

# OH RNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### The Pandemic and the Endemic

*"...but with My Name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them" (6:3)*

One of the side-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is claustrophobia. Recently, I went to visit my mother (who, *bli ayn hara*, is more than half-way through her nineties), in England, and as the plane left the sky and we crested the white cloud cover and broke through to the blue, I had a feeling of exhilaration that reminded me of the first time I ever travelled in a plane. I realized that I was feeling the liberation from being cooped up like a battery hen. The psychological effects of this disease may turn out to be more pervasive and long lasting than the illness itself.

Even before the pandemic, our generation was already suffering from endemic low self-esteem. Enforced isolation has exacerbated this to new levels.

The name of two of the Tribes of Israel bear a striking resemblance: Yehuda, the most exalted of the tribes, is called "Yehuda Gur Aryeh" — "A lion cub is Yehuda." (Ber. 49:10) However in the Book of Devarim, the lowest of the tribes, Dan, is also called Gur Aryeh, "Dan Gur Aryeh" (33:22). (*Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tissa* 13)

Dan was the tribe that was so steeped in the idol worship of Egypt that they carried their idols with them into the sea when it split. Idol worship was so endemic in the tribe of Dan that the mystical "Clouds of Glory" that accompanied and protected the Jewish People in the desert would not accompany them. (*Pesikata d'Rav Kahana – Piska 3:12*)

What can link the lowest with highest?

In the Torah portion of Vayechi, in the middle of his blessing to Dan, Yaakov seems to suddenly stop and

exclaim, "For Your salvation do I long, Hashem!" Ostensibly, this sudden exclamation has no connection to the blessing that Yaakov is giving. On a deeper level, however, this is the essence of Yaakov's blessing to Dan.

There's a famous Midrash that compares different kinds of Jews to the four species of Succot. The lowest is the Jew who has neither Torah nor good deeds, who is compared to the *Arava* — the Willow that has no fruit, no taste and no aroma. Why is the lowly *Arava* part of the four species? And more, why does it have its own special day during Succot — Hoshana Rabba?

The awesome power of the *Arava* is that despite its lowness, it yearns and it thirsts for connection to Hashem, just as the Willow thirsts for water and typically grows by a river.

The Tribe of Dan, despite its lowness, yearns for connection to Hashem: "For Your salvation do I long, Hashem!"

It is this yearning that makes the Tribe of Dan worthy to be given the same name as Yehuda, the Prince of the Tribes.

We are now reading the Book of *Shemot*, literally the Book of Names. In our current situation, it is easy to lose track of our identity — of our value, our place in this world — of our name. We may be in the lowest part of world history, cut off and lonely, but our yearning for connection, for spirituality, to be close to Hashem, can raise us to the levels of the greatest.

# TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Vaera: *Pesachim 58-64*

### One Mitzvah, Coming Up!

*Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said, “Mitzvahs should not be passed over.”*

**W**hat does this principle mean and what is its source? Rashi explains here on our *daf* that it means that once a mitzvah “comes to one’s hand” (i.e. presents itself), one should not bypass it or delay it. However, from the word *m’achar* in Rashi’s commentary, there seems room to ponder whether Rashi is merely making a statement to explain the words or if he is also giving the reason for this principle. If *me’achar* means “once” – i.e. “Do not pass over a mitzvah *once* it comes to your hand” – this is a statement but not a reason. But, if *m’achar* means “since” – i.e. “Do not pass over a mitzvah *since* it came to your hand” – this would indicate a reason for not passing over it. “Since” and “because” it is in front of you to do, it would be a disgrace to the mitzvah to pass over it or delay it.

This same teaching of Reish Lakish of “*Mitzvahs should not be passed over*” is taught in other places in *Shas* as well. For example, it appears in *Yoma* 33a. There, Rashi clearly offers a reason for this important Torah principle, a teaching that is found in the *Mechilta*: The Torah states, *U’shamartem et ha’matzahs* – “And guard the *matzahs*” – which can also be read as “And **guard the mitzvahs**.” This means that if a mitzvah presents itself to a person, he should guard it and do it immediately, not waiting until it becomes “like *chametz* and old.” Accordingly, Rashi here is also using the word *m’achar* in the sense of “since,” and as being the *reason* behind the halacha.

There is also a deeper, spiritual idea behind this Torah principle of not delaying the performance of a mitzvah. Rabbi Akiva Tatz has explained it in the following manner: Just as *matzah* becomes *chametz* if left too long, so too a mitzvah, which is spiritual life for one who performs it, becomes *chametz*, fermented, sour, if it is allowed to become part of the natural. A mitzvah is a physical action containing unbounded spiritual energy, but if it is performed as no more than a physical action, it may lose its connection with the spiritual world. Mitzvahs are like *matzahs*. When performed with zeal and alacrity,

they are transcendent, but when performed sluggishly, they sour.

Returning to Reish Lakish’s statement in the *gemara*: What is the context? The *mishna* teaches the order of the numerous steps involved in bringing the Pesach sacrifice in the *Beit Hamikdash*. After the *shechita*, the blood is received by a *kohen* in a bowl (*bazich*) of silver or gold, which is then passed from *kohen* to *kohen* until it arrives to a *kohen* who is near the Altar, who sprinkles its blood there. One halacha in the *mishna* is that a *kohen* should receive the full bowl from the previous person, on its way to the Altar, *before* he returns the empty bowl, on its way back from the Altar. Why does he receive the full bowl before returning the empty one? The *gemara* says that this supports the statement of Reish Lakish. Since the full bowl is being received and passed on to fulfill a mitzvah, it takes precedence over the empty bowl.

It is important to note that there can be an exception to this rule, if warranted by the halacha. Normally the *tefillin* of the arm should be put on before the *tefillin* for the head. Why? The Torah says that the head *tefillin* will be *v’hayu*. *Chazal* (*Menachot* 36a) explain that this word teaches that when the head *tefillin* are on, the arm *tefillin* need to already be on (*v’hayu* is plural – Rashi). What should one who is putting on *tefillin* do if he mistakenly takes out the *tefillin* for the head first? Should he pass over it, putting it aside until first wrapping the *tefillin* for the hand – and not follow the principle on our *daf*? The halachic authorities rule that he should indeed put it down and first put on the *tefillin* for the hand, due to the Torah decree of *v’hayu*. And to be more careful next time! (*Aruch Hashulchan* 25:9)

• *Pesachim* 64b

# Q & A

## VAERA

### Questions

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?

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

### Answers

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 (*pitem*) 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. 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?

# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Marshes, Marshes, Marshes

The Hebrew Language is seemingly blessed with three different words that mean "marsh" or "swamp." When Pharaoh saw a dream that consisted of seven fat cows, the Bible reports that the cows were grazing in the *achu* ("marsh;" Gen. 41:2, 41:18). Yet, when bringing the Plague of Blood upon the Egyptians, G-d told Moses to tell Aaron to stretch his hand "over the waters of Egypt – over their rivers, over their canals, over their marshes (*agam*), and over all their gatherings of water" (Ex. 7:19), again using the word *agam* for "marsh." Similar verbiage appears concerning the Plague of Frogs as well (Ex. 8:1). *Bitzah*, a third word for "marsh," appears three times in the Bible (Iyov 8:11, 40:21, Yechezkel 47:11) and also denotes a muddy, swampy place. In this essay we will explore the etymologies and nuances of these three words *achu*, *agam* and *bitzah*.

Rashi (to Gen. 41:2) asserts that *achu* means *agam*. To support this claim, Rashi cites Iyov 8:11, which reads: "Can reeds (*gome*) grow tall without a marshland (*bitzah*), or a marsh (*achu*) without water?" That said, Nachmanides (to Gen. 41:2) takes issue with Rashi's commentary and argues that *achu* does not mean "marsh," but rather refers to a certain type of grass or vegetation that tends to grow on the river banks. Nachmanides then suggests that the etymology of *achu* relates to the Hebrew word *ach* ("brother"), in allusion to the camaraderie between the various types of flora that grow in tandem along the river's edge. (Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch makes the same point. Rabbi Pappenheim writes that *achu* refers to the "brotherhood" between the different animals which join up together in the fertile land to feast on its produce, or that it refers to the fact that the *achu*'s location alongside the river makes it appear as the river's "brother.")

Rabbi Moshe ben Shem Tov Gabbai (1340-1420) defends Rashi's position by explaining that *achu* refers to a "marsh" in which the type of vegetation mentioned by Nachmanides often sprouts. Because such vegetation tends to materialize in swampy areas, the word for this sort of vegetation became synonymous with "marshes" themselves, such that in practice *achu* means the same thing as *agam*. (See also Ibn Janach and Radak's *Sefer HaShorashim*, which already propose that *achu* refers to both a certain type of grass, possibly papyrus, and the place in which that grass typically grows.)

To make things a bit more complicated, Rashi (to Ex. 7:19) also defines *agam* as a stagnant body of water and translates the Hebrew word into the Old French *estanc* (*etang* in Modern French), which means "pond." A pond is not quite the same thing as a marsh or swamp.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the word *agam* to the biliteral root GIMMEL-MEM, which refers to "spongy or absorbent material." In that sense, *agam* refers to a tract of water-soaked land inundated or partially flooded with water. Such a place must be sponge-like if it is to soak up so much water and always remain wet. Another word derived from this root is *gome*, which is a sort of "spongy reed" that grows in marshy wetlands. (Rabbi Wertheimer even writes that a marsh is called *agam* because of the *gome* that grows therein.)

The word *bitzah* appears three times in the Bible (Iyov 8:11, 40:21, Yechezkel 47:11), and also denotes a muddy, swampy place. It derives from the Biblical Hebrew *botz* ("mud," Jer. 38:22). Rabbi Pappenheim argues that these two words derive from the biliteral root BET-TZADI, which refers to "a fluid with mucus-like consistency." The most obvious and common derivative of this root is

*beitzah* (“egg”), whose contents are typically gooey, like mucus. (Parenthetically, the word *beitzah* in the singular form never appears in the Bible, only the word *beitzim*, in plural, does (e.g. Deut. 22:6, Yechezkel 30:9). The viscosity of *botz* similarly resembles mucus because it is not quite as pourable as water, nor can it be described as wholly solid. *Bitzah*, in the sense of “marsh,” also fits this core meaning because under swamp conditions the ground tends to remain muddy and thus viscous. Interestingly, Rabbi Pappenheim also asserts that the word *butz* (Esther 1:6, 8:15, Yechezkel 27:16) refers specifically to a type of “flax/linen” that grows in watery soil like that of a *bitzah*.

Rashi (to Gen. 41:2) writes that *achu* translates into Old French as *maresc* (a cognate of the English word *marsh*). Elsewhere (to Taanit 22a, Yevamot 121a, Sanhedrin 5b), Rashi writes the same about the word *agam* and its Aramaic cognate *agama*, and yet again (to Yechezkel 47:11, Iyov 8:11, Bava Metzia 74a), he uses that Old French word as a translation for *bitzah*. Rashi (to Shevuot 16a, Sanhedrin 96a) also translates the Talmudic term *bitzaim/bitzaei mayim* (with an AYIN) into Old French as *maresc*.

But wait! There is one more word that did not make it to our list: *suf*. Rashi (to Ex. 2:3, 13:18) writes that *suf* is related to *agam*. However, Rabbi Avraham Meir HaKohen Glanzer of Antwerp infers in *Maayanei Agam* that Rashi does not write that *suf* means the same thing as *agam*. Rather, Rashi implies that *suf* is somehow associated with the *agam*, but is not coterminous with *agam*. This is borne out by the continuation of Rashi’s comments, in which he translates the Hebrew *suf* into the Old French *roisel*, which means in English “roseau cane” — also known as the “common reed.” Thus, *suf* refers to the reeds that tend to grow in a swamp or marsh, but does not actually refer to the swamp itself. Hence, *Yam Suf* means the Reed Sea (not the Red Sea), not the Swamp Sea.

(In this essay, we used the English terms *marsh* and *swamp* interchangeably. Interestingly, according to Google Books' Ngram Viewer, the word *marsh* was more popular in English literature published between 1800-1850, while *swamp* was more popular from 1850-1970. Then *marsh* became more popular from 1970-2000. Since the year 2000, the word *swamp* has again been more popular.)

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## A BLESSING ON YOUR HEAD – INTRODUCTION

**D**irectly after reciting the blessings over the Torah, we immediately follow them by reading verses from the Torah. Tosafot in Tractate Berachot 11b explain that this custom originated in France and it is extremely old. What is the rationale behind the custom? Normally, on making a blessing over something, we straightaway do whatever it was that prompted the blessing. For example, before eating an apple we make a blessing and then, without pausing, we bite into the apple right away so that there is no break between the recitation of the blessing and the action that goes together with it. So, too, here, directly after reciting the blessings over the Torah, we read selected portions of the Torah. Our recitation of the verses and the Talmudic teachings are an act of learning, and eliminate concern that we might have recited the blessings over the Torah in vain.

What exactly is said to constitute our Torah learning after saying these blessings? First, three verses are recited from Numbers, 6:24-26. Following that, the very first Mishna in Tractate Peah – a Tractate that deals with agricultural issues – is said. The third piece that is said is a lesson from the Talmud that is taken from Tractate Shabbat 127a. The theme of “number three” is clearly prevalent here: the first section is comprised of *three* verses, and, all together there are *three* different segments from the Written Torah and the Oral Torah that are recited.

The Mishna in Tractate Middot 2:6 describes that in the Holy Temple there were three steps between the Israelites’ Courtyard and the Priestly Courtyard, and it was on these three steps that the Priestly Blessing was recited. Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (1579-1654), in his formative and indispensable commentary on the Mishna called *Tosafot Yom Tov*,

explains that the Priestly Blessing was comprised of three verses – exactly the same three verses that we recite each morning after the Morning Blessings – and that is why there were three steps: one for each verse. Subsequently, it is extremely fitting that we recite three different sections of the Torah, corresponding to the three steps between the two courtyards.

But there is another dimension as well. The Torah is comprised of both a Written Torah and an Oral Torah. The dominant part of the Oral Torah is the Mishna and the Talmud. Hence, we recite verses from the Written Torah as well as sections from the Mishna and from the Talmud. And, by doing so, we are ensuring that we say something from each facet of the inestimable and priceless triple-twined treasure that is the Torah.

Rabbi David Avudraham, in his foundational *Sefer Avudraham* on the prayers and blessings, adds another detail. The first of three verses that we read is comprised of three words, the second verse has five words, and the third verse has seven. The universally accepted custom is that when the Torah is read during the week, three people are called up to recite blessings over the Torah. On a Festival, five people are called up. And on Shabbat, seven people are honored with being called up. The Avudraham explains that the reason that our Sages instituted such a system was to mirror the number of words in each of the three verses of the Priestly Blessing – three, five and seven.

*To be continued...*

# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

## Vaera

### Human, Prenatal Greatness

The story of the Exodus is interrupted with a genealogical interlude, which recites the lineage of Moshe and Aharon, concluding with “these are Moshe and Aharon” – and from there, the narration resumes. The roster does not begin with Moshe and Aharon’s ancestor Levi, but rather outlines the tribes of Reuven and Shimon, and then continues to list the children of Levi – Gershon and his children - before getting to Kehat’s line, from which Moshe and Aharon descend. What is the purpose of this genealogical roster?

First, it was meant to show that Moshe and Aharon were human beings. Just as the story is about to turn into one of triumph, with Moshe and Aharon performing miraculous feats, we are reminded that they were mortals. We are shown the relationship of their tribe with preceding ones, and the relationship of their family and house with the families and houses of relatives. They had aunts and uncles and cousins.

Here, the Torah emphasizes that Moshe was an ordinary human. He will go on now to perform mighty miracles, lead the Jewish People out of Egypt, split the sea for them, sustain them in the desert, and bring the Torah down from Heaven. From the inception of his greatness, we are told that he was a man whose parents and grandparents everyone knew. At the same time, this removed the possibility of erroneous deification while demonstrating the heights to which a mortal can rise.

Second, the lineage is meant to dispel another illusion. While this “certificate of origin” verified Moshe and Aharon as humans, it may have also led

to the belief that everyone, without exception, can be a prophet. But, if that were the case, then the “first-comer,” a descendant of Reuven, would have been chosen. Instead, the lineage of Revuven and Shimon, followed by all of the children of Levi, are recited – to demonstrate that the tribe of Levi was chosen, and in particular, Levi’s grandson Amram was chosen among them. G-d chose the most worthy and most exemplary to be His emissaries.

An examination of the names of Reuven, Shimon and Levi reveal the thoughts and feelings of our mother Leah when these children were conceived and born. If the mother-to-be can affect the soul of the child, then from the names, which reflect her innermost feelings, we can surmise why Levi was chosen. The name “Reuven” reflected the sentiment that “the L-rd has seen my affliction [as the less beloved wife]; my husband will love me.” (Ber. 29:32); The name “Shimon” reflected the feeling that “the L-rd has heard that I am the hated one; therefore he has given me this one too!” (Ber. 29:33). Finally, Leah names her third son Levi – “Now my husband will become attached to me!” (Ber. 29:34). In her feelings of disadvantage, she was saturated with love for her husband, and yearning for his reciprocal love – a love that reached its fruition with the birth of Levi.

Within the house of Levi, only one courageous couple, inspired by faith and love, reunited in a time of terror, expressing their great trust in the Almighty. Through faith and faithfulness, love and loyalty, was Moshe, the leader of the Jewish People, conceived.

- Sources: Commentary Shemot 6:14-30

# THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

(Part 11 of a new mini-series)

5781 is a year that is chock-full of rare calendar phenomena that we will *iyH* be witnessing, or, more accurately, taking an active part in. Let us continue exploring what is in store for us.

## No Parshat Vayelech

In what may seem odd to readers, in 5781 the Torah portion of Vayelech will not be read during the public Torah reading service. No, this does not mean that we will skip it entirely. It just means that Vayelech will be next year's Shabbat Shuva. Therefore, by the time we get to its reading, it will already be the next year, 5782. The reason for this is interesting. Rosh Hashana for 5782 will occur on a Tuesday-Wednesday. The Tur, when codifying the calendar halacha, sets several necessary sign-posts in relation to Torah portions, time of year, and various *Yamim Tovim*. One of these is the dictum (seemingly a play on the words of a verse in the beginning of the Book of Daniel): "Ba"G Hamelech Pas Vayelech."

This is referring to when the Rosh Hashana (*Hamelech*) comes in on a Monday or Tuesday (*Ba"G ב ג*). In this case, Vayelech gets split up, or crumbled (*Pas Vayelech*), and read separately. This maxim is letting us know the rule of when Nitzavim and Vayelech will be read as a double Torah portion or be read as separate stand-alone Torah portions.

This adage goes hand-in-hand with another rule, "*Kumu VTik'u*," that Nitzavim always has to be right before Rosh Hashana. ('*Kumu*,' 'stand,' refers to *Parshat Nitzavim*, literally 'standing.' And '*Tik'u*,' 'blow' refers to Rosh Hashana, when the "mitzvah of the day" is to blow the Shofar.)

As the *Gemara* in Megilla explains, this is due to Ezra HaSofer's decree that the curses in the Book of Devarim (meaning *Ki Tavo*), need to be read prior to Rosh Hashana in order that "Tichleh Shana U'Kilalotaha – the year and its curses may end" (and ostensibly, its addendum, "Tachel Shana

*U'Birchoteha* – the New Year and its blessings be ushered in"), to rapidly come true.

Tosafot, and seconded by the Abudraham, and then the Levush, explain why this is so. Since *Ki Tavo* contains *tochachah* (rebuke), there must be a noticeable "buffer week" (practically, Nitzavim) between its reading and Rosh Hashana. Therefore, Nitzavim must be the stand-alone "buffer week" before Rosh Hashana, in order to emphasize that we are getting *Ki Tavo* and its *tochacha* in *just before* Rosh Hashana, to enable a misfortune-free New Year. These rules, or, more accurately, necessary points of *parsha* alignment (or realignment) during the year, are accepted as the clear halacha by all later authorities.

So, synchronizing these instructions, if Rosh Hashana falls out on a Monday or Tuesday, then Nitzavim will be the stand-alone *parsha* right before Rosh Hashana, and Vayelech gets pushed off a week to (next year's) Shabbat Shuva. Yet, when Rosh Hashana falls out on a Thursday or on Shabbat, then Nitzavim and Vayelech are combined on the last Shabbat of the year. Because during the past year (5780), Rosh Hashana fell out on a Monday, Nitzavim and Vayelech were combined on the last Shabbat prior to Rosh Hashana. Yet, this year, 5781, Rosh Hashana fell out on Shabbat. Hence, Vayelech will end up being 5782's Shabbat Shuva, and will not get to be a public Torah reading at all this year.

This actually occurs fairly often, as does the opposite. Sometimes we get to read Vayelech twice in a year (as will happen in 5783), once in the beginning of the year as the stand-alone reading for Shabbat Shuva, and once again at the end, as a *double-parsha*, along with Nitzavim.

## Full Selichot

Another aspect of 5782's Rosh Hashana falling out on Tuesday is that, for Ashkenazim, all of pre-Rosh Hashana days of *Selichot* will be recited. As the Ashkenazic *minhag* is to always commence *Selichot* on a Motzei Shabbat/Sunday that is at least four days before Rosh Hashana, it is only when the next year's Rosh Hashana falls out on a Tuesday, that it is possible for the "full count" of all of the 100 *Selichot* to be recited. This is just one more noteworthy feature that brings our calendar year to a close.

## White-Garbed

There is actually one more interesting convergence with the secular (US) calendar: Erev Rosh Hashana will fall out on Labor Day. However, as at that point we will be entering the *Yamim Noraim*, I am sure that this detail will not be too relevant to us. Since the only "observance" (that I am familiar with) is not to wear white past Labor Day, I am

confident that all Ashkenazim will disregard this unspoken maxim, and instead follow the great Rema's directive to specifically wear white on the *Yamim Noraim* (and certainly on Yom Kippur) to be akin to angels on the holiest day(s) of the year.

In conclusion, since during this year *Vayelech*, the *parsha* that discusses the topic of *Hester Panim* (G-d "hiding His Face" from us, so to speak) will not be publicly read, perhaps this incredible year will be a year of *nissim geluyim* – clear miracles – as was intimated by the *Chasam Sofer*, and may this exceptional year's initials indeed stand for *Tehei Shnas Pidyon Acharon* – May it be the year of the final redemption!

*Postscript:* One last fascinating fact about our remarkable year is that, of all possibilities in the *Tur*'s 247-year cycle, due to its calendar makeup, a *ZaCH'A* year, which is actually the shortest possible Jewish year at only 353 days, also has the least amount of prayers recited within it: 1143 (in the Diaspora).

*Written l'zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha l'yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad.*

*This author wishes to acknowledge Rabbi Shea Linder's excellent article on this topic.*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**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.

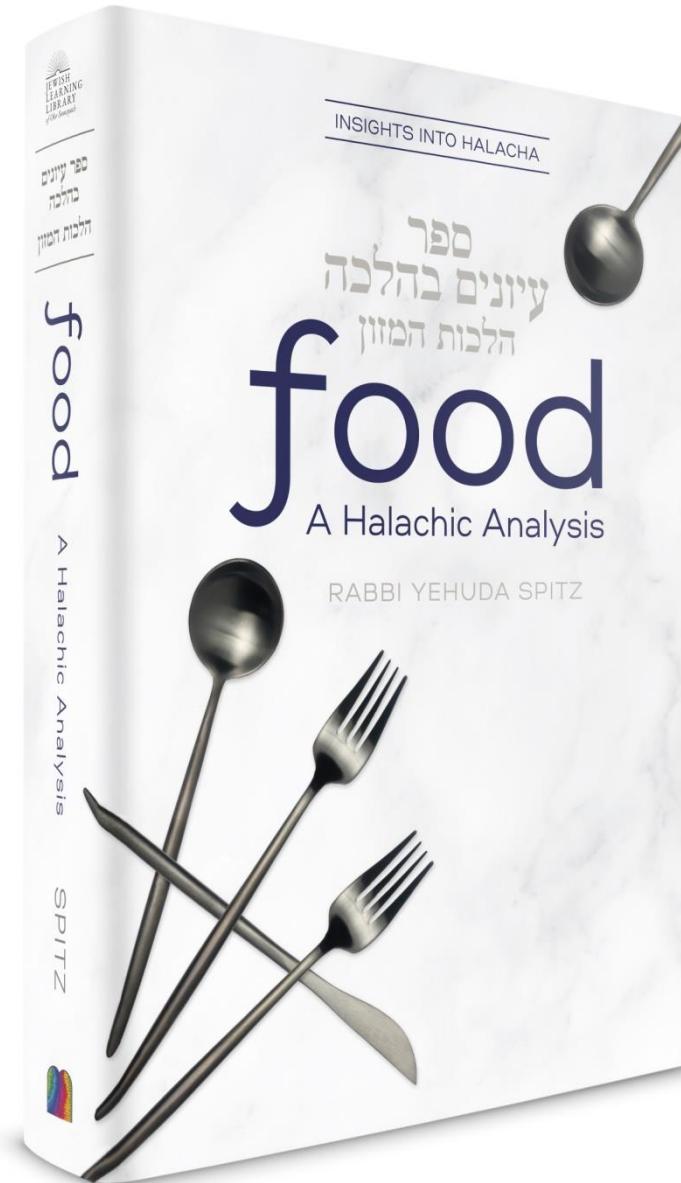
Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

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