

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAERA · 1 SHVAT 5777 · JAN. 28, 2017 · VOL. 24 NO. 14

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

### LEBENSRAUM

**“And the sorcerers did thus with their spells, and the frogs arose on the land of Egypt.” (8:3)**

When one reads of the plagues of Egypt one tends to think that nothing else was happening in Egyptian life at the time. However, the Midrash relates that during the plague of frogs there was an ongoing war between the Egyptians and their neighbors — the nation of Kush — over the precise line of the border.

When G-d commanded the frogs to swarm over Egypt, they did so only on the Egyptian side of the border, so fur-

ther dispute became moot. However, the Egyptian sorcerers tried to create a little extra *lebensraum* by trying to make the frogs swarm over the borders on the side of Kush.

G-d frustrated their designs, as the verse says, “And the frogs arose on the land of Egypt...” Even the frogs brought up by the Egyptian sorcerers arose only “on the land of Egypt,” and not on the land of Kush.

• Sources: Avodat B'Yehosef in Mayana Shel Torah

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt. However, the Jewish People do not listen. G-d commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. G-d punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy

these miracles on a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh to be obstinate. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

This issue of Ohrnet is dedicated in memory of BENJAMIN & IRENE LOWY OBM

בנימין בן רפאל הלוי ז"ל נפ' כ"א תמוז תשס"ח  
אסתר בת יקותיאל יהודה ע"ה נפ' ז' אייר תשע"ה

*After surviving concentration camps and all the horrors of the Holocaust, they came to America, where they married and built a new life. She lost virtually everyone; he lost most of his close family. All their lives they strove to emulate their revered parents and always remained proud of their origins – he from Bardejov and she from Chust. They never wavered in their emunah despite the many challenges they faced in their lives. They shared in everyone's simchah, and projected yiras Shamayim wherever they were.*

*Though they had no children of their own, they found joy and satisfaction in the accomplishments of – and were beloved by – their many nephews and nieces, cousins, and children of their extended family, as well as all Jewish children.*

## BAVA BATRA 4 - 10

“...those who love G-d will be like the sun when it will appear in all its strength.” (Shoftim 5:31)

“Those who love G-d”, explains Ravina in our *gemara*, describes the great illumination and reward that will be evident at the time of the resurrection for those whose lives were immersed in Torah study and mitzvah fulfillment. (Rashi)

This teaching is preceded by descriptions of various — lesser although elevated — degrees of illumination, which are enumerated in a *beraita* on our *daf*. The Tana of the *beraita* elucidates a deeper meaning of a *pasuk* in Sefer Daniel which states:

“And the wise will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who bring the multitudes to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.” (Daniel 12:3)

The Tana explains:

“The wise ones shall shine like the light of the sky...”

These words refer to judges who rule wisely with true and unbiased justice, and to ones who collect and distribute charity (they are wise to know the needs of the poor — Rashi);

“...and those who bring righteousness to the many shall shine like the stars forever.”

And this refers to the Torah teachers of young Jewish children (they bring righteousness to them by educating them in the path of goodness — Rashi).

Yet, brighter than the brightness of these “luminaries” are the Torah scholars who devoted themselves to the unremitting learning of G-d’s Torah.

“...those who love G-d will be like the sun when it will appear in all its strength.” (Shoftim 5:31)

It is certainly difficult to fully fathom the magnitude of these various levels of future reward taught in our *gemara* for righteous judges, charity managers (*gaba’ei tzedaka*), teachers of Torah to children, and loyal Torah scholars. However, we can catch a “glimpse” of the tremendous degree of their light from the words of Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel, the author of the Aramaic “Targum” (translation/interpretation) for the Books of the Prophets. He writes, regarding the words at the end of “Shirat Devorah”: “like the sun when it will appear in all its strength” —that in the end of days the light of the Torah scholars will be 343 times more powerful than the sun as we know it today. This indicates the tremendous glory due to loyal Torah scholars — their glory will be, so to speak, equal to 7 times 7 times 7 the power of the bright sunlight that we see today.

• Bava Batra 8b

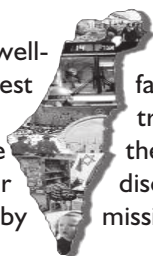
## LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

## THE FIRST JEWISH HOSPITALS IN JERUSALEM

Today Jerusalem boasts a number of modern, well-equipped and staffed hospitals. One of the oldest of them is called “Bikur Cholim”.

But Bikur Cholim, established in 1858, was not the city’s first hospital. That title goes to the “Meir Rothschild Hospital”, founded a few years earlier by



the Rothschild family of Paris and named for the father of Baron James Rothschild. Both hospitals tried their best to serve the Jews of Jerusalem with their modest facilities and thus save them the great discomfort of going to a third hospital run by British missionaries.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Did G-d ever appear to Avraham and say "I am G-d"?
2. What cause did the forefathers have to question G-d?
3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
4. How long did Levi live?
5. Who was Aharon's wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
6. Why are Yitro and Yosef both referred to as "Putiel"?
7. After which plague did G-d begin to "harden Pharaoh's heart"?
8. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
9. Give two reasons why the blood was chosen as the first plague.
10. How long did the plague of blood last?
11. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh's house first?
12. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be "in you and in your nation"?
13. What are "chamarim"?
14. Why didn't Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring lice?
16. What were the Egyptians likely to do if they saw the Jews slaughtering lambs?
17. Why didn't the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
18. The *dever* killed "all the cattle of Egypt." Later, boils afflicted their cattle. How can this be?
19. Why did Moshe pray only after leaving the city?
20. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 6:9 - Yes.
2. 6:9 - Although G-d swore to give them the Land, they never actually had control over it.
3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
4. 6:16 - 137 years.
5. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
6. 6:25 - Yitro fattened (*pittem*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
7. 7:3 - After the sixth plague — *shechin*.
8. 7:15 - To relieve himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god who did not need to attend to his bodily functions. Therefore, he secretly used the Nile for this purpose.
9. a. 7:17 - Because the Nile was an Egyptian god.  
b. 8:17 - Because an invading army first attacks the enemy's water supply, and G-d did the same.
10. 7:25 - Seven days.
11. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
12. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
13. 8:10 - Piles.
14. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed.
15. 8:14 - The Egyptian sorcerers' magic had no power over anything smaller than a barley kernel.
16. 8:22 - Stone the Jews.
17. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
18. 9:10 - In the plague of *dever* only the cattle *in the fields* died. The plague of *shechin* affected the surviving cattle.
19. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air and didn't fall to the ground.

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Vaera

## PHARAOH'S HARDENED HEART

In this week's Torah portion, after the sixth plague of boils, the Torah tells us that G-d "hardened Pharaoh's heart" and he refused to free the Jews. The problem is that by hardening Pharaoh's heart G-d appears to be taking away his free will. If so, how can Pharaoh be held responsible for refusing to free the Jews?

Abarbanel begins by quoting the solution offered by the Rambam who says that Pharaoh, by murdering innocent children and imposing back-breaking servitude, forfeited any opportunity for repentance. Therefore, although G-d eventually takes away Pharaoh's free will, his punishment is a result of his *previous* murderous free will decisions. Abarbanel has a great deal of difficulty with this explanation since the same Rambam emphasizes elsewhere that even if one repents one moment before his death, that repentance, if it is a sincere product of his free will, will be accepted. Pharaoh, however, completely lost that free will.

Abarbanel offers three alternative solutions, with his main focus on the third one. The first solution is that the ability of a transgressor to repent even at the last moment refers only to transgressions against G-d. However, transgressions against other individuals require their direct forgiveness. Obviously, Pharaoh could never be forgiven by the thousands whom he had murdered or injured. Therefore, taking away his free will would have no effect on his ultimate fate which was already sealed.

The second solution is based on a unique understanding of the concept of repentance. Abarbanel claims that repentance in its broadest sense only applies to the Jewish People. In regard to the other nations of the world, repentance is only possible for those who completely reject idolatry and attach themselves to G-d. Therefore, Pharaoh, being an idolater

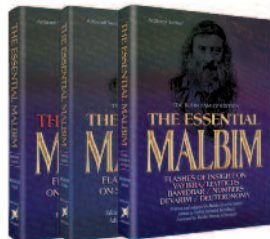
who refused to accept the omnipotence of G-d, was guilty whether or not he eventually lost his free will.

Abarbanel's third approach is a unique but brilliantly simple solution to the problem. All the other explanations are predicated on the assumption that G-d actually took away Pharaoh's free will. Here, however, Abarbanel claims that G-d *never* did so. Thus the question of how Pharaoh could be punished for his actions becomes totally moot. The problem now is how to interpret those verses that state explicitly that G-d "hardened Pharaoh's heart". Abarbanel explains that G-d did not harden his heart directly through some metaphysical spiritual influence. Rather, when Pharaoh saw that each of the first several plagues could be duplicated by his magicians or was only temporary he had no reason to free the Jews. Thus, it was the way in which G-d administered the plagues that allowed Pharaoh to choose not to free them. G-d chose multiple plagues that ceased short of total destruction instead of one unending calamity, in order to demonstrate His power and dominion over Egypt and all aspects of Egyptian life. As G-d says after the plague of pestilence, "For now I could have sent My Hand and stricken you and your people with the pestilence, and you would have been obliterated from the earth. However, for this I have let you endure, in order to show you My strength and so that My name may be declared throughout the world." Pharaoh, however, instead of focusing on the multiplicity of miraculous calamities that were striking Egypt, chose to take advantage of the respite between plagues to strengthen his own resolve to defy G-d, and not free the Jews. G-d never directly steered Pharaoh's decision-making. He only presented him with a particular pattern of plagues that left him free to follow his own inclinations. His free will was never compromised.

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## LIFE BEFORE DEATH

**From: Andrew**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*My uncle recently passed away after a prolonged illness and many of those who were close to him who accompanied him throughout his illness, hospice and death noticed an elevated, spiritual “feeling” that surrounded him that strangely seemed to increase as he got sicker and sicker. Another thing we noticed is that he seemed to have a surge of life toward the end, which gave the impression that he might rally back to health — even though we knew that wasn’t possible in his condition — and then he suddenly passed away. I am wondering if you have any explanation for what many of us perceived with our own eyes and have no doubt that it was real.*

Dear Andrew,

I offer my sincere condolences to you and your family over the loss of your uncle who was clearly dear to you all.

Regarding your sensing a gradual “spiritualization” as he progressed through his illness, an explanation might be as follows:

The great rabbi and kabbalist of Tzefat, Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas (1518-82), in his *Reishit Chochma* (Sha’ar HaKedusha 15:57), describes different approaches to eating. The lowest level is that of one who consumes food and drink merely to satisfy his bodily desires and vitality. Such eating is very physical and leads one to coarseness and physicality, devoid of spiritual sensitivity.

The righteous, however, who consume food and drink with the elevated intention of deriving life and vitality for serving G-d, transform eating to an elevating spiritual experience where even small amounts of food release sufficient energy for several days.

A third category of consumption and its effect on a person pertains to those who are severely ill. In cases where the person is so sick and weak that he can’t even eat or drink at all, the body is sustained by “feeding” off of itself. In such a case the person’s life is maintained by consuming his own blood and vital force. This last stage, writes Rabbi de Vidas, is a very ethereal form of sustenance, which is manifested as spiritual elevation even by people who are not exceptionally righteous.

Regarding the surge of life you noticed before the onset of death, ancient Jewish sources attribute this to the appearance of the Divine Presence which envelops a person before death in order to escort the soul to the Heavenly realm.

Shortly before Jacob’s death the Torah relates (Gen. 47:31), “And Jacob bowed himself upon the head of the bed”. Rashi explains that Jacob thereby turned himself toward the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence. The Talmud (Shabbat 12b)

states, “One who visits the sick should not sit on the bed or on a chair, but should wrap himself (in a *tallit*) and stand in front of the person, since the Divine Presence is above the head of the sick”. The Zohar (Vayechi 218b) further reveals, “When a man is about to die, and Judgment hovers about him so he would depart from the world, a supernal spirit is added to him that he did not have during his lifetime. When it hovers about him and cleaves to him he is able to see what he never saw in his days, due to the additional spirit in him. When the spirit is added to him, he sees and then departs from this world. This is the meaning of the verse, ‘You shall add to their spirit (where the Hebrew term *‘tosef rucham*’ is understood literally as ‘add’ rather than ‘gather’), they die, and return to their dust” (Ps. 104:29).

From these sources we see that the appearance of the Divine Presence to the soul shortly before death adds temporary vitality and vision to the dying, which gives the impression of increased strength and lucidity. But this surge of life before death is only short-lived, and heralds the passing over of the soul from this realm to the next.

The Midrash (Ber. Rabba 62) adds that before death one is given a glimpse of the World-to-Come, by teaching: “The reward of the righteous is in the future world, and while they are still alive G-d shows them what they will attain. They glimpse at it, their souls are satiated and they sleep.” There are numerous reasons for this preview: To spare one the fear and uncertainty of death; to reward the body here for its role in perfecting the soul; to give the body a glimpse of what awaits it upon Resurrection; to add from the holy to the profane — since the World-to-Come is like Shabbat, just as we add from Shabbat to Friday, so holiness is added from the World-to-Come to this world.

Based on these teachings the Zohar (Vayechi 226a) makes a fascinating observation: “When a man departs from the world...his eyes see certain things, as we have explained in relation to the verse: ‘For no man shall see Me and live’ (Ex. 33:24), that men do not see in their lives what they see in their death. His eyes are opened to the sight they have just seen (i.e. the Divine Presence and one’s portion in the World-to-Come), and those standing by should put a hand on his eyes and close them....When the eyes remain open to this precious vision, if he has a son, the son should be the first to put his hand over his eyes and close them. As it says, ‘And Joseph shall put his hand on your eyes’. For an unholy sight (i.e. the dead body) is to come before him, and the eye that beheld the supernal holy sight must not look at the other sight.”

Thus we see from ancient Jewish mystical sources why the demise of the body engenders the strengthening of the soul, and why, paradoxically, there seems to be a resurgence of life shortly before death.

## SAYING SHALOM

Once the time of *Shacharit* (Morning Prayer) arrives (after dawn), it is forbidden to go to a friend's house to say "Shalom". The same rule applies as well if one were to go from his fixed seat in the Synagogue with the specific intention to walk over to his friend's seat (*Mishneh Berurah*). The reason for this prohibition is that since one of G-d's names is "Shalom", it would not be proper to honor someone using one of G-d's names before one first gives proper honor to G-d by praying.

In a case where one happens to be passing by his friend's house, or he sees his friend in the street, or even at the Synagogue (as long as he did not go out of his way specifically to go to him and say "Shalom"), it is permitted to say "Shalom" according to the letter of the law. However, even in these cases it is still better not to greet him with "Shalom", but instead to say "Good morning" or the like. The early Rabbis acted in this way in order to keep in mind that they still hadn't prayed (*Mishneh Berurah*). If, however, one already began to recite the morning blessings, then it is fine to follow the letter of the law in the above cases and say

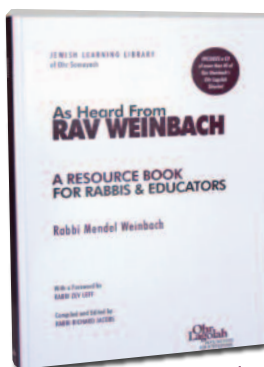
"Shalom" (a. if seeing him in the street; b. happens to be passing his home; c. or at the Synagogue). (*Shulchan Aruch* 89:2; *Acharonim*)

The above prohibition against saying "Shalom" before prayer applies even to one's father or rabbi. Also, the above restriction applies only when one wants to greet his fellow *first*. If, however, the other person says "Shalom" first it is permissible to answer back "Shalom" in all instances. (*Mishneh Berurah*)

If one must go to the home of someone whom he is afraid will become angry and possibly become violent, he should try to get by with shaking his hand without saying "Shalom", but if he passes him on the street he need not be strict and can say "Shalom" according to halacha.

The *Kaf HaChaim* writes that it is also forbidden to send one a gift before praying, and also not to kiss one's children before praying, especially in the synagogue.

• Sources: *Shulchan Aruch* 89:2, as explained by the later rabbis



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## JUST BECAUSE

**B**efore the Plague of Hail Moshe warns Pharaoh that he truly deserves to be killed, but that G-d had said, “Nonetheless, because (*baavur*) of this I let you endure: in order to show you My strength and so that My name may be spoken throughout the world” (Exodus 9:16). The word for “because” used in this context is *baavur*. However, since there are two more words in Hebrew which mean “because” — *biglal* and *bishvil* — why does the Torah specifically use the word *baavur* here and not one of the other two? What’s the difference between these three words?

The word “because” in English has two very distinct meanings. Consider the following two sentences: “I will visit my parents because I love them”, and “I will visit my parents because I want to forge a better relationship with them”. Both of these sentences use the word “because” when introducing the reason for why I will visit my parents, but the interplay between the reason and the visit are different. In the first sentence “because” refers to a pre-existing factor in why I want to visit my parents, while in the second sentence the word “because” introduces the anticipated effects of doing so. In other words, the word “because” in English refers to two types of causes: one that already exists and one that is the intended result of the course of action in question.

Rabbi Wolf Heidenheim (1757-1832), Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865), and the Malbim (1809-1879) all explain the difference between *baavur* and *biglal* based on the logic above. Indeed, both words mean “because” in English, but each one means a different type of “because”. They explain that *biglal* refers to a “because” which calls for a pre-existing factor that justifies a certain action. On the other hand, *baavur* refers to a factor which does not yet exist, but is the anticipated result of the action.

The word *bishvil* can literally mean *bi-shvil* (on the road),

which might be a metaphoric way of relating to the relationship between a cause and effect. It does not appear in the Bible, but does appear in later, Rabbinical writings. For example, the word *bishvil* appears close to fifty times in the Mishna. While it usually bears the same meaning as the Biblical *biglal*, in at least one case it means the same as *baavur* (see Bava Metzia 5:10). Interestingly, both *biglal* and *baavur* never appear in the Mishna, except that the latter appears once in a Biblical verse cited by the Mishna. For some reason the fashioners of Modern Hebrew favored the word *bishvil* over the two Biblical words, and that has become the catch-all word for “because” in popular speech.

Going back to the case of Pharaoh we can now understand why the Torah uses the word *baavur* and not *biglal* or *bishvil*. First of all, the word *bishvil* is out of the running because it never appears in the Bible. Secondly, the word *biglal* refers to a pre-existing reason for the action under discussion. In our passage there is no pre-existing reason for Pharaoh’s life to be spared. He had no merits or other redeeming qualities which should save him from the punishment he deserved. The only reason why G-d wanted to save Pharaoh was so that *in the future* Pharaoh may speak of G-d’s power and spread awareness about Him. Since the reason for saving Pharaoh was the anticipated *future* outcome of doing so, the Torah uses the word *baavur*.

Indeed, the Midrash (*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* chapters 42 & 43) relates that Pharaoh survived the Plague of the Firstborn (even though he was a firstborn) and the Splitting of the Red Sea (even though the rest of his army drowned). He somehow ended up a castaway who eventually came to the city of Ninveh. There, he (or perhaps his descendants or reincarnation) rose to a prominent position and roused its sinful inhabitants to heed the Prophet Jonah’s warnings to repent.

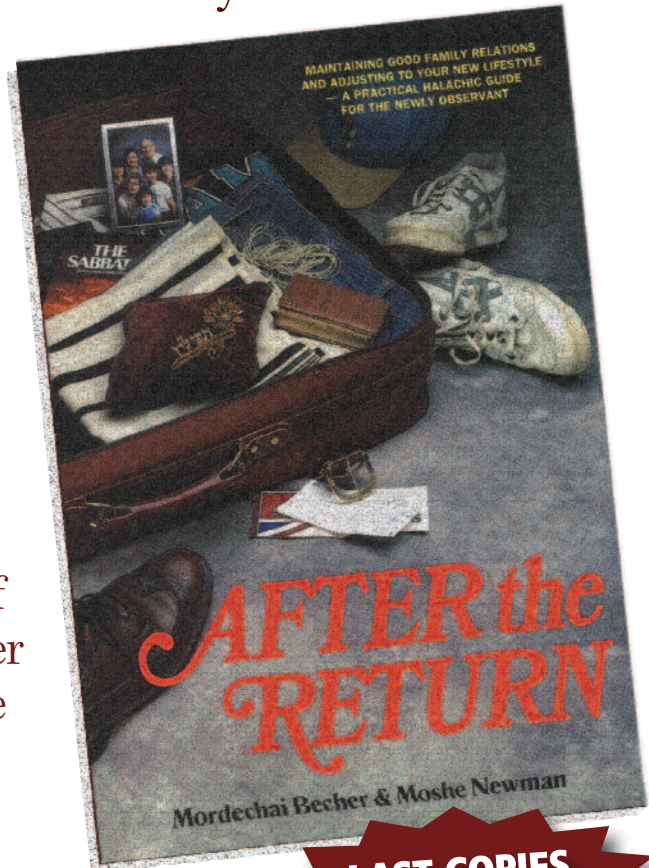
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