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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Escape From Egypt

“Rise up and go from among my people” (12:31)

When I was young, there was one phone in the entrance of our house on a little table, and a chair to sit down on to ‘make a call.’ Now, anyone without a phone in his pocket is considered a little pretentious or a little weird. Speaking “in person” could also mean a Zoom or a Skype face-to-face. And nobody writes anymore – people just text, spelling mistakes and all.

As fast as life has become, so have its spiritual challenges. A couple of decades ago, if someone wanted to do something wrong, he’d have to travel to the seedy side of town, risk being seen by a friend or a teacher, going into a shop and confessing his low desires to the person behind the counter. Nowadays, people don’t need to “prepare” to do something wrong. As soon as the negative impulse strikes – bingo, the transgression is right there at your fingertips, quite literally.

How does one fight such a battle?

It is fought by using the enemies’ weapons. The media brainwashes us with the culture of consumption, of instant gratification: Olam Hazeh. We need to “dry-clean” our brains with images of deferred gratification.

The Chafetz Chaim writes in Nidchei Yisrael, Chapter 26:

“When someone overcomes the yetzer hara (negative drive) for arayot, for immorality, his head becomes encircled with a light from Heaven – a halo. We can’t see it but in the time of Chazal that aura was visible. The Chafetz Chaim continues, “Someone who overcomes his yetzer, especially today, merits that not only that he, but all his descendants until the end of time, will be blessed with the virtue of his courageousness and his strength of character, and their nature will lead them to do what is hatov v’hayasha – “what is good and just.”

Think about that! Burn that image into your consciousness.

Please remember, if you ever have an impulse to do something improper, that standing behind you are your children, who you want to become righteous members of the Jewish People. Remember what the Chafetz Chaim promises: One moment can save your children. And that’s not all.

Standing behind your children are their children, and behind them as far as your eye can see are the exponentially increasing number of your descendants. There are hundreds and thousands of them, all watching you, holding their breath while waiting to see what you will do. To see whether you will succumb or if you will elevate those thousands of lives and your name for all eternity – through a moment's self-control.

The Exodus from Egypt was not just a physical escape, but a spiritual escape for all of time. Burned into our genes was the dormant greatness to rise above the moment and achieve spiritual greatness for ourselves and all of our progeny for all of time.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned.

G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too.

Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d's going to bring one more plague, the death of the firstborn, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month.

The Jewish People are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their doorposts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the doorpost will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the firstborn of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating chametz on Pesach.

Moshe relays G-d's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the firstborn, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the firstborn son) and *tefillin*.

- Pesachim 68a

Q & A

BO

Questions

1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makat bechorot* took place at *exactly* midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at *approximately* midnight.
6. Why did the first-born of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the first-born?
8. G-d told Moshe "so that My wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was G-d referring to?
9. Why did G-d command the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a Pesach offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what *mitzvot* involving blood did G-d give to the Jewish People?
12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti* ." What are they?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot* ?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their matzah on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael* ?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose first-born is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched for and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when G-d punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the first-born, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a first-born.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of matzah was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Please Stand Up

Although the word *amidah* (“standing”) and its variants appear over 500 times in the Bible, the word *nitzav* (and its various inflections) also means “standing” and makes quite a few appearances in the Exodus narrative and the Book of Exodus in general. For example, when baby Moses is placed in a basket on the Nile River, his sister Miriam “stood (*v’titatzav*) from afar” (Ex. 2:4) to follow her little brother’s fate. Similarly, after Moses and Aaron’s first audience with Pharaoh, the Bible relates that certain men – identified by the Talmud (*Nedarim* 64b) as Dathan and Abiram – were “standing” (*nitzavim*) to greet the future saviors and criticize their noble efforts (Ex. 5:20). Later on, in the lead-up to the Plague of Blood, Hashem tells Moses, “Go to Pharaoh in the morning, behold he goes out to the waters, and you shall stand (*nitzavta*) to greet him at the edge of the river” (Ex. 7:15). What is the difference between the type of “standing” meant by the term *amidah*, and how does it differ from the type of “standing” denoted by *nitzav*?

Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dinov (1783-1841) explains that *nitzav* implies a new act of “standing” (for example, if one was first sitting and then stood up), while *amidah* can apply to somebody or something that had already been “standing” until now. As proof-texts to this distinction, Rabbi Shapiro cites two verses. In one verse, Moses tells the Jewish People at the edge of the Reed Sea to brace themselves in anticipation of a great miracle, “And Moses said to the nation: ‘Do not fear, stand up (*hityatzvu*), and you will see the salvation of Hashem...” (Ex. 14:13). In this passage, a cognate of *nitzav* is employed because Moses essentially told the People to recalibrate their stance as though standing anew, in order for them to behold the miraculous spectacle that was about to happen. He basically asked them to “switch positions” from something akin to sitting into something akin to standing. In another verse, the Bible describes that Abraham was “already standing (*omed*) before Hashem” (Gen. 18:22) when he began to plead for Hashem to save Sodom. In this case, a variation of *amidah* is used because it denotes Abraham having already been standing from before, not standing anew.

Although Rabbi Shapiro concedes that there are multiple counter-proofs to the distinction he drew between these terms, that did not stop him from using his distinction to explicate another verse. He uses his distinction between *nitzav* and *amidah* to explain a passage where both words appear in tandem when telling of Hashem’s role as the Ultimate Judge: “Hashem stands (*nitzav*) for litigation, and He stands (*omed*) for the judgment of nations” (Isa. 3:13). As Rashi explains, the first part of this verse discusses Him judging the Jewish People, which is done in a “hasty and less-thorough way” because He has mercy on His nation. The second part of the verse discusses Hashem judging the other nations through more thorough and meticulous proceedings. Rashi adds that the word *omed* implies something that is delayed or stalled, as though it was just “standing” there for an extended time.

Rabbi Shapiro reflects on the same idea by explaining that when it comes to describing the judgment against the Jewish People, Isaiah uses a cognate of *nitzav* because Hashem standing for judgment against them is a “new development” that goes against His “default” approach of mercy. On the other hand, when it comes to describing His judgment against the other nations, a cognate of *amidah* appears because Hashem is “already standing” in judgment against those nations by default, ready to hear any grievances against them.

*To read the rest of this article, visit us online at: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

The Amidah (Part 34) – The Final Paragraph: Personally Speaking

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”
(Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer)

“My Hashem, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let my soul be silent, and let my soul be like dust to everyone. Open my heart to Your Torah, then my soul will pursue Your commandments. As for all those who design evil against me, speedily nullify their counsel and disrupt their design. Act for Your Name’s sake, act for Your right hand’s sake, act for Your sanctity’s sake, act for Your Torah’s sake. That Your beloved may be given rest, let Your right hand save and respond to me. May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, Hashem, my Rock and my Redeemer. He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us and upon all Israel. And let us say: Amen.”

The final paragraph continues, “Act for Your Name’s sake; act for Your right hand’s sake; act for Your sanctity’s sake; act for Your Torah’s sake.” There is a subtle change in the order of the prayer between Sephardim and Chassidim, on one hand, and Ashkenazim on the other. According to Sephardim and Chassidim, the text reads, “Act for Your Name’s sake; act for Your right hand’s sake; act for Your Torah’s sake; act for Your sanctity’s sake.” “Your sanctity” and “Your Torah” are swapped around, and the sentence ends with “Your sanctity,” which is preceded by “Your Torah.” The reason for this difference revolves around the somewhat esoteric concept of the Ten Sefirot, which Kabbalistic texts teach to be the ten powers that Hashem uses to serve as the connection between the Spiritual Realms and the physical realms. Torah is connected to the Sefira of Tiferet – beauty – and sanctity is connected to Gevurah – strength or judgment. There are two opinions among Kabbalists regarding which of these two represents the culmination of our spiritual

aspirations. According to Sephardim and Chassidim, it is correct to end with Gevurah since it represents the awesome Divine power that is found in this world. Whereas Ashkenazim end with Tiferet, which represents the balance of both Hashem’s strict justice and His attribute of mercy in this world.

It is easy to overlook the difference since it is so slight, but, in a certain way, it helps to define the different approaches to serving Hashem that are found between Sephardim and Chassidim on one side, and Ashkenazim on the other. In general, the Sephardic approach to Avodat Hashem is very much centered through the emotions. Sephardic prayer is warm and inclusive, with the congregation reciting every word together in a melodious chant. It resonates with a communal awe and love for Hashem. The Sephardic method of prayer was adopted by the Chassidim and is an intrinsic dimension of their Avodat Hashem as well. The pinnacle of the recitation of the Amidah is the realization that we are doing everything in honor of Hashem’s sanctity. And this is the reason it appears as the final clause in the prayer. We are working our way upwards in the pursuit of the ultimate spiritual goal, which is to recognize Hashem’s complete and absolute Majesty in our world. Ultimately, it is Hashem’s attribute of Gevurah that is the purest measure of our connection to Him. Alternatively, the Ashkenazic approach to Avodat Hashem tends to be less outwardly demonstrative. Like the Sephardic approach, Ashkenazic prayer is also structured and meticulous, but its focus is more on the inner dimension of prayer without expressing itself in an obviously external fashion. In general terms, the Ashkenazic approach is that the Torah is the pinnacle of our spiritual aspirations. The Torah represents everything that we aspire towards. For this reason, in

the Ashkenazic version it appears as the last of the four concepts in the list because it is the most essential requirement in connecting to Hashem.

Which is the correct approach? They are both absolutely correct! The Ba'alei Mussar use a cup of coffee (of all things...) to explain. When one makes a cup of coffee, the first thing a person does is to boil the water. Yet, no one drinks the coffee when it is that hot. They wait for the water to cool off before drinking it. But, if they need the water to cool off, why do they need the water to reach boiling point? Surely, it would make more sense to make the coffee as soon as the water reaches the desired temperature for drinking! Of course, as everyone knows, if the water has not been boiled first, the coffee won't taste right. The Ba'alei Mussar teach that in a similar fashion, our Avodat Hashem needs to begin with passion. It should be "boiling," meaning full of enthusiasm. It is true that the intensity may cool off a little with time, but since it began with such an incredible sense of excitement and fervor, the incredible "taste" remains forever. We are all different and we all need different approaches to our Avodat Hashem. Sometimes, a person needs to incorporate a palpable warmth and passion so that they feel the connection being built with Hashem. And, on other occasions, a less emotional and more analytical approach might be required to help the person understand intellectually what their obligations are towards Hashem.

I once heard an enchanting story. An American living in a religious Israeli neighborhood in Yerushalayim

came into his local Shul one day, expecting to join his regular Minyan. He was surprised to find everyone there passionately reciting Tehillim with great urgency. Worried about what might have occurred, he asked one of the locals why they were saying Tehillim. The Israeli looked up and told him in Hebrew, "Because there was a tsunami in Texas." Then, the Israeli paused reflectively and added, "I don't actually know what a tsunami is and I am not quite sure that I know what Texas is either – but when a Jew is in danger we recite Tehillim!"

The Tur (122:2) cites a Midrash (Sefer HaManhig, Hilchot Chol 62), which teaches in the name of Shmuel that "Anyone who hurries to say these four descriptions will merit to receive the Shechina." Rabbi Shimon Schwab explains that our Sages are teaching that a person who sincerely feels that they are unworthy of having their prayers answered by Hashem – a person who honestly feels that the only reason that Hashem should react to their entreaties is solely for His own sake – such a person can be described as being a true Yireh Hashem.

It is fascinating to note that the gematria (numerical value) of the Hebrew word "lema'an," which means "sake," is one hundred and ninety. This is exactly the same gematria as the word "ketz" – redemption. The Rabbis teach that the connection between lema'an and ketz is that the only way we will merit redemption is by acknowledging our complete and absolute subservience to Hashem.

To be continued...

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PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

The Song of the Frog

The frog says:

“Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.”

King David once walked along the riverbank and exclaimed, “Master of the Universe, is there anyone in the world who thanks and praises his Master as much as I do?” He encountered a frog. It said to him, “Don’t be haughty, because I exceed you! I gave up my life for the will of my Master when I jumped into the ovens of Egypt to putrefy the Egyptians’ bread. Moreover, I praise Him day and night, without silence!”

When the frog leapt into the Egyptian ovens, it declared that even its very life was an insufficient expression of Hashem’s eternal praise. With its unremitting croaking, the frog proclaims that Hashem’s name should be blessed forever since there is no end to His praise. Thus, the frog sings, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.”

We may suggest further that the frog’s leap symbolizes the leap of faith that is necessary in order to decide to perform Hashem’s will when logical steps that lead to that decision are not entirely clear. Although we may not be challenged to give up our lives as did the frogs in Egypt, sometimes making the right choice involves suffering great discomfort or financial loss, and only a frog-leap of faith can get us through. Like a ship that sails through dense fog relies blindly on its navigational calculations, we have try our best to perform Hashem’s will to the best of our knowledge, and to leave the rest to Him. Even after a decision, confusion may persist, but this is part of the trial. Trials which truly challenge a person’s nature are the ones that accord him the greatest reward and enhancement of character. Unconditional faithfulness to Hashem is one of the greatest forms of praise, and it finds expression in the frog’s unceasing blessing of Hashem’s kingship.

A Jew may aim with deliberation, but he leaps with confident faith. And wherever he lands, he lives with song.

Sources: Zohar (Pinchas 232b); Malbim; BiShmi V’lichvodi Berasiv; Perek B’Shir

*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Nedarim 79-85

Together in Torah

“Take care to learn Torah only together with other people in a group.”

This is an important message that the Sages of Bavel sent to the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael at that time. By learning Torah with others, the members of the group help “sharpen” each other in understanding the Torah. This applies to both the students and also to the Rabbi who teaches them. (Rashi & Rabbeinu Nissim)

Nedarim 81a

From Poverty to Torah

"Pay special heed to the children of the poor because Torah will come forth from them."

This was another important message sent by the Sages of Bavel to Eretz Yisrael, and is supported by a verse in the Torah (Bamidbar 24:7), as is explained in the gemara.

Is there a logical basis to explain why poverty should be an indication of special potential for success in Torah study? Yes. One reason is that the students will not be preoccupied with wealth or lofty and pressing careers. Therefore, they will not be distracted from dedicating their time and thoughts to Torah study. Another reason is that poverty is humbling – and humility is essential for being successful in learning Torah. (Rabbeinu Nissim)

Nedarim 81a

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Like a Lamb

If we were to point to one act as the moment of the birth of our nation, it would be the *korban Pesach* undertaken by our ancestors more than three thousand years ago. The words conveying this instruction are, in Rav Hirsch's words, the Magna Charta of Israel, setting forth the foundational elements of Jewish nationhood.

The way in which the people were counted for this service (highlighting the prominence of the family unit), the permission of one individual to act on behalf of his brethren (declaring that all are equal before Hashem, so that one is authorized to act for another), the permission for self-determination in the formation of household units (emphasizing the right to independence and free choice), and the way in which communal sharing was instructed (to those who perceive their own abundance to seek out their neighbor) – are all facets of this foundation stone in the edifice of Jewish nationhood.

The *korban Pesach* was the foundation of not only the communal and social structure, but also of the individual's relationship to Hashem. At this moment of emergence into a new life, each individual, each household, each family and the entire community as a whole are to see themselves as lambs – they are to accept Hashem as their Shepherd and place themselves under His guidance and direction. This concept – that Hashem is our Shepherd and we are His flock – became the most comprehensive and lasting view of our relationship to Hashem. (*Psalms 100:3; 80:2, 79:13*)

Indeed, our daily Temple service of one sheep in the morning and one sheep in the afternoon would symbolize this relationship – the way in which Israel was to present and dedicate itself to Hashem at the start and end of each new day. This was but a continuation of the first instance of Israel, the lamb, submitting to the leadership of the Shepherd.

This Jewish lamb, however, is not a meek, sad creature, that allows itself to be led to the slaughter without offering resistance. The Paschal lamb was “complete, male, in its first year” – whole in body, with manly vigor and fresh with eternal youth. Complete and independent, but vis-à-vis Hashem, forever young and following.

Both sheep and goats were fit for the *korban Pesach*. A goat characteristically shows greater independence toward the outside than does the sheep. Thus the word for goat – *ez* – denotes stiff resistance. While the goat assumes an outward posture of defiance, showing his horns to every stranger, to the shepherd he is obedient and pliant, as the sheep.

Sources: Commentary Shemot 12:3-6