

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Sabbath before Passover, which is known as "The Great Sabbath" (Shabbat Hagadol), is dedicated to Elijah the Prophet who - as we read in the Haftarah - will herald the arrival of the "Great and awesome day of the Lord", the period of redemption (Malachai 3:23). Elijah is one of the most fascinating and ubiquitous personalities of the Bible, which describes him as having been "translated into heaven": this provides the midrash with the opportunity to say that Elijah never died, but rather continually travels between heaven and earth visiting important personages and sowing seeds of loving kindness and good works. We all become especially acquainted with Elijah since our Tradition suggests that he is present at every circumcision ceremony - indeed, the 8 day old baby is ceremoniously placed on a special chair known as the "seat of Elijah" - as well as every family seder, when the door is opened and a special wine goblet is filled specifically for Elijah the prophet. What prompts the midrash to invite Elijah's presence specifically on the two occasions just mentioned? What does this teach us both concerning Elijah as well as the Jewish people in general?

Just about everyone is aware of the climax of Elijah's career, when he ministered as prophet of Israel during the first temple period under the reign of the wicked and adulterous King Ahab and Queen Jezabel. There is a terrible drought in the Land of Israel; Elijah is determined to prove the existence and involvement of the only one and true G-d of the universe, Lord of Israel and the world. Elijah stages a magnificent contest atop the majestic Mount Carmel in Haifa, a contest between the prophets of the Idol Ba'al and the prophet of the G-d of Israel in the presence of no less than 600,000 Jews at the bottom of the mountain. First the prophets of Ba'al cry out to their idol without receiving any response whatsoever; then Elijah calls out to the Lord G-d of Israel and the world - and a fire descends from heaven consuming the whole burnt offering offered to G-d. The Lord emerges triumphant, and all of the Jews shout in loud acclamation "The Lord He is G-d". The false prophets of Baal are murdered and the much needed rains begin to fall. Elijah and his G-d have won the day! (Kings I, 18). But then - in the very next chapter of the Book of Kings - comes a most

unexpected twist and turn of events. Queen Jezabel sends a messenger to inform Elijah that in 24 hours he will suffer the same fate as the slain prophets of Ba'al, and Elijah flees to Mount Sinai where he begs G-d to take his soul. What causes Elijah to give up so quickly and so completely? At the heels of such a public triumph, why does he not stand up to Jezabel and taste the fruits of his victory? I believe that the answer lies in the fact that Jezabel informed him that he would be killed in the next 24 hours. Why did she not execute him immediately? Elijah understands that Jezabel is delivering a profound insight into the mentality of the Israelites. She couldn't possibly execute Elijah immediately when he was still basking in the halo of his miracle; however, she understands only too well that in 24 hours the halo will be dimmed, the people will forget, and the legal power of king and queen will enable them to get away with anything, including Elijah's execution. And the proof that Jezabel is correct lies in the fact that during the 24 hrs following the miracle no change whatsoever took place within the life style or mentality of the Israelites. Yes, they may have proclaimed G-d's ascendance on Mount Carmel, but the very next morning very few individuals went to minyan or daf yomi who hadn't been there the day before. And very few families switched their children from public schools to religious schools. As G-d visually explains to Elijah, "Steven Spielberg productions" do not transform peoples' hearts or change peoples minds. G-d is not to be found neither in fire nor in thunder nor in rushing winds; G-d is only to be found in the still small voice of daily prayer and torah study, of kindness and good deeds.

Elijah remains frustrated, because his disappointment with the Israelites after his great extravaganza atop Mount Carmel makes him feel that there is no hope for ultimate Jewish repentance. He cries out to G-d, "I have zealously acted as a zealot for the Lord G-d of Hosts; but the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, have destroyed your altars and have killed your prophets by the sword; I now remain alone and they wish also to take my soul." (Kings I, 19).

The Almighty then takes Elijah up in a cloud into the supernal heavens, appointing the prophet Elisha as his successor. Elijah can no longer be a prophet of Israel because he has lost his faith in the Jewish people. Indeed, no one can be a spiritual leader

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of Israel unless he believes in Israel's ability to return to G-d and to redeem the world. But since Elijah never actually dies, the Almighty charges him with a mission. In effect, G-d says to him: "You declared that the Israelites have forsaken their covenant with Me? You will see how wrong you are! You will attend every circumcision which is the expression of My covenant and which symbolizes the willingness of every Jew to shed blood in commitment to Jewish future. And you will attend every Passover seder, when every Jew exclaims his faith in ultimate freedom and redemption as he vows to spend next year in Jerusalem. And through these ceremonies you will see how parents and children unite in building a Jewish future based on a Jewish past, and through your very presence during these two pivotal and crucial ceremonies you will enable 'the hearts of the children to be turned towards their parents and the hearts of the parents to be turned towards their children'" (Malachai 3, 24) © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd also the nation that they shall serve will I judge, and after that they will leave with a great amount of possessions" (Beraishis 15:14). After G-d had informed Avraham that his descendants would be subjugated in a long, harsh exile, He added that the nation that would afflict them would be punished accordingly, followed by an exodus that included becoming rich. Rashi tells us that this "punishment" refers to the 10 plagues that G-d sent on the Egyptians. Yonasan ben Uziel, on the other hand, says that it refers to 250 plagues. But which 250 plagues is he referring to?

There are 3 opinions brought in the Haggada about how many plagues actually occurred. All 3 opinions are based on the presumption that since the plagues in Egypt were done with "G-d's finger" (Shemos 8:15) while those by the Sea of Reeds were done with "G-d's great hand" (14:31), and a hand has five fingers, there must have been five times as many plagues by the sea as there were in Egypt. Therefore, Rabbi Yosi haGalili, who takes the simpler approach of there being 10 plagues in Egypt, says that there were 50 by the sea; Rabbi Eliezer, who uses a verse

(Tehillim 78:49) discussing the plagues in Egypt to show that each plague was really 4 plagues, says that there were 200 by the sea (4x10x5); and Rabbi Akiva, who learns that each plague was really 5 plagues, calculates the plagues by the sea to number 250. It would seem, then, that the Targum Yonasan is following Rabbi Akiva's opinion that there were 250 plagues by the Sea of Reeds, and understands G-d's words to Avraham to mean that after these 250 plagues are sent upon the Egyptians, his descendants will go free.

However, they were actually set free earlier, after the 10th (or 40th or 50th) plague in Egypt. The splitting of the sea only had to occur because the Egyptians changed their minds and chased after them. If the "judgment" in the above verse refers to the plagues that occurred in Egypt, it can correctly be said that afterwards they would go free. It can also be said that the Children of Israel were saved from the Egyptians through the miracles (including the plagues) that occurred at the sea. The Torah itself calls it a "salvation" (Shemos 14:30), not an act of "freeing." But Yonasan translates the end of the above verse as "afterwards they will go free," not afterwards they will be saved. If the plagues referred to are the ones by the sea, how can it also be said that after these plagues they will go free?

The whole numbers game of how many plagues there really were raises several issues. For one thing, where does it say that there were any plagues at all by the sea? First we should be told that there were (also) plagues by sea, and then we can be told (based on the finger/hand ratio) how many of them there were. Why does the Haggada assume that we already know that there were plagues by the sea, going straight into telling us how many of them there were? Secondly, if Yonasan ben Uziel is following Rabbi Akiva's opinion, shouldn't the number have been 300, not 250 (50 in Egypt and 250 by the sea)? Why didn't he include the ones in Egypt? Additionally, what is really going on with each of the plagues in Egypt being broken down into 4 or 5 plagues, and then multiplied by 5 to get the number of plagues by the sea? Are we simply reveling in the suffering of the Egyptians?

As previously mentioned, the plagues were designed to punish the Egyptians measure for measure, precisely correlating to how they made us suffer (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/bo.pdf). It is hard to imagine that every Egyptian deserved the exact same punishment. What is more likely is that some were more active in the oppression while others were more passive (perhaps silence being their only real act of partnership in the oppression). If one plague targeted those that were more involved in one specific type of oppression (for example, beating their Jewish slaves), another may have dealt with those that overworked their slaves (or did so with a certain type of work). The

depth of the affliction each Egyptian suffered from each plague was dependant on how egregious the corresponding oppression was. When Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva say that each plague was really 4 or 5 plagues, they may mean that there were 4 or 5 aspects to the same plague, and whether an individual was afflicted by 1, 2 or even all 5 of those aspects depended on their level of guilt. There were only 10 plagues in Egypt, according to all 3 opinions. The disagreement is only about how many levels or parts there were to each of those plagues, how specific G-d got in His punishing the Egyptians in Egypt. Was there a national plague that affected all Egyptians equally, or did G-d afflict the Egyptians in a way that addressed each Egyptian based on their individual indiscretions?

This is regarding the plagues in Egypt. In Pirkay Avos (5:4), we are told that just as there were 10 plagues in Egypt, there were 10 plagues by the sea. No breakdown of 10/50, 40/200 or 50/250, just 10/10, i.e. ten in Egypt and ten by the sea. According to everybody, the 10 by the sea were 5 times more specific than the ones in Egypt. We were able to see "G-d's great hand" because we were able to see that He punished the Egyptians precisely for what (i.e. the type of plague) and how much (i.e. severity of the plague) they deserved. According to Rabbi Akiva, each of the 10 plagues by the sea had 25 different levels, or aspects. Therefore, when (according to the Targum Yonasan) G-d told Avraham that he would free his descendents after He punished the oppressors, He meant specifically the plagues by the sea, not the ones in Egypt. Only when the plagues were so precisely targeted could this "judgment" be said to be complete; the first 50 (in Egypt) weren't enough.

One could now ask why G-d didn't just sent these precisely targeted plagues in Egypt? Why wait until the sea to complete the punishment? According to the Midrash Hagadol (Shemos 10:28-29), they were supposed to be, but had to be postponed.

Before the 10th plague in Egypt, when Paro told Moshe to leave and never see his face again, Moshe agreed that he wouldn't. Right then and there G-d spoke to Moshe, telling him that "there are additional plagues that I am going to bring upon this wicked one, [but] because you said you will not see his face again I will bring them upon him at the sea." The Midrash Hagadol then continues that "based on this, our sages taught that the Egyptians were smitten with 10 plagues in Egypt and 10 by the sea." The 10 plagues by the sea mentioned in Pirkay Avos, which were broken down more specifically into 50, 200 or 250 plagues in the Haggada, were originally going to occur in Egypt, until Moshe validated Paro's threat that he won't see his face again.

It can therefore be suggested that when G-d told Avraham about the 250 plagues, i.e. the ones that most specifically targeted each Egyptian oppressor

based on their precise indiscretions, He referred to ones meant to be sent while still in Egypt, right before the nation was set free. It was only because of Moshe's words that G-d postponed them until the showdown by the Sea of Reeds. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

As is well known, the Shelamim sacrifice is unique in that its owner receives some of its meat to eat. However, even for this sacrifice the Torah requires that part must be given to the Kohanim? the breast and the thighs. From the passage in the Torah it is clear that there is a significant difference between these two gifts to the priests. With respect to the breast, we are told to lift it up together with the fat that will later be offered on the Altar: "Let his hands bring G-d's sacrifice, let him bring the fat on the breast, to lift it as a raised offering before G-d. And the Kohen shall offer the fat on the Altar, while the breast will be for Aharon and his sons." [Vayikra 7:30-31]. With respect to the thigh, it is written, "And give the thigh on the right side as a gift to the Kohen from the Shelamim sacrifices. The one who sacrifices the blood of the Shelamim and the fat from among the sons of Aharon will have the right thigh as a portion." [7:32-33]. What is the reason for these differences?

Evidently the Torah wants to emphasize that with respect to the breast meat, Bnei Yisrael are not giving a gift to the Kohanim but rather to G-d. The fact that the breast meat is added to the fat, which is a major element in the Shelamim sacrifice, shows that in principle the breast should also have been burned as a sacrifice. The fat and the flesh are only separated after they have been put together in the ritual of lifting them up: the fat is indeed offered on the Altar, and the breast is given to the Kohanim. The thigh, on the other hand, can be clearly seen from the verse to be a gift from the person who brings the sacrifice, directly to the Kohen, without any special ritual of dedication to G-d. Thus, the thigh is a direct gift from Bnei Yisrael to the Kohen, while the breast is a gift from Bnei Yisrael to G-d, and it is then transferred to the Kohen. This also explains the differences in terminology between the breast and the thigh. "For I have taken the breast of the lifting-up ceremony and the gift of the thigh from Bnei Yisrael, from their Shelamim sacrifices, and I have given them to Aharon the Kohen and to his sons as an eternal gift from Bnei Yisrael." [7:34]. The verse discusses the two gifts together, but their specific names emphasize the difference between them: the breast which takes part in the ritual, which was given to the Kohen by G-d, as opposed to the thigh, which was a direct gift from Bnei Yisrael to the Kohen.

In other places in the Torah it is implied that the thigh is also lifted up in a ritual, and the Ramban

discusses this point: "This verse implies that the breast is lifted up with the fat while the thigh is not lifted, while later on it is written, 'The breast meat and the thigh were lifted up by Aharon as a raised offering' [9:21]. This is because the thigh was raised separately." In any case, even if the thigh is indeed raised, this is done to show that the animal was dedicated to G-d? but the gift is still a direct one from the owner of the sacrifice. The fact that the lifting up of the thigh is not mentioned in the passage serves to emphasize the different approach to the two gifts.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Hagadol, depicts the Jewish scene moments before the advent of Mashiach. Malachi, the last prophet before our first exile, shares with us the prevalent conversations during the final moments of our final exile. The masses of our people will reflect upon the generation's unprecedented affluence and conclude that Torah observance is a wasted exercise. Their argument will be, "What material gain has ever come from observing His commandments or walking the downtrodden path for His sake? We constantly praise the agnostics and the wicked who met much success and yet, escaped the wrath of Above." (3:14, 15) The impressive financial success of so many unaffiliated Jews will suggest an indifference on the side of Hashem, almost to the extent of condoning their inexcusable behavior.

What will be the response of the righteous? The prophet continues, "Then the G-d fearing people will speak amongst themselves and Hashem will hearken, listen and preserve the comments of those who revere Him and respect His name." (3:16) During those dark moments G-d fearing people will be scarce. However, those who will endure and persevere, despite the fierce influences of exile, will remain steadfast in their faith. They will gather and strengthen one another sharing their true perspectives on life. They do not seek tangible benefits from life and certainly do not expect a reward in this finite world (see Malbim to 3:16) Their service is based on reverence and respect rather than reward or material gain. To them, the absence of fame or financial success will not present a serious challenge to their commitment. Instead, they will patiently await the era of redemption wherein the glory of Hashem will become revealed to all.

Our Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (591) explain this unwavering faith with the following parable. The queen was once confronted by a maidservant in the midst of a dark night. The latter argued that she was more attractive than the queen herself! The queen responded calmly, "Say all you wish now because tomorrow in the light of day the truth will be revealed." In the same vein righteous people, during our dark exile, find themselves

at a serious disadvantage. In the absence of Hashem's clear revelations, anything can be presented and said. Allusions can easily be construed that promise eternal bliss for those who walk the unethical and immoral path. It requires men of great character and commitment to rise above public opinion and speak the truth. Their response to this senseless talk is, "The truth is around the corner." "Soon Mashiach will arrive and the clear revelations of Hashem will tell the real story." Regarding these devout, the prophet says, "And for you who fear Hashem a gracious and healing sun will shine upon you." (3:20) Those who firmly awaited the light of redemption will merit its light, the brilliant radiance of Hashem. The light of day will finally arrive and those clear perspectives of the righteous will become self evident truths.

In truth, these very same discussions took place in Egypt and served as an essential factor in the preservation of our people. The Midrash Rabba (Shmos 5:18) reveals to us that the Jewish people observed Shabbos long before they were commanded. In defense of his people, Moshe Rabbeinu approached Pharaoh and insisted on a day of rest. After being granted his request, Moshe conveniently dedicated the seventh day of the week for this purpose. The Midrash adds that the Jewish people effectively utilized this day to study scrolls of redemption. In the midst of heavy persecution, the Jews maintained their faith in Hashem. Although no trace of Hashem could be seen, they remained devoted to Him. They didn't question Hashem's lack of involvement and were not influenced by the darkness of their exile. Although their wicked taskmasters enjoyed a comfortable life this could not seduce the Jewish people into straying from Hashem. They, too, gathered together and encouraged each other with the truths of Hashem. They understood that daylight would eventually arrive and, in the radiance of Hashem, the truth would become self evident. In this merit, they did experience those long awaited results. Eventually, Hashem did shine His light upon them as it says, "For the Jewish people there was light in their settlement." (Shmos 10:23) May we merit to experience this light speedily in our days. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Perhaps the most famous song in the haggadah is Dayenu. What is its meaning? Note that the song begins with the words kamah ma'alot tovot-how many good favors has G-d bestowed upon us. The song then lists fifteen generous gifts that G-d has given us. But the word ma'alot may not only mean "good favor," but may also mean "ascent," referring to the fifteen shirei ha-ma'alot-songs of ascent found in Psalms. Ma'alot also means "steps," referring to the fifteen steps in the area of the Holy Temple.

These views have one point in common. Both teach that Dayenu alludes to the ultimate redemption when Psalms will be recited in the rebuilt Temple. While Passover is the holiday that celebrates our freedom from Egypt-and, indeed, the section prior to Dayenu (Arami oved avi) focuses on that exodus-Dayenu reminds us that full redemption means incorporating the spirit of the Psalms and the Temple into our lives.

Dayenu includes another message. Many feel that redemption requires complete change. The Dayenu reminds us that redemption or self improvement is a process. Each line of the Dayenu makes this very point. For example, we say had G-d taken us out of Egypt and not executed judgement upon the Egyptians, Dayenu-it would have been enough. One should be perpetually moving towards self improvement. The process is sometimes more valuable than the end result.

One final thought. I remember in some of the most difficult times of the Soviet Jewry Movement, standing outside Soviet government buildings and chanting-dayenu. Our message was clear. We were declaring, enough of the suffering that our sisters and brothers in the Soviet Union were experiencing. We would spell out what we meant using the structure of the Dayenu itself. "Had only the Soviets prevented the baking of matzot, and not imprisoned Sharansky it would have been enough...."

But in reality, Dayenu teaches the opposite message. It tells us that had G-d only done one favor for us, it would have been enough. Dayenu is not a song of complaint; it is rather a song of thanksgiving to G-d.

Dayenu is a perfect way to bring the learning in the magid section to a higher level. Once recounting the story of the Exodus, we cannot contain ourselves as we declare-thank you G-d for allowing us to ascend and come one step closer to full redemption. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar with some thoughts that he had from his grandfather. The Chiddushei HaRim posed a basic question: Why is this Shabbos called "HaGadol" ("the Great")? To address this question, the Chiddushei HaRim (and the Sfas Emes) look at other cases in which Chazal used the word "gadol". The objective is to conclude from those other contexts what Chazal may have had in mind when they used the word "gadol."

One such case is the term "Anshei Kenesses HaGedola"-the men of the Great Assembly. This term refers to our Torah leaders in the early years of the

Second Beis HaMikdash. The Gemara (Yoma, 69b) explains that the assembly was called "Gedola" because they restored HaShem's crown to its former glory. This answer, however, only deepens the puzzle. Because to say "restored" implies that the glory of HaShem's crown had somehow been diminished in an earlier time period. But how could that have happened? Have no fear. The Gemara and the Sfas Emes will explain.

Chazal note that Moshe Rabbeinu referred to HaShem (Devarim, 10:17) as "HaGadol, HaGibor, Vehanora" ("the Great, the Mighty, and the Awesome"). But later generations could not in all honesty apply those words to HaShem. Thus, Yirmiyahu witnessed the Babylonians desecrating the Beis HaMikdash, and asked: "Where is His awesomeness?" And seeing no sign of HaShem as being awesome, he deleted the word "Nora". Thus we see Yirmiyahu (32:18) referring to HaShem only as "HaGadol, HaGibor".

Similarly, when Daniel saw how the Babylonians oppressed their Jewish captives, he asked: "Where is His might?" And seeing no evidence of HaShem's "might," Daniel deleted the word "HaGibor" and referred to HaShem (Daniel, 9:4) only as: "HaGadol (Vehanora)".

Then came Anshei Kenesses HaGedola and said: Adrabba! (On the contrary!) What you have witnessed is in fact powerful evidence of HaShem's might and awesomeness. For were it not for His great might, He could not stand by as His people are oppressed. And were it not for His awesomeness, the Jewish people could never have survived-let alone maintained its identity among the nations of the world as Ovdei HaShem. Thus, interpreting the evidence differently, Anshei Kenesses HaGedola recognized that HaShem is indeed mighty and awesome. Therefore, they reinserted the attributes of "HaGibor VeHanora" into our conception of HaShem. And to this day, we utter those words in the first beracha of Shemoneh Esrei. This was indeed "restoring HaShem's crown to its former glory"!

The Sfas Emes cites another context-Creation-in which Chazal employ the word "Gadol." Chazal comment: "'Gedula,-zeh ma'aseh bereishis." ("The word Gedula-Greatness-refers to HaShem's having created the world.") The Sfas Emes explains. The world that HaShem created-i.e., nature -- appears to be contrary to a perception that HaShem rules the world. But a closer look enables us to see that nature exists only because HaShem gives it existence. Thus, Creation-and nature-also testify to HaShem's greatness.

The Sfas Emes cites one more case where the word "Gadol" appears. That place is in parshas Lech Lecha, (Bereishis, 12:2)., where HaShem promised Avraham Avinu: "Ve'eh'escha legoy gadol" ("I will make

you a great nation.") The Rambam gives us the context of this promise. Avraham had been able to penetrate and see through the fiction of the many false G-ds worshiped in his milieu. Thus, he was able to perceive HaShem's Omnipresence in the world. However, Avraham Avinu wanted to see an entire nation that would provide testimony to HaShem's dominion. In that context, HaShem assured Avraham that He would make Avraham into a "great nation." Thus, once again we encounter the word "gadol."

To conclude, the Sfias Emes is saying that the word "gadol" (as in "Shabbos HaGadol") refers to the capacity to see through apparent reality-either in history or nature-and thus to perceive HaShem's Omnipresence.

Our ancestors demonstrated this capacity many years ago, in Egypt. They did so when on, the day now known as Shabbos HaGadol, they dared to prepare for slaughter the deity of their former masters. This action required personal bravery. It also required a key intellectual attribute: namely, the ability to pierce the Hester with which HaShem chooses to cloak the true real world, and thus to see reality as it truly is. Clearly, we need more of both of these qualities-both individual courage and intellectual integrity. May HaShem help us to develop these strengths in our everyday lives! © 2007 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The word "tzav" itself conveys much of the basic message of Judaism and the traditions of Torah life. Even though we live, or believe that we do, in a world of ultimate free choice and personal autonomy, the structure of all civilizations and societies is that we are commanded to do certain things in life. Sometimes it is our family that makes these demands on us, other times it is our work or profession and still other times it is the government that intrudes upon our autonomy. There is always a piece of us, deeply hidden within the recesses of our psyche, which rebels against these intrusions on our private choices and lives.

The Torah recognizes this nature of ours and therefore emphasizes the necessary requirement of commandments that can thereby insure a moral lifestyle and a better society. Even the great Aharon, the paradigm of human goodness and peace, the holy High Priest of Israel, has to be commanded. The strength of being commanded - of "tzav" - is the bulwark of Jewish life and tradition. Without that ingredient of asher tzivanu - blessed be G-d Who has commanded us - there is no Judaism and ultimately no private or public Jewish life.

All of our lives, from the time of infancy onward, we are shaped and raised by commandments. The rabbis called this process chinuch - the laying of a strong foundation for our lives. Thus the word "tzav"

which introduces our parsha this week is not only to be understood in its literal and narrow meaning as it applies to the laws of sacrifices in the Temple and to the High Priest of Israel but it is to be seen as the basic expression of the values and mindset of Judaism in all of its aspects.

Special note should be made that this word "tzav" appears in conjunction with the commandments regarding the sacrifice of the olah in the Temple. The olah, unlike any of the other sacrifices, was a sacrifice from which no human being obtained any immediate tangible benefit. It was completely consumed by the fire on the altar.

Thus there must have been a hidden voice of hesitancy that resonated within the person bringing that sacrifice and even within the priest that was offering it up on the altar to be totally consumed. After all, of what value was a sacrifice if no one would derive any immediate value from its offering?

Because of the limited range of human logic as compared to G-d's infinity so to speak, the Torah emphasized here the word "tzav" - this is an order, a commandment - not subject to human logic or choice. Many times in life demands are made upon us there are illogical and sometimes appear even to be capricious, but nevertheless they must be met.

By realizing the innate necessity in life for "tzav" - for bowing to Divine Will and for obeying commandments, we therefore make our lives easier to live and more meaningful as well. And we also must realize that life at times demands an olah from us, selfless sacrifice that shows little immediate or tangible reward or benefit. We are here to serve. That is our ultimate life's purpose. © 2007 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI ARI WEISS

Where's Moshe?

This year, like every year, as we read through the Hagaddah, we wonder why Moshe is not mentioned. One would think that Moshe, through whom all of the plagues were brought, and whom Hashem commanded to lead us out of Egypt would be the central character at our seder. Wasn't it through him that our redemption occurred? Yet, we find no trace of Moshe's name anywhere.

In order to understand why Moshe is in the background during our seder, we must examine the content of maggid. Maggid outlines the story of our redemption and actually retells the story of every exile we've gone through and will go through. In maggid we read of the prototypical exile and redemption that generalizes all of our exiles and redemptions. The Baal

Hagadah presents this in the form of four P'sukim which are expounded upon during maggid. The first verse describes our descent into exile, and how it was intended for but a short time. The second verse describes how the Egyptians oppressed and afflicted us. The third verse describes how we finally called out to Hashem to help us, and the final verse describes our redemption.

These four verses can therefore be seen as the outline of golus and geula. We first go into exile, are oppressed, cry out to Hashem for help, and he answers by saving us. This is the model for all redemptions, including our final one (IY"H). But what happened to Moshe - the Moshiach? The Gemara at the end of Sanhedrin underscores the importance and requirement of Moshiach in our redemption. Yet the Baal Hagadah neglects to mention Moshiach as one of the elements of Golus and Geula.

It is very possible, then, that the Baal Hagadah is focusing on our role in the Geula and how we can help to bring it about. We read, therefore, in the maggid how Hashem listened to our calls, saw our afflictions, our toils, and our troubles. It wasn't until we cried out to Hashem in tefillah that we were saved. We finally realized that we couldn't do it ourselves and could only be saved through Hashem's intervention. But the Baal Hagadah goes on to explain that the Passuk also refers to the children. Hashem came to redeem us because of our tefillos and because of the Jewish identity instilled in the children.

So why isn't Moshe mentioned? Because Moshiach is Hashem's "job." Ours, as is recalled in the Hagadah, is Tefillah and the home. When we uphold our end, Hashem will bring about the Geula in whatever way He sees fit. © 1999 Rabbi A. Weiss

RABBI BARUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

Life is good. There is no doubt that the vast majority of us feel this way. This is why the most common Jewish drink toast is "L'Chaim," To Life. Sure, there are difficulties, but when all is said and done, we conclude that it's worth bearing the painful times in order to experience life's pleasures.

This week's Torah portion confirms our observation in describing the thanksgiving offering, the korban todah. Rashi (Leviticus 7:12) states (paraphrased): "A man offers a thanksgiving offering (in the Temple) when he is saved from potential danger. There are four types: sea travelers, desert travelers, those released from prison, and a seriously sick patient who has recovered. As the verse says in Psalms (107:22), 'They should give thanks to G-d for His kindness, and for His wonders to mankind.'"

Interestingly and providentially, the mnemonic for this group of four is CHaYYiM-which means "life." [Chavush (jail), Yisurim (illness), Yam (sea), Midbar

(desert)] (Shulchan Aruch 219:1). In our times, we fulfill this concept with the recitation of the blessing called HaGomel ("He who grants favors..."). Certainly, we thank G-d for delivering us from possible disaster because we wish to stay alive. We know that it is good to be alive. This is what we express each morning when we arise to the Modeh Ani prayer: "I am thankful before You, Living and Everlasting King, that You returned my life to me with mercy. Great is your faithfulness!" Life is good.

Puzzling beyond words then, is the following passage in the Talmud Eruvin 13b: "For two and a half years, the Academies of Hillel and Shammai debated. One school maintained that we would have been better off having never been created, while the other opined that we are indeed better off having been created. They finally concluded that we would have been better off having never been created but now that we are created we should examine and refine our deeds."

If ever a passage of Talmud needed explanation, this is it. The Talmud cannot mean what it seems to say. G-d is the Ultimate source of goodness. He decided to create the world. Can we now sit and debate whether He chose correctly? Is there any other possibility but to conclude that it was an absolute act of G-d's generosity and kindness for Him to create us? What kind of discussion could Hillel and Shammai have had? Just as a passage in the Talmud that were to say that $2 + 2 = 77$ cannot mean what it seems to say, so too with this passage of Talmud. There must be some explanation beyond what the simple reading of the words indicates. What then is the deeper meaning?

We may be tempted to suggest (a simple reading of Tosafot might imply this but it cannot be taken at face value) that while it is certainly beneficial for righteous individuals to be created, most people do not fulfill G-d's Instructions for Living, and they will be punished. Therefore, it would have been better for them not to have been created.

Even if we were to try to fit that into the language of the Talmud, which has no indication that it is only discussing the wicked, it will still be very difficult to tolerate such an explanation. Could G-d have created a world in which only one pious person out of 100 or so succeeds in making creation worthwhile, while for all others, creation is detrimental? If so, based on *Imatatio Dei*, we can derive that it is permissible to make 100 people suffer as long as one benefits. Could this be what is meant by G-d as the ultimate source of Kindness? Rather, the explanation is the following. G-d created mankind and it is obvious that it was beneficial for all to have been created. Hillel and Shammai are not questioning G-d's actual choice to create. The only issue is whether specifically from our perspective, we should feel as if we should have been created.

Every person is bound to sin even if only once, as the verse in Kohelet 7:20 says: "There is no man so

completely righteous on earth who always does good and never sins." Therefore, Hillel and Shammai wonder if all the benefits of being created are worthwhile from our human viewpoint, if it means we inevitably must disappoint and pain G-d through sin at some juncture.

If a baby knew that by being born he would be giving his mother intense pain he should believe that all the benefits of being born are not worth having to give his mother this pain. Even if the mother says it's worth it to her, the child should be of the mindset that he would never want to put the mother through any pain even though he benefits later.

So too, we should feel similarly when it comes to our relationship with G-d. We know that G-d's creation is an amazing kindness. But we are unsure, says the Talmud, if we should experience feelings of regret at having been created since creation must involve delivering G-d some pain as a result of sin. We conclude in the Talmud that from our human vantage point we would not have chosen existence since it does entail sinning and disappointing G-d, to some degree. But once G-d has created us, "we should examine and refine our deeds." We must do our utmost to avoid sinning so as to distress and dissatisfy G-d as infrequently as possible.

G-d is not merely a distant Creator. He is a loving parent. We must always be aware of this. Children naturally like to please their parents. We should make it our business to naturally want to please our Father in Heaven. © 2007 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.com

RABBI TZVI KLUGERMAN

Baruch Hamakom, Baruch Hu

As we enter deeper into the recitation of the Passover saga, we recite Baruch Hamakom, Baruch Hu, Blessed is the Omnipresent. This paragraph concludes with Baruch Shenatan Torah L'Amo Yisrael, Blessed be the One who gave Torah to His nation Israel. This blessing is unique, as it is said without Shem u' Malchut, the Divine Name and Royal Appellation. A blessing usually signifies the liturgical division of a prayer service. This blessing, albeit without the Divine Name, sanctifies what may be the actual start of the Passover seder, the commandment to relate the Exodus from Egypt.

This possible beginning of the seder, is marked by the section of the four sons. Why would the seder begin with the four sons? Why not begin immediately with the passage from the Midrash Mechilta "Yachol M'Rosh Chodesh, You might suppose that we should begin from the beginning of the month"?

If the motif of the seder is Chinuch Hayeladim, instruction of the children, then we have to establish pedagogical guidelines. We bring the example of the wise son, the Chacham, to reaffirm our obligation. Even

if our children are more learned than us, we still have an obligation to transmit our heritage. The Rasha, evil son, reminds us not to discount the rebellious child without trying. The harsh response offered to this son is another attempt to show him the folly of his attitude. As we learn in the Torah, the Ben Sorer u'Moreh, rebellious son, was declared rebellious only after repeated attempts were made to teach him. The Tam, simple son, receives the simple answer. We are encouraged to be persistent in our attempts to teach him, even if he doesn't understand after the first time. The Sh'eino Yodea Lish'ol, one who doesn't even know to ask, reminds us not to disregard the quiet student, and not to assume that everyone present understands what is being said and done.

Yet, perhaps there is another meaning behind the placement of the four sons at this juncture. The saga of the Redemption of the Israelites as G-d's people, was an epic event that had many different facets. Witnessing the Otot u'Moftim, G-d's wonders and signs that were visited upon the Egyptians and retelling the Exodus can have profound reactions in the same person.

After learning about the Exodus, we should be able to see The Divine and search out G-d in the events. This spiritual revelation may overwhelm us, even inspire us to new heights, but even the sky is a limit. We must remember the seemingly inappropriate answer given to the Chacham, "Ein Maftirim Achar Hapesach Afikoman, nothing is to be eaten after the Afikomen". Regardless of the spiritual revelation achieved, the primacy of Halacha remains supreme.

Similarly, we may at times deny the Divine in the events of the Redemption saga. Like the Rasha, we might try not to see the hand of G-d in the events. The answer given to the wicked son makes us aware that had we denied the Divine during the actual plagues and not heeded Moshe's warnings to place the blood upon the doorposts, we would not have been saved.

However, there are times that we look at G-d's divine providence with some hesitation. Did He have to do it that way, we might ask. The answer given to the Tam instructs us to look at the wonders and signs of The Almighty with Temimut, full acceptance. This is the approach of Nachum Ish Gamzu, who regularly stated "Gam zu L'Tova, this too is for the best". That is the approach of the Tam. Acceptance of G-d's will with Emunah She'leimah - complete belief.

Yet, there may be events of the Redemption that overpower us and our response is one of silence. We are too overwhelmed to respond. "At Petach Lo, you open for him", is the response to the Sheino Yodea Lish'ol. The learning process must never cease.

At the beginning of our Kiyum Hamitzvah, the discharge of the commandment, of telling the Exodus saga, we need to be aware of others' and our own reactions. © 1999 Rabbi T. Klugerman