

Setbacks overwhelm us; we get consumed by success. Both can obscure our focus. Before we know it, life passed us by as we allowed ourselves to be drowned in practical matters. We mourn not having regularly indulged the greatest joy – Torah study. Whether we are succeeding or undergo setbacks, we can enjoy this greatest good, treasured by our kings. Certainly, these geniuses knew better. They chose a life of wisdom. Study will grant us deep fulfillment here, for both rich and poor, and wisdom is what we take to the next world, not wealth.



5757
5771
14
YEARS

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IN THIS ISSUE

BESHALACH	1-3
TESTING GOD	1,4
LETTERS	1,5-8
LEADERSHIP OF MOSHE	9

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Weekly Parsha

Beshalach

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The Reciprocal Relationship between Through and Action

And Hashem said to Moshe: Now, I will rain for you bread upon the

(continued on next page)

Weekly Parsha



Testing GOD

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

This week's parsha contains some of the seminal moments in the history of Bnei Yisrael. Events such as the splitting of the sea, the destruction of the Egyptian army, the introduction of mitzvos at Marah, the manna, and the war with Amalek are each, by themselves, subjects of enormous significance. There is one incident, though, that at first glance seems to be relatively minor. Nestled between the commandments regarding the manna and the war with Amalek is the account of Maase-Merivah, a seemingly ubiquitous story of complaint that actually plays a pivotal role in the development of the nation.

The story unfolds with Bnei Yisrael arriving at Rifidim, where there was no readily available drinking water. The Torah then says (Shemos 17:2):

(continued on page 4)

Letters



Letters from our Readers & More

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

How to Answer Children

Chaya: In light of the many Jews who dismiss fossils and scientific knowledge, how would you explain these topics to children: dinosaurs, the world's age, and Christmas?

(continued on page 5)

(Beshalach cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha**JewishTimes**
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camp from the heavens. The nation will go forth each day and collect (it). In this manner, I will try them as to whether or not they will go in the way of my laws. (Shemot 16:4)

The introduction of the mun and its laws

Parshat BeShalach provides the Torah's first mention and a description of the mun – the manna – that sustained Bnai Yisrael in the wilderness. One month after the nation's departure from Egypt, the people arrived at the Wilderness of Sin. In this wilderness, there was no obvious source of food. The people bemoaned their plight and grumbled that death in Egypt would have been preferable to their impending starvation in this wilderness; in Egypt, at least they had food to eat – even meat. In response to the complaints of the nation, Hashem gave them mun in the morning. Also, in response to their longing for meat, Hashem brought the people quail in the evening.

Hashem established a number of laws related to the daily collection of the mun. The people were only permitted to collect enough for the day. They were required to completely consume the daily portion and they were not permitted to save any for the next day. If any was hoarded, it spoiled that day and was unusable the next day. On Friday, they were to collect a double-portion that would suffice for that day and for the entire Shabbat. It would not spoil. On Shabbat, the mun did not fall and the people were enjoined against leaving the camp to search for the mun.

In the above passage, Hashem explains His reason for providing the nation with mun. Through the mun, He will try the nation and determine whether the people will follow the laws He has established. This is a strange statement. The mun was granted in order to sustain the people. Testing the people's obedience seems to be a secondary objective. Yet, in Hashem's explanation of His reason for granting the gift of mun, He does not mention the people's legitimate need for sustenance and identifies as His primary objective the testing of the nation.

Greed and its origins

A comment of Rashi can help explain this passage. Rashi comments that the nation's request for sustenance was appropriate. However, the longing for meat was not warranted. This is for two reasons: First, the people should have realized that meat is a luxury and not a necessity. Second, the nation left Egypt with all of their cattle. If they truly desired meat, then they could have slaughtered their own cattle and satisfied their perceived need.[1]

Of course this raises an interesting question: why did the people not slaughter their own cattle? If their need for meat was so intense, they could have easily satisfied it! Rav Yisroel Chait suggests that apparently the nation was



motivated by greed. They were unwilling to slaughter their own animals in order to satisfy their desire for meat. He further explained that generally, greed stems from one of two sources. For some people, greed is an expression of haughtiness. These individuals are driven to amass more and more wealth because they believe that their possessions and resources reflect upon their own greatness and accomplishments. They are unwilling or unable to share with others lest they diminish their wealth and thereby, its representation of their own greatness. However, for others, greed is an expression of an almost opposite attitude. It stems from a deep sense of insecurity. Such individuals are dominated by fear of impending disaster and they cannot overcome their anxiety. In response, they devote themselves to preparing for the potential catastrophe that may come with the new day. They cannot arrest their need to amass resources because this is their response to their anxiety and they cannot share their resources because they believe that this may jeopardize their own survival when the doom they fear does arrive.

Rav Chait explained that it is unlikely that the greed of recently liberated slaves was driven by a fantasy of greatness. However, we can easily imagine the fears and anxieties of a generation that had barely survived its

(continued on next page)

generation's Holocaust – the bondage and persecution of Egypt. They were now in the wilderness. They had no source of sustenance. Yes, they longed for meat; but they were unwilling to draw upon the one finite source of nourishment that was available to them – their cattle.

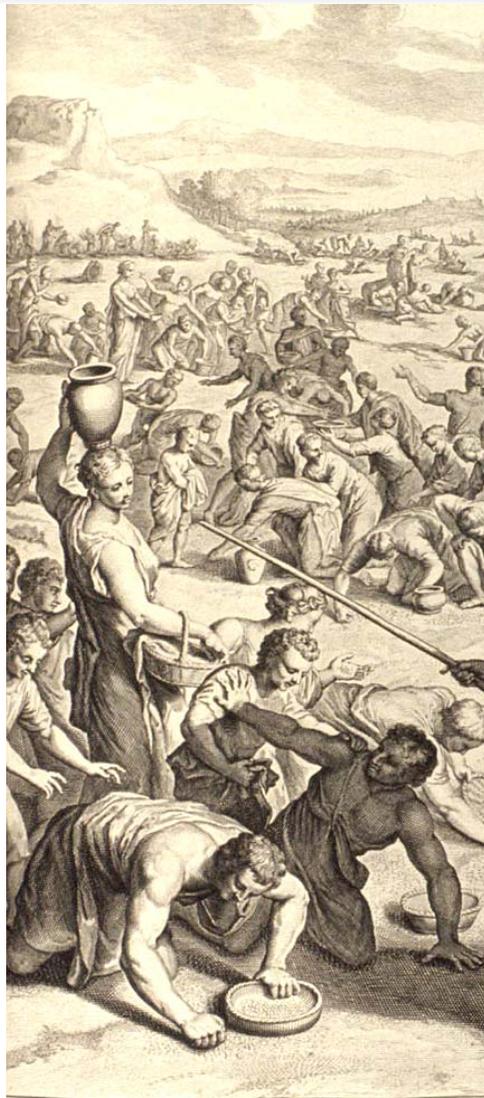
Mun as a response to the nation's anxiety

Based upon this insight, Rav Chait explains that the mun was intended to address the nation's sense of anxiety and insecurity. The mun fell each and every day – except Shabbat. It was a miracle granted by Hashem. Hashem demonstrated to the people that He is the only real source of security. The message of the mun was that through their relationship with Hashem they can achieve the only true security.[2]

It is now possible to re-approach the above passage. The objective of the mun was not merely to provide sustenance. Other means could have accomplished the same end. Instead, the mun was designed to address the nation's anxieties and insecurities. It was intended to instill within the people a confidence based upon reliance upon and trust in Hashem. The message of the passage seems to be that this objective could not be accomplished merely through the consistent appearance of the mun on a daily basis. In other words, even though the people would see the mun spread upon the ground day-after-day, they would continue to struggle with their anxiety. Only through observance of the laws related to the mun would they overcome their insecurities. Why would they not be able to overcome their fears through observing Hashem's constant care for them and His commitment to their welfare? Why were the laws needed?

Action and Thought

Sefer HaChinuch notes that there is a reciprocal relationship between our thoughts and our actions or behaviors. We all realize that our thoughts inform and guide our actions. For example, when we feel threatened, we may respond through either engaging in action to defend ourselves or to attack and eliminate our adversary. But our actions also inform and influence our thoughts and attitudes. For



example, if we force ourselves to engage in positive behaviors, we eventually influence and improve our self-image. Often actions have a more powerful impact upon our ideational reality – our thoughts and attitudes – than can be achieved through reflection and contemplation.[3] This can be illustrated. Consider a person who suffers from agoraphobia – fear of open spaces. No doubt this person has been told by countless friends and colleagues that his fear is irrational. He probably, at some level, realizes that this is true. But despite all of the assurances he has received that his fear is baseless, he cannot shake his sense of foreboding when challenged to travel outside of his home. However, if this person can be persuaded to take a first small step towards confronting his fear – perhaps, just standing in the doorway of his home and gazing upon the world outside – he may begin to overcome his anxieties.

Now, the function of the mitzvot regarding the mun is more clearly grasped. These laws demanded that the people act in a manner that expressed security in Hashem. They were commanded to collect only enough mun for the day. They were forbidden from hoarding the mun. They were commanded to collect a double portion on Friday and trust that it would not spoil over the course of the following day. Each and every one of these laws reinforced through action the ideas and attitudes the mun was designed to communicate. The people not only observed Hashem's constant attention to their well-being. They also, acted in a manner that reinforced their acceptance of Hashem as their trusted provider. Through this process, the nation was provided the opportunity to gradually overcome its anxieties.[4] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 16:8.

[2] Rav Yisroel Chait, Shir al HaYam, YBT TTL #C-059.

[3] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 16.

[4] Rav Chait suggests an alternative explanation for the function of these laws. He explains that in order to cultivate within the nation a sense of security based upon its relationship with Hashem, it was necessary for Hashem to become a reality for them; the people must enter into a relationship with Hashem. This relationship is created through the observance of mitzvot and the study of their laws. The mitzvot and their laws reflect the wisdom of Hashem. Through Torah observance and study, we draw closer to Hashem and He becomes more real to us. He points out that in a preceding similar incident in Marah, Hashem responded to the nation's fears through providing mitzvot and requiring their regular study. The Sages identify the mitzvot given at that time and they are not specifically related to the incident or related to issues of insecurity. This implies that the study and observance of mitzvot – any mitzvot – is helpful in nurturing a person's sense of reliance upon Hashem and security. This is because through study and observance of mitzvot, Hashem becomes more real and a relationship is forged between Hashem and the person.

(Testing continued from page 1)

Weekly Parsha

"The people quarreled with Moshe, and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moshe said to them, 'Why are you quarreling with me? Why are you testing God?'"

At this point, God remains silent. The Torah continues, explaining that the people became thirsty, questioning the rationale for leaving Egypt to die in the desert. Moshe is mispallel to God, who then instructs Moshe to take his staff, and along with the elders of the nation, strike a specific rock from which water will flow. The story concludes:

"He [Moshe] named the place Massah and Merivah because the B'nei Yisrael had quarreled [Merivah] and because they had tested [Massah] God, saying, 'Is God among us or not?'"

This story seems pretty formulaic in light of Bnei Yisrael's future complaints against Moshe and God. Yet, this incident is isolated from the others. In Parshas Veschanan (Devarim 6:16), we see the following:

"Do not test Hashem, your God, as you tested at Massah."

The fact that the prohibition against testing God referred to in Devarim emerges from the above incident indicates that this was the quintessential example of this behavior and is thereby ripe for analysis.

The Ramban (ibid), in explaining the prohibition against testing God, writes that a person should not say, "Is God among us to perform miracles for us?" According to the Ramban, this was the perspective of Bnai Yisrael at the time of the incident at Rifidim. Bnei Yisrael essentially offered an ultimatum to God – if He would provide them with water using a miracle, they would follow Him into the desert, and if not, they would leave. The Ramban (to paraphrase) then explains that a person should not worship God with the caveat that He will act in a miraculous way, nor should he worship God with the expectation of reward.

One astonishing point the Ramban makes requires some clarification. How do we understand the drive of Bnei Yisrael, who had just been saved from the Egyptians with the splitting of the sea and were the recipients of the miraculous manna, somehow issuing an ultimatum to God? Furthermore, were the previous miracles somehow inadequate, precipitating the desire for yet another show of God's control over nature? (The general problem of testing God is pretty self-evident and not the objective of this article)



The event of Maaseh-Merivah was one of crucial importance and it occurred at a pivotal moment in the sequence of events. The splitting of the sea and death of the Egyptians served to sever the existing slave mentality state of Bnai Yisrael. It also demonstrated to them the unique relationship between God and themselves, a relationship they could reflect on now that they were saved. With Bnei Yisrael freed from their psychological shackles, God then introduces numerous mitzvos to the nation (at Marah), indicating that they would be tied to a system of commandments that would guide their lives. It was also a further indication of how Bnei Yisrael would be unique, the derech Hashem available to this nation alone. God then brings the manna, a miraculous food that would provide the necessary sustenance to Bnei Yisrael. With this continuous daily supply, Bnei Yisrael was now able to place their entire security in God. And much like the previous examples, it certainly strengthened their belief in an exclusive relationship with God. So we see at this point two developments. One is the evolution of the nation, from slaves to Pharaoh and the Egyptian people to worshipers of the one true God. The other is the evolution of their sense of self and the requisite feeling of self-importance which is likely where their error emerged. Up to this point, God had often related to the nation through the use of miracles. To know that God altered, and continued to alter, the natural order for them on a "regular" basis created a distortion in the way Bnei Yisrael viewed themselves in relation to God. They developed a sense of expectation, where God would provide for them due to their important status. Furthermore, they latched on to

the feature of the miraculous, where God's use of miracles to the benefit of Bnei Yisrael would reinforce their self-image. Therefore, when they arrived at Rifidim, prior to even needing any water, they expressed their expectation that God would provide it for them. As the Ramban so brilliantly notes, it was not just the basic need of water they were searching for – "Is God among us to perform miracles for us?" God should make use of a miracle in order to give them this water, buttressing their sense of self-importance.

It is important to emphasize that while this indeed was an error on the part of Bnei Yisrael, God does not openly punish them for this distortion. God essentially ignores the initial request for water, only responding once Bnei Yisrael were thirsty. The implication from this is that their flaw was not an unexpected one. To undergo the transformation from slave nation to where they were now, engaging in the derech Hashem and receiving direct sustenance from God, is nothing short of psychological upheaval, and this self-importance was not an entirely unavoidable by-product of their rapid progression. We see in God's plan the attempt to right the ship. Rashi (Shemos 17:5) points out that Moshe was commanded to take the elders in order to refute the assumption that the water God would be providing would be from some overlooked spring. This helps clarify the nature of God's plan. On the one hand, to provide sustenance at this very moment with a public miracle would serve to further the distortion. On the other hand, it would be inappropriate for Bnei Yisrael to assume this water came from a purely natural cause. The hashgacha had to be apparent, but in a way that would focus their attention on the correct ideas rather than their false sense of superiority. By removing the miraculous from the experiential into the abstract, the fantastic element exchanged for the importance of understanding their dependence on God, Bnei Yisrael would be able to correct their distorted self-image and serve God appropriately.

That is not to say we should not view ourselves as having a one-of-a-kind relationship with God! Our relationship to God is certainly unique, but it exists within a certain framework. We are distinct in terms of our gift of the Torah and role in this world. To expect God to relate to us through the miraculous is a false one, and it serves to ultimately debase this bond. It is through the use of our minds, studying the Torah, following the commandments, and constantly analyzing the abstract surrounding universe of ideas, that we properly fulfill our end of this relationship. ■

(Letters continued from page 1)

Letters

Rabbi: I'd explain these topics to children, just as I would to adults. Of course, certain words cannot be used, since children won't understand them. But the concepts should be presented in the same, sensible manner of explanation.

Science reflects God's wisdom and truths, just as Torah does. Both systems are true. It is only those who are ignorant or erring who claim certain scientific discoveries cannot be true, since the Torah "appears" to omit or even conflict with them.

Scientific truths reflecting God's brilliance, is precisely why God made the universe with laws. God made it available to human minds to detect great wisdom in nature, and appreciate the Creator of these natural laws. Those who ignore science, ignore God's will that His wisdom be revealed. We study all areas of science, just as we study Torah. There is infinite wisdom encased in both. And if we find a scientific fact that "seems" to go against Torah, like evolution, when God said He created man from the earth...then we must strive to make the two ideas harmonious. For God made Torah and science, so they cannot be in conflict. We can suggest that God's process of "creating man from earth" took many years. Science has already proven that the universe is billions of years old, and so is the Earth. 5771 is not dated from God's first act of creation, but from Adam's arrival on earth. The first 5 days were not 24-hour periods. They were epochs of billions of years. This also explains how dinosaurs can be millions of years old.

One can easily appreciate the universe's ancient age through the stars. We see them. And we can only see an object if the light reflected from its surface reaches our eyes. This means that starlight seen by us on Earth has traversed millions of light-years to reach our eyes. Thus, the world has been around millions and billions of years. Nothing in Torah demands we ignore science: just the opposite is true. Rambam says by studying nature we arrive at Ahavas Hashem, Loved of God. (Yesodei haTorah, 2:2) The prophet also accuses man who has the capacity to explore God's natural wonders, but does not, "...the works of God he did not behold; and the acts of His hands he did not see". (Isaiah 5:12)

My friend Yonah Berwaldt is submitting an essay on this topic, soon to appear in the JewishTimes. He makes some very astute observations and arguments: "...if we accept science in other areas, such as medicine, cause and effect, and more...we must maintain the same position of the validity of science and accept other findings such as the rate of radioactive decay that dates the world in billions of years, and also the time required for skeletal fossilization, which also requires much more time than 5771 years. It would be inconsistent to accept one set of scientific findings and dismiss others."

I would define Christmas as a day that celebrates an idea that violates a Torah fundamental: that a human is worth praying to, or that a human can be a god, which Christians accept. They pray to Jesus and say, "he atones for our sins".

Torah teaches that no man should become our focus, but that Torah's focus is always God. The current practice of putting Rebbes on pedestals, writing big volumes about them and selling "Rebbe playing cards" goes against the very texts of Tanach. In Tanach, all stories center on God, and even men like Moses at times were almost punished by God with death. It is this deification of man that forces a person to deny his own thinking, and accept anything some Rabbi says. And since all men err, including Moses, we are not to accept them, but only their ideas, if they are reasonable. Rambam asks his readers to correct him if they find an error in his writings. This is the true Torah approach, where we are focused on learning about God, not deifying a person.



Pharaoh's 3 Titles

Anshe: Why in Torah do we find three references to Pharaoh: 1) "Pharaoh", 2) "King of Egypt", and 3) "Pharaoh, King of Egypt"? The Torah is perfect, so what explanation warrants all three terms, and what is the unique nature of each term?

Rabbi: Studying the contexts, we discover when "Pharaoh" alone is used it refers to his "person", his subjective, evil nature. The man he was. "King of Egypt" refers to Pharaoh when he acted in accord with national interests, in the capacity of a king, not necessarily with a personal agenda. And "Pharaoh, King of Egypt" is used as a respectful term, meaning Pharaoh, who earned the throne. But this term is used least, as he was afforded respect only at first, prior to sinning against God and the Jews.

But why are these names warranted inclusions in the Torah? As Torah was given to educate us, God deemed an understanding of human nature and the precise dialogues with Pharaoh to be transmitted. With this understanding, we further our knowledge of psychology, and God's justice. Certainly, when God prevented Pharaoh's repentance, we must be taught the unique character of such an evil person, so as to appreciate God's rare intervention of such extreme degrees.

Jacob's 2 Names

Mordy: What is the difference between the uses of "Jacob", and his name "Israel" given later on?

Rabbi: Jacob refers to his clutching of Esav's heel at birth. The word heel and Jacob share the same root, "akev". So his receipt of this name refers to his identity or capacity of contending with man. In Genesis 32:29 "Jacob" succeeded over the "man" with whom he wrestled. This man was actually not a human, thus the struggle was no physical encounter. A wise rabbi once explained that, as Jacob was "left alone" as the verse states earlier, the battle could not be with another, but must have been an internal battle; a struggle with a part of his nature that Jacob understood must be dominated, for his perfection. Having succeeded over a damaging element of his personality, he was awarded a new name of Israel, which means to struggle with inner perfection...a higher matter than human struggles.

From my review of the many verses, these two names are consistently used to refer to either "Jacob": one contending with man, as is used throughout is encounter with Esav...or "Israel": used when he was involved in higher matters, as when he finally greeted Joseph, the son who will be the spiritual guide of the Jews for the future generations.

Why are certain people given new names, why others were not?

What is the role of one's name? Specifically, what are the lessons to be derived from God's replacing the name of Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, and adding to Jacob the second name of Israel? Name altering is very rare, so we wonder at God's intention with these changes.

Some of the clues will be found in God's explanation for the name, as well as the precise time God instituted the change. Contrasting these two cases of Abraham and Jacob, we learn that God did not change Jacob's wife's name, as He did regarding Sarah. We must seek a difference in these two cases to offer an answer to this question.

What's in a name?

A name is an 'identity'. It distinguishes one person from another. Thus, a change in name indicates a change in the person. God explains His reason for changing Abram to Abraham, "For you will be a leader of great nations". (Sarai is also changed, as the verse says, she is Abraham's "wife". She shared his new identity and mission)

This name change replaced Abraham's former name Abram. It also took place in connection with the command to circumcise his family. Circumci-

(continued on next page)

(Letters continued from previous page)

Letters

sion was to be a national overhaul of this nation's direction. Abraham and his seed would now be under the direct providence of God, unlike prior, where mankind progressed naturally. By adhering to the Creator's will, Abram was selected. He was transformed into Abraham, who would lead his nation to follow God. This demanded a withdrawal from the life of the instinctual, demonstrated by diminishing the sexual enjoyment through circumcision. God would now direct the future of Abraham's seed.

This metaphysical alteration was not only for Abraham and his children, but his new identity was to assist all other peoples in recognizing his new path. A name is also a reputation, so to inform others. God desired all people learn from Abraham. This is precisely what God said, "For you will be a leader of great nations". Again, Genesis, 18:19, "For I know (him) that he will command his children and his household after him and they will keep the way of God to do charity and justice..."

Abraham's life now reached the true purpose of man's creation: that man follow God, not his fantasies and idolatrous ways, and that God bless man with His providence, directing man towards greater knowledge of, and fulfillment in the Creator and His wisdom. As this was the crowning moment in human development, God wished to inform all generations present and future – of mankind's objective. God made this great announcement by changing Abram to "Abraham". This new role completely replaced Abraham's prior role as Abram, which was bereft of this new treaty with God. Thus, "Abram" is never used again.

As we observed above, Jacob was retained even after being named Israel. His new role did not mitigate the greatness of Jacob, the man who successfully and wisely contended with other men, like Esav and Lavan. Dealing with mankind is a perfection, that which is to be sustained. Thus, the name Jacob was retained. But let us learn from God's very words. In Genesis 35:10 God addresses Jacob, "And God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob; no longer will Jacob be your name, but [also] Israel will be your name. And He called his name Israel.'" When God says "Your name is Jacob" He thereby confirms the name given to him at his birth. Meaning, this nature that Rebecca perceived as the newborn Jacob clutched Esav's heel, conveyed to her that Jacob had a particular, inborn nature. Jacob could contend with people without fear, while many others avoid confrontation, thereby avoiding progress and perfection achieved only through facing reality, not retreating from personal fears. Rebecca named her son on account of this trait. With these words "Your name is Jacob", God is telling Jacob that he used his natural talents well.

He deserves to continue his success using his natural traits. Jacob will remain his name.

But Jacob not only mastered life by using his natural-born traits. He went further, making changes in his personality and going against his nature. This was God's naming him as Israel, one who contends not only with men, but rules over his very personality and conquers his nature. "Who is strong? He who conquers his nature." (Ethics 4:1)

What is troubling is why, regarding Jacob, God says, "And He called his name Israel". But God does not do this act of "calling Abraham" by his new name. God merely tells Abraham his new name, without the subsequent application of his new name, as God does regarding Jacob. I do not know why this is.

Jacob's new name was not like Abraham. Abraham was changed by God's command – externally. Jacob, through his struggles within, had perfected himself. This is the second type of identity change; when one does so from himself, and not from God. Thus, we find only two times God changes one's name, meant to reflect a new status, as there are in fact only two types of changes man endures: internal and external. This also explains why Rachel's name was not changed, for Jacob's change was to himself alone. But when Moses changed Hosea to Joshua, Moses meant this to encourage Joshua and remain firmly committed to the mission, and not fall prey to the spies' evil counsel. Here, Moses utilized the mechanism of Joshua's identity to bolster his self image. Changing his name would strengthen him.

A King's Quest

Rabbi: Why did King Solomon seek knowledge of the process of sin? According to Sforno, the king inquires (Koheles 7:26) how it was at all possible that the snake, Adam and Eve could each violate God's decree not to eat of the tree, despite the fact that all three admitted knowledge of the severe consequences. What enables creatures to violate their very reasoning and realization of the stark truth, and inevitable harm?

Although an answer is not given in the verses (as far as I see), the king may have felt as follows: God wishes man to follow the Torah, and not sin. One method is to focus on a prohibition, and this truth should keep one far from sin. But perhaps if we can monitor our emotions as they try to derail us from truth, and if – while battling with the enticing lure of a sinful act, we can pinpoint the precise process or decision we make when choosing sin – we might be able to better protect ourselves in the

future. Just as unconscious emotions cannot be dealt with until made conscious, perhaps the king was also following this approach, and seeking to pinpoint the moment where man departs from allegiance to God, and chooses to violate for the sake of satisfying a lust or passion.

But as the workings of our emotions cannot be laid on the table for viewing and dissection, it appears that King Solomon concluded that all we have, is to veer from the temptations. A more abstract approach of digging into our psyches appears far too difficult, if possible at all. But the king was correct in his approach. If we could isolate a specific process that functions at the point where we change our minds and decide to sin, this awareness would lend to greater control.

Plaguing Questions

Rabbi: Why did God deliver these specific plagues to Egypt? And are there any clues within the verses that reveal the answers? Of course there are.

Rabbi Reuven Mann once explained why, when faced with the first plague of blood, the Torah records that "Pharaoh turned, and went to his home". (Exod. 7:23) Rabbi Mann explained this as Pharaoh's attempt to deny the plague, hiding from the plagues effects. We might add to his words, that this denial was precisely why "frogs" followed as the next plague. The Torah records that the frogs entered every square inch of Egypt. No escape this time. God sought to address Pharaoh's reaction of denial.

During boils, the Torah teaches us that the astrologers could not stand before Moses, "for the boils were on the astrologers and on the Egyptians". It is unnecessary to tell us the boils were on the Egyptians, since we are only concerned with why the 'astrologers' could not stand before Moses. But we learn through this, that it was the equation of the astrologers to all other Egyptians, which caused them their embarrassment. They could no longer defend their claim of superiority or possession of powers, if they were equally defenseless to the boils as were all other Egyptians. We now learn God's intent for the boils. He wished to strip away one more layer of Egypt's idolatrous ways, exposing their belief in mysticism, phony leaders, and the occult, as lies.

What about the plague of darkness? I understand the Torah must describe the event factually, but where is the clue to understanding the objective in this plague? If Exodus 10:22 tells us there was "thick darkness in all of Egypt", what is intended

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(Letters continued from previous page)

Letters

by the next verse, "man could not see his brother"? If it is dark, of course one cannot see, not his brother, or anything! Therefore, the verse must be pointing to some significance in not being able to see others, and perhaps not even talking to others. For we learn that Pharaoh did not call unto Moses until after Darkness had ended.

I would suggest that Darkness targeted a state of isolation. God wanted the Egyptians to have no distraction, which is afforded by everyday human interaction. To force the Egyptians to face God, He created a state where the Egyptians could not see or talk to anyone. In such a state, they must have focused purely on the Cause of this darkness, on God. Isolation elevates the need for social interaction, and God forced the Egyptians to redirect this need for dialogue, towards God alone. Perhaps facing God in their thoughts, they would repent. This was the objective of the plagues: to turn Egypt's people away from the fallacy of idolatry, and recognize a single Power in the universe.

Liability for Damages

Rabbi: The Talmud discusses the concept of "Deina d'Garmi" – the laws of causative damages. What is the dispute between Rabbi Meir and the other Rabbis? Unlike the other Rabbis, Rabbi Meir holds liable one who was partially involved in damages. For example, if A tossed a vase off the roof aiming at some cushions on the ground below, and B removes the cushions, causing the vase to shatter...both are liable according to Rabbi Meir. The other Rabbis exempt these parties, since no one individual caused the vase to break of his own doing. In Talmudic study, we endeavor to grasp the reasoning behind all positions. It is not an attempt to determine "who is right", but rather, "why each Rabbi opined as he did". We are searching for theories in Halacha that can explain both views.

Discussing this with a friend, we arrived at the following: Rabbi Meir determines liability based in "involvement" in damages. It does not matter that I required B below to remove the cushions. Since I "contributed" to the damage, I am liable.

The other Rabbis require more. It is insufficient that I am "involved". Rather, I must perform "an act of damage". Merely tossing a vase off a roof in itself, does no damage. In flight, the vase is unbroken. My act was not a "damaging act". But if I take a vase and smash it to the ground, now I have performed an "act of damage". Now I am liable, even according to the other Rabbis. So according to Rabbi Meir, all that is required is any contribution to a damage, and I will be liable. The other Rabbis require that I perform an act of damage. This means I must be solely liable for a damage.

Contributing is insufficient.

Even without seeking any conclusion as to what the final law is, we find such theoretical definitions quite enjoyable. We come to understand yet another layer of the Torah's depth, gifted to us by God.

False Prophets

Reader: How is it possible to know if a prophet speaking real of false prophecy? Thank you very much.

Rabbi: See Deuteronomy 18:21. We are taught that a prophet is proven as a true prophet, if he predicts, and all of his words come to pass. For some people can guess well at events that will unfold, but no one can offer all the details, unless God informed him. Thus, a prediction that comes about with all predicted events, proves the prophet to be validated.

Reader: Thank you. I don't quite know what to make of what the torah contains about this in Parshos Reeh and Shoftim. What was someone who heard prophecy supposed to assume while waiting to see if the prediction occurs? What if at the time of that person's death and/or the navi's death, the prediction never happened? There are prophecies made thousands of years ago that still haven't materialized. It seems unclear how we're able to claim they're valid prophecies. Thank you.

Rabbi: It appears from the verses that the prophet must make predictions that will occur in his lifetime. Since the Torah says a false prediction is met with death. He is also a false prophet if he tells others to make a permanent change in any Torah law.

Christian Prayers, for Jews?

Reader: I found a prayer for a man to pray for his wife's benefit composed by a chrisitan - am i as a jew permitted to pray it?

Rabbi: We are to follow Torah, and this includes the law to follow the prayer format created by the Rabbis. We are also mandated to include in our Shemoneh Essray, all of our needs and wants. If one's wife needs health, we include

that request in the prayer for health (Rifah-aynu). If she needs physical sustenance that we cannot provide, we include that request in the prayer for sustenance. (Baraych Alaynu) Additionally, the Christian god is false, a blind faith. And this obviously can do you no good, to pray towards a fallacy.

Perfection: Not a Jewish Birthright

Ryan: I have been reading much from your website and thank you for all of the information there is to study. I had read elsewhere, with interest, that Jews have different souls than Gentiles. But I came across something that I wasn't sure about. I was reading from The Chumash, Stone Edition (Artsroll), and commenting on Bereishis 17:11 it says the following: "11. - The sign of the covenant. Circumcision is literally a sign, a mark, on the body, stamping its bearer as a servant of God; just as their souls are different than those of other nations, so their bodies must be different.....(Chinuch).

I was hoping you could comment as to what is meant by this, and what exactly "Chinuch" is (is this referring to Sefer ha-Chinuch)?

Many thanks, Ryan

Rabbi: This merely means that with Torah, a Jew's soul is perfected. But if a gentile would follow Torah, or led a perfected life as did the patriarchs, the gentile too would equal the observant Jew's perfected status. Perfection is not a birthright. It is achieved only through study and action.

A Jew who ignores his Torah responsibility is less perfected than a gentile who observes his. The Torah makes this clear in numerous cases where we are admonished to select the correct life, or face the consequences. Now, if the Jew had some in-born elevated status in his soul, the Torah would be wrong in all these cases, claiming that action is required for perfection...not a birth certificate.

We conclude that the Torah is correct and action is required for perfection. Resting on imagined laurels of an "elevated Jewish soul" violates God's words.

Recall that Abraham was not a Jew, yet God loved him over all others. And be mindful that although not of Jewish lineage, the future messiah descends from converts. We learn that one's beginning is of no consequence, all that matters is what he/she makes of him or herself. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth". (Koheles 7:1) King Solomon says this since at birth, one has no merits.

(continued on next page)

(Letters continued from previous page)

Letters

But at death, he or she has arrived at a life of perfection. This verse also applies to a Jew, thereby rejecting the notion that at birth, the Jew has any greater value. The Jew too must wait until death to have his soul assessed as being a value or not. And if he can ruin his soul, of it is false to suggest his soul is "better".

Faulty Translations

Chaim: Dear Rabbi, During the last forty years, we English speaking, Torah Observant Jews, have been kept current of blatant abuse by food companies that distribute non-kosher, but certified kosher, using unauthorized trusted kashrus Logos and Symbols. Immediately after our kashrus overseers discover an infringement, they publish their findings. We are fortunate to have these Rabbis and Kashrus organizations working in our behalf.

This brings to mind the existing problem of the lack of organized overseers who can bring corrected Hebrew-to-English translations and interpretations of Torah to the thousands of English-learning public. Isn't the prevention of digesting un-kosher concepts into our minds, as important as preventing the digesting of un-kosher food into our stomachs?

The following are two different Torah translations of the same Parsha:

1. The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, J.H.Hertz, Soncino Press London 5758-1997

2. The Tanach-The Artscroll Series-The Torah/Prophets/Writings, Rabbi Nosson Scherman, Mesorah Publications, Ltd. Brooklyn, N.Y. 5757-1996

Specifically; VAYEITZEI, GENESIS 28:20 by Rabbi J.H.Hertz: "20. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying: 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, 21. so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God, 22. and this stone which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee!'"

At this point it appears that Jacob is making a conditional deal with Hashem. Meaning **only if** Hashem delivers, Jacob will **then** be a servant to God, will set this stone up as part of God's future House, and Jacob will give tithes

Version 2 by Rabbi Nosson Scherman: "20. Then Jacob took a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going; will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear; 21. and I return in peace to my father's house, and Hashem will be a God to me-22. then this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall become a house of God, and whatever You will give me, I shall repeatedly tithe to You."

How can we initiate an effective solution? May I suggest the following; Since there are thousands of English learning students who diligently study the Parsha of the week, wouldn't it be constructive to offer to the brightest, a venue where to bring questions of translations and interpretations? Couldn't your JewishTimes offer a special column for this purpose? Could we title this column "PARSHA QUESTIONS"? Couldn't we encourage our readers to join in with their answers, and print them in the following week? Couldn't your Jewish Times offer another special column for questions of translation and interpretations of any Published Torah Works?

Rabbi: Thank you for the suggestion. I agree, we must invite all those interested to address these, and other questions on Torah study and Jewish life. Torah education must be freely available so all who desire it, may find it. Mesora and the JewishTimes have been inviting and addressing questions for 14 years. Our home page has an "Ask the Rabbi" feature where we receive many questions weekly. And our Discussions Forum also offers a dialogue on all topics. People may even join us live Sundays for interactive, audible sessions. And as you suggested for the JewishTimes, we regularly include a readers' questions and answers column.

I am glad you raised this specific issue, bringing to light the correct understanding as Rabbi Scherman writes above. Thank you.

When a Mitzva Isn't

Chaim: Dear Rabbi, Before our last Rosh Hashanah holiday, I was fortunate enough to have received my beautiful Israel manufactured Shofar. It took me no time to learn how to sound the Tekiahs, Shevarims and Teruahs. My whole life I depended on others to fulfill the mitzvahs of hearing the Blasts of the Shofar, and this Rosh Hashanah it was no longer necessary! I was so proud of myself!

As the weeks and months passed by, I would walk past my beautiful Shofar at least ten times a day, and forced myself not to take it out, for I believed that it was used only during the High Holidays, and other religious occasions. The temptation to remove it from its lovely silk bag and hold it, was very difficult to resist.

Then one day, after returning from schul, after praying "PESUKEI D'ZIMRAH" Psalm 150. (I made a mental note) which says, "Halleluyah! Praise God in His Sanctuary, praise Him in the firmament of His power. Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him as befits His abundant greatness. Praise Him with the blast of the Shofar..." I couldn't resist hearing its magnificent sounds, so I placed the Ram's Horn to my lips and in my mind stated my intent to Praise Hashem with the blasts of my Shofar like it is written in my Siddur, loudly sounded Tekiahs, Shevarims and Teruahs.

My question is: Will this premeditated act be added to my storehouse of mitzvahs?

Rabbi: A mitzvah is only a mitzvah when we follow the parameters of the law, and not simply physical parameters. So blowing a shofar off-season does not register as the fulfillment of a command, despite the fact that you performed the identical action, and had great intent. Similarly, waving a lulav during January is not a halachik act, nor is donating to Churches an act of tzedaka. Mitzvah is defined by strict parameters, not by the physical act alone.

That being said, notwithstanding the above have expressed a perfection in desiring to glorify God. We see thereby, that we can perfect ourselves even without mitzvah, as you demonstrated. During your prayers, something moved you to desire to express a celebration of our Creator. You embodied today, the perfection we attain during Rosh Hashannah. So you may continue to blow the shofar, even though it is not a mitzvah, if it reminds you of true ideas.

I once heard an idea taught by Rabbi Israel Chait. He taught that blowing an instrument is to convey our inability to articulate a true praise of God, since we know not what God's nature really is. To demonstrate that man's words fall very far from the truth, King David ended his books of Psalms with the psalm you cited. The king wished to end all of his praises with the final truth, than man's praises fall short of what we owe God. Thus, he used wordless instrumentals to convey our inability to offer true praise of God. ■

Weekly Parsha

the
LEADERSHIP of
Moshe
Rabbenu

RABBI REUVEN MANN

In this week's parsha, Beshalach, we read about one of the greatest miracles in Jewish history, the splitting of the Red Sea which gave the Jews' safe passage on dry land and caused the destruction of the Egyptian expeditionary force. The Jews were seized by panic when they saw the Egyptian army chasing after them and they turned against Moshe. Their fear was so great that they chastised him for taking them out of Egypt and even claimed that it would have been better for them "to be slaves in Egypt than to die in the wilderness." We can learn a great deal from the reaction of Moshe Rabbenu to this shameful provocation. He did not get angry but retained his calmness and composure. With the Jews on the verge of a complete meltdown Moshe encouraged them to stand firm and witness the salvation that Hashem would effectuate for them. He concluded his brief oration with a simple but effective admonition; "Hashem will battle for you and you, be silent."

Moshe's behavior in this crisis reflects the qualities of a great leader. In general even superior leaders who are idealistic suffer from a certain vulnerability; the fear of rejection. There is hardly a person who is not affected by harsh criticism. Thus, the science of gauging public opinion has become indispensable to contemporary politicians. Political campaigns are planned with

great care and positions taken by candidates are thoroughly tested for public reaction before they are adopted. Even courageous and independent minded leaders can lose their "cool" when they feel they have brought great harm upon their people. Golda Meir, the late Prime Minister of Israel, felt terrible about her responsibility for the catastrophic consequences of allowing Egypt to get in the first blow in the Yom Kippur War. Her grief was so great that she even considered suicide, but, to her great credit, contemplated the impact it would have in the soldier's morale and decided against it. Menachem Begin spent the last years of his life, in a state of withdrawal and depression. There were many causes but clearly the unpopularity of the War in Lebanon and the universal condemnation for the Sabra and Shaltilla massacre (which was carried out by Arabs against Arabs and was blamed on Israel) played a significant role.

In many ways Moshe Rabbenu was the greatest leader in history. No one ever accomplished more for their people than the one who led the Jews out of Egypt, brought them the Torah and made them into a nation etc. Yet he was viciously provoked and personally attacked to the point where he said "just a bit more and they will kill me." Moshe recognized the dangers and pitfalls of leadership and pleaded with Hashem to be spared that responsibility. His greatest qualification was his

lack of desire for the egoistic gratification which attract ordinary people to positions of power. The very desire for power is rooted in the need of the human ego to be nurtured by the approval of others. As parents, teachers, spiritual guides, etc. we all are leaders in some sense of the term. Moshe Rabbenu was successful because he was not in search of the approval of people. He was absolutely committed to doing what was best for them, as dictated by Hashem. His faith in Hashem was absolute and this alone gave him the strength to be undeterred by the disapproval of people. May we seek to emulate the example of Moshe. May the Jewish people merit to have spiritual and political leaders who eschew public acclaim and bravely battle for the interests of Klal Yisrael irrespective of popularity.

Shabbat Shalom ■

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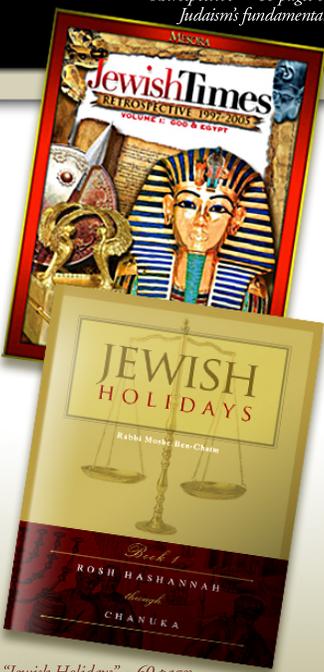
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