to teach future generations of the miracle of the Exodus. Both these portions, Exodus 13:2, קַדֶּשׁ לִי כָל בְּכוֹר , sanctify for Me every first born, and Exodus 13:11, וְהָיָה כִּי יְבִאֲךָ , when the L-rd G-d brings you into the land of Israel, speak of the mitzvah of Tefillin. Tefillin, of course, are the phylacteries (the leather boxes and straps) that are to be worn daily by Jewish men as a sign on the hand and as frontlets between the eyes, so that all should know that the Al-mighty took the People of Israel out from Egypt with a mighty hand.

The mitzvah of Tefillin is indeed a strange mitzvah. Jewish men are instructed to place a leather box containing sacred parchment scrolls with texts of the Torah, on their weak arm, encircle the arm seven times with a leather strap, and to place a second little leather box on the head, also containing sacred scrolls, and leather straps. What could possibly be the meaning of this ritual?

Conventional wisdom has it that Tefillin represent the bonding of the human being with G-d. Winding the straps around one's arm seven times is reminiscent of the bride who marches around the groom seven times in the

traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, as an act of betrothal. The winding of the straps around the fingers represents the wedding ring. Placing Tefillin on the head represents giving one's mind, one's consciousness, and one's intelligence to the service of G-d. The binding of the leather box on the arm, next to the heart, represents giving one's strength to G-d, and devoting one's heart to G-d. So in effect, it is an act which represents total sublimation of one's self to the Divine Creator, giving over strength, intelligence and heart to G-d.

Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik, in a seminal essay entitled, "Jew and Jew, Jew and Non-Jew" develops the idea of the Tefillin in a most profound way. Rabbi Soloveitchik notes that the Tefillin of the head are worn exposed on the head, where they may be seen by everyone. The Tefillin of the head contain four separate compartments in which parchments concerning the Torah writings regarding Tefillin are placed. On the other hand, the Tefillin of the hand are always worn covered. A sleeve is usually pulled over the Tefillin, or a cover is worn over the actual Tefillin box, to hide them. The Tefillin of the hand represent emotion–not like Tefillin of the head which are open, rational, given to scientific and empirical investigation for all to analyze.

The parchment contained in the Tefillin of the hand, just like the Tefillin of the head, contain the four sections of the Torah, which mention the Mitzvah of Tefillin. However, they are written on one long parchment, and are seemingly melded together, not separate, but uniform and unified. While the Tefillin of the head sit on the brain, the source of rational, empirical understanding, the Tefillin of the arm sit next to the heart, the source of the esoteric emotions.

Rabbi Soloveichik explains that Judaism recognizes two forms of "love"–"rational love" and "emotional love." When a person evokes "rational love," someone or something is preferred because they are rationally superior and empirically deserving. They are worthy, because they are good. It is possible to rationally, and, in many cases, scientifically assess the goodness empirically and to make a decision to like or dislike something. However, says Rabbi Soloveichik, there is also a love of the heart, that is not based on rational or empirical evidence. It is an emotional favoring that only a person in love can comprehend and appreciate. In fact, it can, at times, be shown that it makes no sense rationally, and deserves to be abandoned. That is why it is always next to the heart, covered and hidden. No amount of convincing or cajoling can affect these emotional feelings.

Rabbi Soloveichik insists that there is a difference between a Jew's love for a fellow Jew and a Jew's love for a non-Jew. The Torah instructs everyone, (Leviticus 19:18) וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֲךָ כָּמוֹךָ , Love your neighbor as thyself. That is the love that a Jew should have for all of humankind. Jews are bidden to love and respect all people. However, the objects of this love must be worthy of our love, they must be good, decent, principled and moral people. When, however, it comes to the love of our brother, love for our family members becomes irrational. Goodness, or worthiness, is not a factor, after all–it's my brother.

Can it be explained? Two people are drowning, one, a world-famous scientist, the other, my child!! Despite the fact that the scientist can probably accomplish so much good for humanity, I'll choose to save my child anyway. Can it be explained? It's irrational, because it's based on emotional love! There is a rationality to the heart, that the mind cannot comprehend or fathom. And, so says Rabbi Soloveichik, is the emotional love that a Jew has for another Jew. They may not be the most worthy of people, they may not be the kindest, they may not be the most moral, but they are, after all, my brother, my sister and I love them, despite their deficiencies.

People make irrational decisions all the time. People often buy a new suit of clothes, even though they may be of inferior quality, because they are in style. It's irrational. Few people will buy an out-of-style suit even though the quality of the material and sewing is far superior. No one is going to buy an old flip model phone, even though the flip phones were far more durable and cheaper than the current smartphones.

And, so it is when expressing love for our fellow Jews. While it often makes no sense to the mind, it makes perfect sense to the heart. So go argue with the heart! That is why, says Rav Soloveichik, the primary blessing that we make on Tefillin, is made on the Tefillin of the arm. In fact, if a blessing is made on the Tefillin of the head, it is a questionable blessing, and the phrase בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד , Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever, is immediately recited in order to make certain that it is not a "wasted blessing."

There are many things in life that cannot be explained rationally, they can only be felt. Such are the concepts of love of the mind and love of the heart–another revolutionary idea that stems from Judaism.

The Light in the Darkness Throughout History

Rabbi Dr. David Shabtai

Because the Ten Plagues seem so familiar to us, having heard them so many times since childhood, it's sometimes hard to consider what it must have been like as they were happening. Many were powerful and awe inspiring. Seeing hail mixed with fire raining down and smiting everything in its way certainly evoked an appropriate mix of fear and trembling. Being covered with lice, continuously and with no hope of a cure, was beyond depressing. Some others were displays of Hashem power over nature—bringing throngs and throngs of frogs to swarm over and throughout every visible surface simply overwhelmed the senses.

And if the goal was to cause terror and force and acknowledgement of Hashem's power, the escalation of their ferocity seems to pan that out. Until the second to last plague, darkness.

Darkness is something we are all used to. Even while the timing was different in that it lasted all day long, that in itself wasn't all that punishing. But that wasn't all that occurred. The Torah describes that the darkness had a tangible quality to it (וימש חשך) and that possibly because of that quality, the Egyptians actually did not move for three whole days. But even while highly inconvenient and certainly strange, a plague of darkness seems somewhat out of place in the plague repertoire.

Indeed, the Midrash explains that during those three days, a whole bunch of Jews died. The Rav Hida explains that these were people who believed that Hashem would never redeem the Jewish people and denied His ability to do so. And even while they didn't deserve to be saved, Hashem did not want the Egyptians to relish or find any satisfaction in their deaths. So as to protect their dignity and keep their deaths from the Egyptians, Hashem arranged their deaths during the plague of darkness—when the Egyptians could neither see what was going on or move about the world around them.

Delving even deeper, the Rav Hida explores an additional layer of meaning. We have a tradition that each plague (including its warning and aftermath) lasted for around a month, with the final redemption on the night of Pesach, the 15th of Nisan. Calculating backwards, that means that the three days of darkness began on the 13th of Adar. This was the very same day, that more than a thousand years later, Haman would 'randomly' select as the most appropriate to perpetrate a Jewish genocide. Because these were days in which many Jews died, Haman reasoned, the Rav Hida explained, that it was a fortuitous day for finishing off what Hashem began.

Continuing this theme, the Rav Hida explains that what Haman did not consider was that ולכן בני ישראל היה אור במושבותם—and for [the rest of] Bnei Yisrael, there was light in their neighborhoods. It's for this reason that the triumph of the Jews of Shushan is described as ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר—the Jews merited, light, happiness, joy, and grandeur. But the connection is more than just a clever play on the words dark and light.

When Haman wanted to destroy the Jews, what ended up saving them, is Esther's realization that Hashem is the true Author of history, orchestrating actions and events such that we should be spurred to act. She inspires the Jews of Shushan and in doing their own teshuvah, persevere and prosper.

Even while Haman focused on those Jews who died during the plague of darkness, they aren't spoken of in the Torah. The Jews who survived, those who merited redemption, were those who merited אור בכל מושבותם. They had a lot in common with those Jews who died. They all suffered through a horrific and oppresive slavery that broke their bodies and their will. But these Jews—those who were saved—recognized what was happening around them during the plagues. It was Hashem demonstrating to them that despite what sometimes may appear, He is truly running the show. It's that recognition through which they merited redemption and it's their legacy that the Jews of Shushan girded themselves with when they too were saved.

It's now up to us to imbibe that very same lesson, to seek out and recognize Hashem in everything that happens, and in so doing—just as our ancestors in Egypt and Persia before us—merit Hashem's ultimate Redemption.