

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

QOL HA-QAHAL

קול הקהל



Issue 28: Bo-Beshalah
IN LOVING MEMORY OF PHILIP JAROSLAWICZ Z"L



In loving memory of Philip Jaroslawicz Z"l

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QOL HA-QAHAL MISSION

To promote Torah throughout our community
by providing a platform for our rabbis, lay members, students and institutions.

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Cover Image: Israel's Escape from Egypt, illustration from a Bible card
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Perashat Bo

PERASHAT BO Rabbi Elie Abadie MD

After a devastating series of seven plagues that concluded last week's Perasha, three more are to come in this week's Perashat Bo. The last three plagues that came upon Egypt were even of greater import and devastation that overwhelmed Pharaoh to the point of expelling the Israelites from Egypt as God had originally assured Moshe.

Were these last three plagues necessary? Weren't the last seven distressing enough that they brought Pharaoh to say "I have sinned now?" – In a sense he acknowledged his transgressions. That should have been enough for Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave! Yet, the Almighty felt it necessary to bring another three plagues "so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt...that you may know that I am Hashem" (Shemot 10:2). Therefore, the purpose of the last three plagues was not so the Egyptians should acknowledge God, but that the Israelite should acknowledge Him and remember Him for all the generations to come.

The events that occurred in Egypt and witnessed by people and nations, were talked about for generations. Indeed in all future encounters, nations feared the Israelites because of what transpired in Egypt. Yet, the Torah instructs us that these miraculous events should be told into the ears of our children – to whisper them into their ears. If history proclaims these awesome miracles, why should we then whisper them into the ears of our children?

The Torah is teaching us an important lesson. The message of Jewish history depends upon its interpretation. Records of various historical events means very little; we have seen throughout the years how people attempt to manipulate historical events according to their own agenda, and most of the times we, the Jews are targeted as the culprits of historical tragedies. Even until today with excellent historical documentation including photographs, films and diaries, people still have the audacity to claim that the

Holocaust never occurred! Even when the crematoriums are still standing and eyewitness accounts can testify to this horrible chapter in Jewish history, still people dare to deny it! Only 70 years later, as we commemorate the International Holocaust Memorial Day this week, people dare to deny it, imagine the events in Egypt 3400 years ago, the perversion of what occurred and how it occurred could be even greater!

Indeed, throughout the annals of Jewish history various miraculous events have been misinterpreted by historians and theorists, people who lack religious conviction, as being merely natural phenomena; refusing to recognize the Hand of the Almighty.

Therefore, at the beginning of their national redemption, the Israelites in Egypt are warned that despite the world's interpretation of the miracles of the Exodus in Egypt, their future depends on how they transmit these events to their children – in their ears! One speaks in the ears of another person not

only that outsiders should not hear, but that the one in whose ears is being whispered, should ignore what others have to say and not listen to them. God was saying: whisper into their ears the truth so that they ignore the false interpretations.

The success of a Jewish family, for its children to remain staunch and secure in their beliefs, and loyal to its traditions, depends on its own whispering. We must whisper into the ears of our children our version of history, our version of who we are and what we stand for. Let them hear the whisper of our Torah, the whisper of our tradition, of our *misvot* so that they go forward in the task of building a Jewish family and continuing the legacy of our People.

"We must whisper into the ears of our children our version of history, our version of who we are and what we stand for."

Rabbi Abadi is the Head Rabbi of the Edmond J. Safra Synagogue in New York City.

BO: TAKING NOTE

Rabbi Joseph Dweck

“All there is to thinking is seeing something noticeable, which makes you see something you weren’t noticing, which makes you see something that isn’t even visible”

— Leo Strauss

“Be here now” — Ram Dass (Richard Alpert)

Following an onslaught of ten powerful plagues, Egypt buckles from the aftermath of its inane obstinance, and the Hebrew slaves see the dawn of freedom breaking over the horizon. Here Moshe’s role changes from that of a redeemer to that of a law-giver. Parashat Bo, therefore, presents us with the first twenty *misvot* (commandments) in the Torah.

As we might expect, some of our first *misvot* focus on the nature of liberty and freedom. Two of these prohibit¹ eating or owning *hames* (leaven) over Pesah, and command us to eat *masah* during that time.² The interplay between *hames* and *masah* is designed to make us mindful and aware of our circumstances. Keeping the *misvot* of *hames* and *masah* requires us to pay attention and to notice a moment in time that makes an enormous difference.

There is a fine line that separates *hames* from *masah*. Only a grain that can become *hames* can be used to make *masah*. This means that while making *masah* there is always a danger of it becoming *hames*. When flour from wheat, barley, oats, rye or spelt comes into contact with water, it can be made into *masah* for the next eighteen minutes. After that, it leavens and becomes *hames*. The halakhic change at that point is drastic — one can fulfil a great *misvah* with *masah*, but the Torah prohibits *hames* more severely than it does pork. The point at which the change occurs, however, is only a moment, and it can be easily missed. Therefore, there is a command to carefully watch³ the process of making *masah*.

The mindfulness that is demanded in the production of *masah* is the mindfulness that is necessary in order to be truly alive and

responsive in life. But the human condition does not make it easy. We do not usually stay keenly aware of the environment in which we live, nor do we examine our surroundings anew each day. We tend to take familiar circumstances for granted and assume that things are as they always have been. When we are in that state we are not free, but confined by habit and compelled by the recurring patterns of our thoughts. We are, in essence, running on autopilot.

Awareness must be learned and achieved. It requires being fully conscious and connected to the present moment. It takes a good deal of mental focus and energy, but it is worth it. When we become aware of what is happening inside us and all around us, the world comes alive before us as if we are seeing it for the first time. We experience a fullness in life that otherwise would pass us without being noticed. Most important, perhaps, is that when we are cognizant, we allow ourselves to learn from what life brings us, both in hardship and in joy, and we grow. We then become more in touch with the world and with our deeper selves.

Every day the sun shines, trees sway, traffic stops and starts, people are born and they die, they speak and act, and our pulses keep beating. And moment by moment, life comes to us and challenges us to wake up and notice what is happening. Even if we manage to go back to sleep and tune it all out, life keeps knocking.

“Awareness must be learned and achieved.”

Masah demands that our minds are alert and observant. On the festival of our freedom, bread that results from mental lassitude is off limits. Before stepping out of the physical confines of slavery, we had to step out of the confines of a national psyche that had been lulled to sleep over centuries of an entrenched mentality. The act of baking *masah* was our first step into awakening. That bread of freedom became the catalyst for a nation that would live by its commitment to feeling and experiencing life, so that it might connect with the world and live and learn from all of its glorious expressions.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Dweck is the Senior Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Sephardi Community of the United Kingdom.

¹ 12:15, 19, 20.

² 12:18

³ 12:17

INSIGHTS INTO MOSHE'S DEVELOPMENT

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

Many of the central figures in the Torah narrative are not described in a static way. Instead, the Torah sketches the course of the character's development. This is done not only because it makes the story more interesting, but because self-development is an essential aspect of spiritual life. By charting the character's development, the Torah displays models of self-improvement – a behavior that is applicable to ourselves even within our own more limited spiritual levels. In the story of Moshe's early experience as a leader, we see a development of another kind.

One aspect of Moshe's development as a leader is seen from his encounters with Pharaoh. The Torah describes in detail only several meetings of Moshe with Pharaoh. By examining the dialogue of the encounters, specifically the first and the last, we see that Moshe has developed into a forceful speaker and a strong leader. His effectiveness as a speaker is demonstrated throughout his later career.

Although Moshe displayed significant reluctance in taking the position, God prepared Moshe for the first encounter with Pharaoh by scripting the request and its tone. The request is:

YHWH, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us – so now, pray let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness and let us slaughter (offerings) to YHWH our God! (3:18; Schocken Bible¹)

Besides this courteous request, God tells Moshe to threaten Pharaoh stridently, saying:

When you go to return to Egypt, see: All the portents that I have put in your hand, you are to do before Pharaoh, but I will make his heart strong-

willed, so that he will not send the people free.

Then you are to say to Pharaoh: Thus says YHWH: My son, my firstborn, is Israel!

I said to you: Send free my son, that he may serve me, but you have refused to send him free, (so) here: I will kill your son, your firstborn! (4:21-23; SB)

Moshe's first speech to Pharaoh is similar to the content of the first request, but lacks the stridency of the second demand. Although Moshe begins the first encounter with Pharaoh confidently, he quickly crumbled at Pharaoh's rebuff. Moshe retreated from his first more strongly-worded statement into a more reserved one.

Moshe's first statement to Pharaoh announces:

Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel:

Send free my people, that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness! (5:1; SB)

This statement is a direct demand from YHWH, the God of Israel, to the enslaver of His people. This request identifies YHWH as the source of the statement, using the specific name of God and the noble name of Israel. Moshe gives no reason for the request – the mere fact of God commanding it is enough reason to obey.

Moshe's second request is more meekly worded:

The God of the Hebrews had met with us; pray let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, and let us slaughter (offerings) to YHWH our God, lest He confront us with the pestilence or with the sword. (5:3; SB)

“ In the story of Moshe's early experience as a leader, we see a development...”

¹ Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (The Schocken Bible, Volume 1)* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995). Henceforth in this article, we will refer to the Schocken Bible as SB.

This is not a demand of Pharaoh, but a plea to his authority. It is not even clear that God is the author of this petition. Although Moshe does mention “the pestilence and the sword,” these words function less as a threat and more as a reason why Pharaoh’s compliance would be to his benefit (i.e. to prevent the diminishing of his work force that would result from a plague, or to spare the Egyptians the harm that also would affect them if Israel were decimated). Even assuming Rashi’s explanation, that Moshe is showing respect to the king, the words can hardly be called a threat and differ markedly from the brazen ultimatum with which God commanded him to confront Pharaoh. Moshe, reduced to being a meek petitioner to the throne, is now ignored by Pharaoh.

Pharaoh then referred to Moshe and Aharon in the third person—as if they were not there. There is no formal dismissal of Moshe and Aharon. Pharaoh belittled Moshe and Aharon by ignoring them. He turns instead to the business of increasing the Israelites’ oppression.

It is little wonder that Moshe is upset after his first encounter. Moshe’s distress at his failed first attempt is apparent in his strong words to God:

My Lord, for what reason have you dealt so ill with this people? For what reason have you sent me? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has dealt only ill with this people, and rescued—you have not rescued your people! (5:22-23; SB)

God’s response to Moshe, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh,” is necessary not only for the Israelites

but for Moshe’s own development as a confident leader.

Although God commanded Moshe to speak to Pharaoh before the first plagues, the Torah does not report those encounters. The next reported encounter between Moshe and Pharaoh comes during the plague of frogs when Pharaoh asks Moshe to pray that God will remove the plague. Moshe obviously has the upper hand in that encounter – with Pharaoh now entreating him. Moshe sarcastically toys with Pharaoh asking him:

You may have this triumph over me (*hitpa’er ‘allai*): for what time shall I plead in behalf of you. (8:5; NJPS)

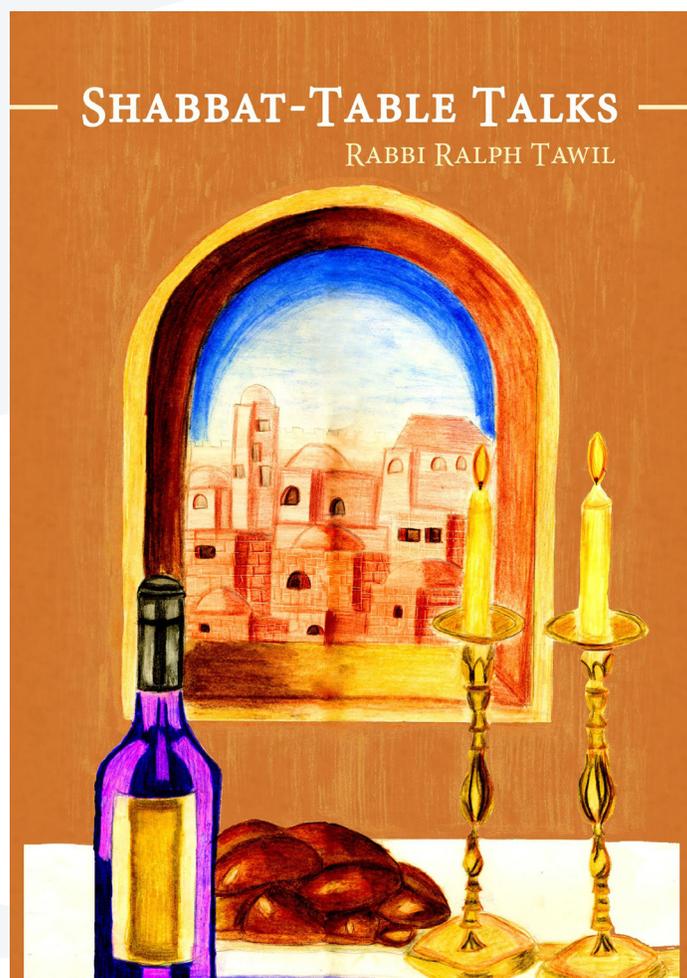
The next two encounters reported by the Torah, during the plagues of *‘arob* (flies or wild animals) and the plague of hail, continue the tendency, with Moshe becoming more powerful and Pharaoh becoming weaker.

The plague of locust represents an important milestone in the relationship. Pharaoh’s servants’ derision (“Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?”) caused Pharaoh to recall Moshe and negotiate even before he suffered the plague. The Torah’s account of this plague reflects the change, by reporting, for the first

time, the pre-plague warning. Moshe abruptly ends the encounter by disrespectfully turning and leaving (*“vayyifan vayyesse”*) after describing, in detail, the devastation awaiting Egypt.

After Moshe and Aharon are brought back to the palace, Pharaoh agrees to let them worship but asks who will be

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going. Moshe's semi-poetic response to Pharaoh's question displayed a superiority that infuriated Pharaoh and caused him to suspect their true intentions of flight. Although Pharaoh did not capitulate to all Moshe's demands, he conceded to Moshe by permitting (even commanding) the men (alone) to go. Pharaoh's concession is, of course, not enough. Moshe and Aharon are chased away from Pharaoh, in a pretense of domination and control. This supposed domination is shown to be baseless when Pharaoh is forced to rush Moshe back in order to rid Egypt of the locust.

Moshe's next encounter with Pharaoh, coming after the plague of darkness and before *makkat bekhorot* (the plague of the firstborn), is the last time Moshe speaks to Pharaoh (but not their final encounter). Pharaoh called Moshe and said to him:

Go, serve YHWH, only your sheep and your oxen shall be kept back, even (Hebrew: *gam* –“also”) your little-ones may go with you! (10:24; SB)

Even this more generous concession by Pharaoh is not accepted by Moshe. Pharaoh, in a show of astounding arrogance, thinks that he can still dictate the terms to Moshe. Moshe responds:

You yourself (Hebrew: *gam atta*) will provide us with sacrifices and burnt offerings to offer up to YHWH our God. Our own livestock, too, shall go along with us—not a hoof shall remain behind: for we must select from it for the worship of YHWH our God; and we shall not know with what we are to worship YHWH until we arrive there. (10:25-26; NJPS)

Moshe sarcastically begins his response with the very word that Pharaoh used to emphasize his further concession (*gam*, “also”). Moshe's use of exaggeration in his rejection of Pharaoh's proposition displays his strength. Pharaoh is still very strong also – at least in his own mind – as he

chases Moshe away saying:

Go from me! Be on your watch: You are not to see my face again, for on the day you see my face, you shall die! (10:28; SB)

Unfazed by this threat, Moshe sardonically responded:

You have spoken well, I will not henceforth see your face again. (10:29; SB)

Before leaving Pharaoh, Moshe receives another prophecy, or he remembers something which God had communicated to him earlier. God communicated to Moshe the details of the last plague, *makkat bekhorot* (the plague of the firstborn), that Moshe conveys to Pharaoh. Moshe ends with the following words:

“Then all these your servants shall go down to me, they shall bow to me, saying: Go out, you and all the people who walk in your footsteps! And afterward I will go out.” He went out from Pharaoh in flaming anger. (11:8; SB)

These are the last words that Moshe speaks to Pharaoh. He will go out when he is ready – after he has won over Pharaoh's servants, undermining Pharaoh's authority. Moshe underscores the fact that he is in control by leaving in anger. He left the palace when he wants, and he will leave Egypt when he wants. Moshe had the last word in this encounter, unlike the first encounter when Pharaoh has the last word.

The final (eighth, seventh in the context of the plagues), encounter with Pharaoh occurs at midnight, in the midst of the devastation resulting from the tenth plague. In this encounter only Pharaoh talks:

Arise, go out from amidst my people, even you,



The Plague of Locusts, watercolor circa 1896-1902 by James Tissot

even the Children of Israel! Go, serve YHWH according to your words, even your sheep, even your oxen, take, as you have spoken, and go! And bring a blessing even on me! (12:31-32; SB)

Pharaoh is frantically urging Moshe and Israel out of Egypt. There are seven words in the imperative (command) form in these verses. The words “go out” (*sse’u*) and “go” (*lekhu*) recur several times. Pharaoh repeats the word *gam* (“even”) four times indicating his complete capitulation to Moshe’s position. The fact that Pharaoh had to retract his threat to not see Moshe again is humbling. Pharaoh’s request that Moshe and Aharon should also bless him illustrates Pharaoh’s absolute submission. In sharp contrast to his first words to Moshe, where he claimed he did not know God, he now sees that he is in need of His blessing.

What is surprising is that Moshe does not respond at all to Pharaoh. Pharaoh’s words have no consequence for Moshe, as he did not need Pharaoh’s permission to leave. Moshe and Israel were going whether Pharaoh let him or not. Moshe’s silence in the face of Pharaoh’s unconditional surrender shows that Moshe is not at all dependent on Pharaoh. Moshe’s final denigrating disregard of Pharaoh is the ultimate sign of Moshe’s triumph in the power struggle with Pharaoh.

At the burning bush Moshe answers God’s calling by saying:

Please, my Lord, no man of words am I, not from yesterday, not from the day before, not (even) since you have spoken to your servant, for heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue am I! (4:10; SB)

The precise meaning of Moshe’s excuse has been argued by Torah commentators. Rashbam explains that it means that Moshe was not familiar with the Egyptian language, having been away from Egypt for so many years.² Shadal found Rashbam’s explanation unconvincing, arguing that

Moshe grew to adulthood in the king’s palace and was therefore very familiar with the Egyptian language and would not likely forget it. Shadal instead explains that Moshe was not an orator—gifted with rhetorical abilities. Moshe’s first encounter with Pharaoh, as analyzed above, supports Shadal’s position.

God answers Moshe by saying:

Who placed a mouth in human beings or who (is it that) makes one mute or deaf or open-eyed or blind? Is it not I, YHWH? So now, go! I myself will be there with your mouth and will instruct you as to what you are to speak. (4:11-12; SB)

Moshe’s inability to speak is seen by his weakness in the first encounter with Pharaoh. His subsequent speeches to Pharaoh, culminating in the final two encounters, are

the result of God’s “being with Moshe’s mouth and instructing him what to say.” Moshe, with God’s help, has become an effective speaker, advocate and *nabi* (usually translated “prophet” is better understood as

“spokesman.” See Exodus 7:1). This divinely bestowed ability is used throughout the rest of Moshe’s reign. It is used when Moshe deals with men (Qorah, Aharon, the Israelites) and, ironically, even in his dealings with God Himself.

Rabbi Tawil is the author of Shabbat-Table Talks (Tebah Educational Services, 2014).

“Shadal instead explains that Moshe was not an orator—gifted with rhetorical abilities.”



² He cites Ezekiel 3:4-6 as proof. He also argues against the interpretation that says that Moshe had a speech impediment.

A PLAGUE-FREE LIFE

Rabbi Haim Ovadia

The Exodus is an axis around which most of our awareness as a nation seems to revolve. Egypt is the melting pot, the furnace that turned scattered family members into a nation. It has taught us to value freedom and to cherish the Image of God embedded in every human.

Meeting Shifrah and Puah, simple midwives at the helm of the first civil disobedience, Yocheved and Miriam, the mother and sister who would fight to the bitter end for the life of an innocent newborn, and Pharaoh's daughter who defied her father and brought his nemesis into his palace, we are awestruck, enabled to believe in the ultimate kindness of mankind (or maybe womankind).

We understand that a process was necessary not only for Pharaoh but for his people as well to “Let the People Go,” anticipating future atrocities in which tyrants succeeded in their devilish schemes only because of the help of civilian collaborators. With the lessons learned and the defining qualities of the Exodus, there is little wonder that it features so prominently in our prayers and rituals.

But I still wonder at times why does the Torah go into such detail in describing the plagues? Would it not suffice to mention that God took us out of Egypt, defeating the tyrant and teaching humanity spirituality and mutual respect?

True, it provides a source of endless fun to toddlers and elementary school

teachers who embellish the Biblical narrative with Midrashic help but it seems a little voyeuristic, not unlike rubbernecking in order to witness the crumpled metal and injuries of others.

I would like to suggest, therefore, that the story of the Ten Plagues could be understood as a parable with applicable lessons to all humans at all times. It is the story of redemption on the individual level, manifested by the ability to bring to fruition one's talents and potential.

It is a search for meaning and identity which yields fruits and lets us enjoy a sense of fulfillment. It is the journey between the opposing poles of Pharaoh, whose name is derived from the Hebrew verb for wild, unruly, and between Israel which connotes control, straightforwardness and a sense of purpose.

In our struggle to set meaningful

“... the story of the Ten Plagues could be understood as a parable with applicable lessons to all humans at all times.”

goals and achieve them while maintaining a fine balance between self, society, family and work, we turn to “Self Help” books, gurus, and established religions, but here, before the birth of Judaism at Mount Sinai, the Torah offers a synopsis of

life gone wrong and recommends that we do something about it before it is too late.

The exchange between Moses and Pharaoh is a reminder of how to avoid the plagues which represent the negative attributes and character traits that we might have. Moses' argument is that by thinking of others and not only yourself, by being sensitive, spiritual, and close to the Divine, whose quintessential commandment is “Love the other as you love yourself,” you will be able to autocorrect your course and use your potential to the maximum, thus achieving personal redemption. Pharaoh's path, conversely, is riddled by obstacles and distractions. He pursues false goals and wakes up when it is too late.

The symbolism of the plagues, as archetypes of negative behavior is as follows:

Blood - being temperamental and hot headed. Saying or doing things in the heat of the moment and then regretting them.

Frogs - using words and not actions, being officious and bossy

without extending a hand to help. The vociferous amphibian could also represent destructive gossip and calumny which are so hard to avoid, unless you are engaged in positive altruistic work, having no time or need to see the negative in others.

Lice - letting little things irritate you. While too thick of a skin is not recommended, one must maintain a balanced approach and care only about things which are really important.

Wild beasts - the feeling of being out of control and apologizing later “I don’t know what got into me” to which the listener would mutter politely “who let the dogs out?” Behaving responsibly and considering future repercussions helps us put ourselves, when necessary, on a virtual leash.

Pestilence - having a lethargic,

fatalist attitude to life, as if it has nothing good to offer and all one wants to do is die.

Boils - opening old wounds, dwelling on the past instead of looking forward. We don’t have to forget the past; on the contrary, awareness of past mistakes will help us avoid them later on, but there is no need to make the gloomy swamps of the past our permanent residence.

Hail - the only plague in which an option was given to the Egyptians to save their property by bringing their flocks indoors, which the majority ignored, represents the unwillingness to take actions in face of great challenges, especially the forces of nature, a shortcoming which has become more accentuated in recent years with climate change looming ever more dangerously.

Locust - the swarms of locust

covered the sun and threw the world into destructive darkness as they consumed all sprouting plants. This plague symbolizes pessimism which obfuscates the sun’s rays of hope and in turn suffocates growth and prosperity.

Darkness - the last stages in our lives are compared by Ecclesiastes to darkness. At the end of the road, when we look back and try to take stock of our lives, what will we find? Will it be a life of fulfillment and happiness, imbued with spirituality, generosity and altruism? Or will it be the last plague, that of the Firstborn? The firstborn represents our best qualities, talents and potential. For one to look back and realize that those qualities and talents were wasted is tantamount to the loss of the firstborn.

Moses’ admonition should reverberate for modern humanity as well: do not wait for darkness, for nightfall, to find out that opportunities were missed.

Rather, he says: “*Let My People go!*” Now! Use your talents, fight your plagues, and achieve your personal Exodus, your own redemption, today and every day.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Haim Ovadia is the Rabbi of Magen David Sephardic Congregation, “The Sephardic Synagogue of the Nation’s Capital”- Washington, D.C.



*The Seventh Plague,
painting of the plague of hail and fire
1823 by John Martin*

PESAH MISSRAYIM VS. PESAH DOROT: A MESSAGE FOR OUR TIME

Rabbi Charles Safdieh

The story of *yessiat Missrayim* that occurs in Perashat Bo details a unique account of how the Hebrews celebrated the first Pesah ever. It contrasts vastly with “*Pesah dorot*,” “Pesah for generations,” in which we celebrate our modern day Passover in a myriad of ways (gemara Pesachim 96a). One such difference is the way in which B’ne Yisrael ate the *qorban Pesah* in *חפזון* fashion, (rather quickly). As the pasuq states:

וְכַכֵּה, תֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ מִתְנַיִם חֲגָרִים, נְעָלֵיכֶם בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם וּמַקְלָכֶם בְּיָדְכֶם; וְאָכַלְתֶּם אֹתוֹ בְּחִפְזוֹן, פֶּסַח הוּא לֵה’.

And thus you shall eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste--it is God’s passover. (Exodus 12:11)

The gemara infers from the word *אֹתוֹ* (“it”) that only during that time, *Pesah Missrayim*, was the *qorban Pesah* eaten at a quick pace. Even though halakhah prefers that we eat the *afiqoman*, nowadays *masah*, a substitute for the *qorban Pesah*, before *hasot* (midnight), nevertheless if one were to finish eating the *afiqoman* afterward one would still fulfill his obligation. But in no way do we feel a “rush” to finish the *afiqoman* the way the original Pesah was celebrated by the Hebrews in Egypt. They were forced to eat the *qorban* hastily and be prepared to leave Egypt immediately as HQB”H was smiting every Egyptian firstborn (Berakhot 9b). In essence, even though the Hebrews were forced to eat the *qorban* hastily, knowing that they would be free from the shackles of Egypt, their freedom was not complete until they made their exit; they only had a “taste” of freedom (Hizquni, parashat Bo). *Pesah dorot*, on the other hand, is when we sit down with our families in a calm, peaceful and convivial environment eating and drinking to our heart’s delight without any duress from any oppressors or outside forces that the Hebrews faced in the first Pesah. However, the Haggaddah of Pesah states something interesting. It says:

“B’ne Yisrael realized the power of tefilla and cried to God for salvation.”

בְּכָל דּוֹר וְדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִילוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם.

In every generation, a person must feel as if he himself has left Egypt.

One should aim to place themselves in a state of slavery as if they are being freed from bondage in order to enjoy the miraculous taste of freedom on this holiday (Ritva on the Haggaddah).

The question is obvious: How are we to feel as if we left Egypt when we are not consuming our *qorban Pesah* under pressure? We are not eating the *afiqoman* with “staff in our hands,” nor are we eating it “in haste!” Moreover, we do not even eat a *qorban Pesah* nowadays as there is no *Bet Hamiqdash* but rather we eat *masah* as the substitute during *safun*. Furthermore, some people would tell you that they enjoy Pesah immensely but it is hard for them to relate to the original Pesah and the mental state of the Hebrew slaves at the time, since it was so many years ago that they feel “far-removed” from the whole incident. How then, in our times, should we “feel” as if we left Egypt while we celebrate our Pesah?

A possible answer would be to understand the antithesis of Pesah, namely Tisha’ Be’ab. One would not think to link the happy Hag haPesah with the sad, depressing fast day of Tisha’ Be’ab. In actuality, there are many striking differences and some similarities that can help us understand one of the themes of Pesah.

Tisha’ Be’ab was the day that B’ne Yisrael cried *בְּחִנּוּם* (with no apparent reason). God commanded them that since they cried for no apparent reason, He will ensure that they will continue to cry on this night for generations (Ta’anit 29a). On this night, there are certain elegies that we recite. One of them is called “מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל” “הלילות” Which is exactly the same song that we sing

cheerfully on Pesah except now it sung from the opposite perspective:

מדוע בליל פסח שלחן ערוך בשמחה, עתה בעוונותינו בליל
הזה קול אנחה.

*Why on the night of Pesah the table is happily set, but
now [Tisha' Be'ab] because of our sins, there is a sound
of sighing.*

Odd that this famous song on Pesah is now lamented infamously on Tisha' Be'ab. But it is no coincidence. If we

recall, the day B'ne Yisrael cried, it was the sin of the spies which caused them to weep **בהנם**. Years later, during the days of the Second Temple, there existed animosity between Jews, namely **שנאת חנם** (baseless hatred). This prevailing sentiment in 'Am Yisrael ultimately led to the demise of a Jewish society in the land of Israel and years of diaspora, our current state. B'ne Yisrael brought upon themselves their own destruction and expulsion from the land. By accepting the report of the ten spies to be true without giving a chance for positivity, they displayed a lack of respect and regard for Hashem and His miracles. During the days of the Second Temple when **שנאת חנם** abounded, they showed disregard for their fellow man. In both instances, B'ne Yisrael violated laws regarding **בין אדם למקום** (between man and God) and **בין אדם לחברו** (between man and man). In

Pesah missrayim, B'ne Yisrael took the opposite perspective. They placed their trust in Moshe our leader and HQB"H to save them from their plight, thereby abiding by the laws of **בין אדם למקום** and **בין אדם לחברו**. It really comes

down to our actions as a nation that dictate what our fate will be.

Furthermore, it is also no coincidence that both the first night of Pesah and the night of Tisha' Be'ab will always fall out on the same weeknight (except when Pesah falls out on Friday night in which Tisha' Be'ab is pushed to Sunday, as it happened this past year). Surprisingly, these two specific days are also linked not just by the positive or negative connotations that were mentioned previously, nor by their calendar appearance but also grammatically.

In Hebrew, the land of Egypt is called **מצרים**. The root of the word is **מצר** which means restriction. We have seen this word in other places such as the famous *piyut* of **מעוז צור** sung on Hanukkah where we chant:

לעת תכין מטבח מצר המנבח
- אז אגמר בשיר מזמור חנכת
המזבח.

*When God will slaughter our
enemies that bark [oppress] us,
then we will celebrate in song
and inaugurate the altar.*

Enemies throughout Jewish history have been known to torment our nation in unimaginable ways. The victim feels controlled, repressed and cramped. In the case of the Hebrews in Egypt, they felt tethered to **מצרים**, a feeling and notion they thought they would never escape. This could be a possible reason for the Hebrew word **מצרים** following the logic of its root. The land of Egypt, by definition, means

restriction. Egypt inhibited B'ne Yisrael's progress as a cohesive unit by chaining them down to the land in slave-like fashion. Only when the Hebrews united and turned



*The Jews' Passover, watercolor
circa 1896-1902 by James Tissot*

Continued on page 14

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to Hashem, were they finally answered. As the verse states:

וַיִּאֲנְחוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן-הָעֲבֹדָה, וַיִּזְעֻקוּ; וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעֲתָם אֶל-
הָאֱלֹהִים, מִן-הָעֲבֹדָה. וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים, אֶת-נַאֲקָתָם; וַיִּזְכֹּר
אֱלֹהִים אֶת-בְּרִיתוֹ, אֶת-אֲבֹרָהֶם אֶת-יִצְחָק וְאֶת-יַעֲקֹב.

And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning. And God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.
(Exodus 2:23-24)

B'ne Yisrael realized the power of tefilla and cried to God for salvation. They understood that the misfortunes that overtook them in Egypt were probably because of their turning away from God. They realized that the only way out of Egypt was to return to their roots and remember the special people they came from; Abraham, Yishaq and Yaaqov. Pesah, therefore, is a test of *emunah*. God wants to see who His loyal subjects are. He is always there for us, waiting to free us from our worldly, everyday mundane burdens, He just wants to hear our voice. If we follow in God's footsteps, then we will be able to feel the spirit of Pesah. However, if we submit ourselves to the evil inclination and neglect God's Torah, then we are showing Hashem that we are disregarding His holy name and commandments. When we choose to be free our way, by leaving God out of the picture, then it's as if God is saying that He will make sure we feel sorry for it by bringing upon us the naughty and miserable feeling of Tisha' Be'ab in which we are stripped of our inner beautiful Jewish spirit. It is a day in which we sing

elegies on the floor with rent garments and non-leather shoes as opposed to Passover when we lean like kings on plush pillows, drink four cups of wine, and sing praises to God at all hours of night, while wearing the most elegant of clothing. A day in which we are confined to praying and returning to God by deep introspection, bereft of nutrition, inhibiting our ability to freely learn any topic of

Torah of our liking, and feeling chained and confined to a state of melancholy with a small, bleak chance of hope toward the latter part of the day called *nahamu*. It is therefore no coincidence that Tisha' Be'ab is the culmination of the 21 day period known as *ימים בין המצרים*, which literally means "the days between the borders." We do not want to feel reduced to slaves during these days anymore. These 21 days hamper our spiritual growth by placing restrictions on our Jewish communities as laid down by the halakhah.

"If we want to feel the true meaning of Pesah, we must look deep inside ourselves and appreciate what we have and what God has blessed us with."



Table set for the Passover Seder

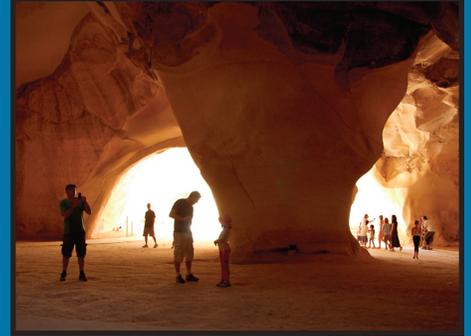
feel the true taste of freedom.

If we want to feel the true meaning of Pesah, we must look deep inside ourselves and appreciate what we have and what God has blessed us with. We must understand that what God does is for the best, always. We certainly do not want to continue fasting on Tisha' Be'ab by feeling stifled as we did in Egypt. The only way to stay on God's path is to have complete trust in Him and keep His *misvot*. By adhering to His Torah, we will undo the shackles of Egypt, we'll really feel as if we left Egypt, and only then will we

Rabbi Safdieh is a teacher, sofer and tutor. He currently teaches at Barkai Yeshivah and is also the coordinator of the youth minyan at Bnei Yitzhak.

YESHIVAT MORESHET YERUSHALAYIM

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‘ESSER MAKKOT

Mr. Morris Arking

The Torah presents the ten plagues as three groups, with each group comprised of three plagues, and the final blow of *makkat b'khorot* (smiting of the first-born) at the end. This structure is apparent from the noticeable pattern in how each plague was introduced. For the first plague in each group (blood, wild animals, and hail), Par'oh was warned privately, early in the morning. The second plague in each set (frogs, animal disease, and locusts) was always introduced with “*bo el Par'oh*” (“Come to Pharaoh”), as it was a public warning at his royal palace. But the third plague in each set (lice, boils, and darkness) came without any warning whatsoever. It seems that the reason for this pattern is that when one is warned at first, it is preferable to warn them privately in order to avoid embarrassing them. If that is not effective, then an official public warning is necessary. At that point, if further action is still needed, another warning is not required. This explains the structure of each set, but why were three sets performed before coming to the final blow?

The Abarbanel points out that at first Par'oh stated that he did not know Hashem and therefore he did not feel that he had any reason to free the Jewish People. Moshe wanted to convince Par'oh of three beliefs. 1) The existence of Hashem. 2) Hashem's involvement with humanity and his desire for their proper conduct and worship. 3) Hashem's ability to perform supernatural miracles especially when rewarding the righteous or punishing the wicked.

A closer examination of the language in the Torah's narrative of the plagues, illustrates that each set of plagues was performed to successfully persuade Par'oh of one of those beliefs. The warning for blood includes “*b'zot teda' ki ani*

Hashem” (“with this you will know that I am G-d”). And by the end of the first set, existence of God was acknowledged when the magicians were not able to replicate the plague of lice and they exclaimed “*essba' Elokim hi*” (“it is the finger of God”).

The warning for the beginning of the second set of plagues (the fourth plague which was wild animals) explained that the purpose is “*l'm'an teda' ki ani Hashem b'qereb ha'aress*”

(“so that you will know that I am Hashem among the land”). Whereas the first set of plagues simply sought to persuade that Hashem exists (“*ki ani Hashem*”), the second set will go further to convince Par'oh that Hashem is involved with humanity and requires their involvement with him (hence

the additional phrase of “*b'qereb ha'aress*”). That goal was realized at the beginning of the second set when Par'oh first began offering the Jewish People some opportunity to serve God.

The third set that began with *barad* (hail) stated that its purpose was making Par'oh aware of “*ki en kamoni b'khol ha'aress*” (“there is no one like Me in the whole land”). This is highlighting Hashem's ability to go beyond the limits of nature especially when dealing with the righteous or the wicked. This plague contained hailstones with fire like the verse described “*v'esh mitlaqahat b'tokh ha'barad*” (“And fire burned inside the hail”). This phenomena defied nature as the fire did not melt the hailstones.

And it was in the beginning of this stage that Par'oh acknowledged the plague as a punishment for his sin, as during the hail he exclaimed for the first time “*hatati ha'pa'am! Hashem ha'ssadiq va'ani v'ami ha'rsha'im*” (“I have sinned this time! Hashem is Just and I and my nation are the wicked ones”).

“... this structure of three sets of three plagues was alluded to by Ribbi Yehudah in his famous acronym of D'Ssa”Kh ‘ADa”Sh B'Aha”B!”



The plague of frogs, coloured etching

It is through these verses that we see Par'oh's progression to a full belief in Hashem. The first set of plagues brought about belief in Hashem's existence. In the second set of plagues he recognized the importance of worshipping Hashem, and in the third stage he admitted to Hashem's power over nature in connection with meting out punishment to the wicked. Since he was not able to translate his belief into action by actually freeing the Jewish People, the final blow of *makkat*

b'khorot was performed to win their liberation from slavery in Egypt. In fact, this structure of three sets of three plagues was alluded to by Ribbi Yehudah in his famous acronym of *D'Ssa"Kh 'ADa"Sh B'Aha"Bi*!

Mr. Arking is community member and regular contributor to Qol Ha-Qahal.



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על רקע זה יש להעריך את איתנותה ויציבותה של ישראל. ב-67 שנות עצמאותנו בנינו מדינה לתפארת - יהודית ודמוקרטית, מתקדמת ומוסרית. אנחנו שולטים בגורלנו ומסוגלים להגן על קיומנו בכוחות עצמנו. הישגינו, בשורה ארוכה של תחומים, משמשים מופת לאנושות ותורמים לרווחתה.

מסע החירות שהחל במצרים - הגיע לירושלים. התקווה התגשמה. חזונות נביאי ישראל בדבר שיבת ציון וקיבוץ הגלויות מתממשים. אדמת הארץ פורחת.

בזכות החיבור לשורשינו, רוח ישראל מתנשאת מעלה. כך, בעזרת השם, יהיה לעולמי עד.

Prime Minister Netanyahu is the leader of the Likud party and current Prime Minister of the State of Israel.

כשכיהנתי כסגן שר בממשלתו של יצחק שמיר צפיתי מקרוב בהתרגשותו העצומה למראה שערי בריה"מ שנפתחו לרווחה. העלייה ההמונית לישראל החלה. התרוממות רוח דומה הוליד בואם של אלפי יהודי אתיופיה, שזכו להתאחד עם המולדת העתיקה שאליה נכספו דורות ארוכים.

לפיד החירות שעמנו נושא בידיו ממשיך להאיר לרבים, אולם יש לזכור כי רוב מדינות תבל עדיין אינן דמוקרטיות ליברליות. החירות, השוויון והצדק טרם הפכו להיות נחלת הכלל. בשנים האחרונות עובר המזרח התיכון טלטלה עצומה. מדינות מתפוררות, גבולות נמחקים ומעשי זוועה המוניים מתבצעים בחפים מפשע. מיעוטים נרדפים באלימות נוראית ותאוות ההרג של האיסלאמיסטים הקיצונים שוברת שיאים של רוע ואכזריות.

איש אינו יודע מתי תסתיים הטרגדיה הבלתי פוסקת, אך בלב מקננת תקווה שיקום מנהיג מוסלמי בעל שיעור קומה מוסרי ויכריז: 'שלח את עמי'. די ללאימות ולדיכוי, הגיע זמנה של החירות.

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מסע חירות ממצרים לירושלים

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu¹

היה לו ברור שהפתרון לשאלת היהודים הוא ריכוזם בארצם. "רעיון זה" - מעיד הרצל עצמו - "הוא ישן-נושן, שנותיו כשנותיה של האומה".

לא בכדי מוצג פסלו של משה באולם בית הנבחרים של הקונגרס האמריקני, שכן הוא חולל תפנית מהותית בתולדות העמים מפאת תרומתו לניתוח כבלי העריצות.

בהקשר זה, לקראת סוף נאומו בקונגרס, שעסק בסכנת הגרעין האיראנית, אמרת:

"סיפורה של ישראל הוא לא רק סיפורו של העם היהודי, אלא סיפורה של הרוח האנושית המסרבת שוב ושוב להיכנע לזוועות ההיסטוריה. מולי באולם זה, צופה על כולנו, היא דמותו של משה. משה הוביל את עמנו מעבדות אל שעריה של הארץ המובטחת, ולפני שעם ישראל נכנס לארץ ישראל משה העניק לנו מסר שחישל אותנו במשך אלפי שנים. אני משאיר אתכם עם המסר שלו היום - 'חזקו ואמצו, אל תיראו ואל תערצו מפניהם'".

אכן, את רוחו של האדם החופשי אי-אפשר לכלוא לנצח. סופה להתנער מחיי פחד, דיכוי אכזרי ורמיסת זכויות. לאחר מלחמת ששת הימים, ביוני 1967, היינו עדים למאבקם העיקש של יהודי ברית המועצות לעלות לישראל ולחיות בה כבני חורין. ססמת המאבק - 'שלה את עמי' (Let My People Go) - היא - איחדה את יהדות העולם. היא

התנוססה בהפגנות מחאה מרשימות נגד השלטון הסובייטי, והגיעה דמוקרטיות רבות לזעוק את זעקתם של מסורבי העלייה שמאחורי 'מסך הברזל'.

לקראת סופו של המשטר בבריה"מ שימשתי שגריר ישראל באו"ם. הייתי עד לסדקים שנבעו במסך הברזל ולתמורות הדרמטיות שחוללה מדיניות הגלסנוסט והפרסטרויקה של מיכאיל גורבצ'וב, במחצית השנייה של שנות ה-80. אסירי ציון כנתן שרנסקי, יולי אדלשטיין ואידה נודל הגיעו ארצה. הקילוח הדק של עולים ממעצמת-העל הסובייטית הקורסת יהפוך במהרה לשיטפון של ממש.

המילים 'שלה את עמי' הן בעלות מוטת כנפיים אדירה. עוצמתן חובקת עולם ומתבלטת ב-3,300 השנים האחרונות כל אימת שקבוצה לאומית או אומה משועבדת מבקשת את חירותה. כבנים לעם ישראל, גאוותנו על כך שבשורת החירות בוקעת מבין דפי התנ"ך - ואין כמו הסיפור המכונן של יציאת מצרים להמחיש זאת.

אומתנו החלה להתגבש בכור הברזל של השעבוד המצרי. מנהיגו, משה ואהרן, התייצבו באומץ - גם אם לא בלי-היסוסים - לפני שליט האימפריה

פרעה ותבעו את שחרור אֶתְיָהֶם. אין זה דבר של מה בכך להתריס כנגד רודן הרומס ברגל גסה את זכויות האדם. אך תחושת הייעוד גברה על הפחד, וראשי העם לא הרפו משליחותם. בסופו של דבר, לאחר עשר המכות שהונחתו על פרעה, הוא ניא את לשלח את בני ישראל מארצו. ברגע זה החל המסע אל הארץ הייעודה.

סבי, הרב נתן מיליקובסקי ז"ל, כתב ב-1925:

"זקן וצעיר, נשים וגברים, יצרו בעם את הרצון לתקווה אחת: לצאת מהגלות, להשתחרר מכבלי העבדות. והנס התחולל - יציאת מצרים. זוהי דוגמה יחידה בהיסטוריה האנושית, שעיקרה - עמים שלא היה בהם הרצון החזק לחופש ועצמאות, לא התקיימו בהיסטוריה האנושית! אבל משפחה אחת, בסך הכול 70 איש, מתוכה קם עם. והעיקר - לא מבחוזן באה ההתעוררות, לא סיבות חיצוניות גרמו לכך, אלא הצמא לחופש. מבפנים, מתוך הנשמה, פרץ זרם של חיים חדשים, שעורר את העם, שהביא את היכולת לצאת ממצרים".

ציינתי שהקריאה 'שלה את עמי' מהדהדת לאורך הדורות. אוליבר קרמוול, המצביא והמדינאי האנגלי הנודע בן המאה ה-17, שאב ממנה השראה. כן עשו נשיאי ארצות הברית ג'ורג' וושינגטון, תומס ג'פרסון ואברהם לינקולן, ובעקבותיהם מרטין לותר קינג, גלסון מנדלה ואחרים.

גם בנימין זאב הרצל, מחולל התנועה הציונית, דמה בעיני רבים למשה רבנו. כמשה, שהבין כי אין תוחלת בהימצאות היהודים בגולה, כך הרצל;

¹ This article was originally published as part of the 929 program of tanakh study: www.929.co.il



Perashat Beshalah

“THEY HAD FAITH IN THE LORD AND HIS SERVANT MOSES”

Professor Nathan Aviezer

The most dramatic event in this week’s reading is undoubtedly the splitting of the Red Sea – one of the most impressive miracles in the entire Torah. The Israelites were caught between the sea and the approaching Egyptian army, and it appeared as if all were lost and hopeless. Then suddenly the Holy One, blessed be He, split the sea, the Israelites crossed safely on dry land, and the entire Egyptian army that had been pursuing them was drowned: “The waters turned back and covered the chariots and the horsemen – Pharaoh’s entire army that followed them into the sea; not one of them remained” (Ex. 14:28).

Amazingly, it was only a few weeks after the splitting of the Red Sea that the sin of the golden calf took place. The Israelites, the very people who had witnessed the splitting of the Red Sea with their own eyes, were the ones who committed the terrible sin of the golden calf. The Torah stresses that the entire people were party to the sin:

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god”...and all the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron...And they exclaimed, “this is your god, O Israel.” (Ex. 32:7-8)

From Revelation to Revelry

How could it be that the people who experienced God’s deliverance in the splitting of the Red Sea turned to idolatry? About the splitting of the Red Sea, the *Mekhilta* comments,

“maidservants beheld at the Sea that which even Isaiah and Ezekiel did not see” (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Tractate *de-Shirah* ch. 3). Nevertheless, despite the revelation to which everyone was party, the impact of the splitting of the Red Sea on the Israelites did not endure more than a couple of weeks. Why was this?

Before answering this question, there is another question which ought to be raised. Why was the Holy One, blessed be He, so angry about the sin of the golden calf? On account of this sin the Holy One, blessed be He, proclaimed He would annihilate

“True faith is acquired through long years of pondering, studying Torah, observing commandments, and improving oneself; it is not the product of momentary elation that comes in the wake of one or another miracle..”

the entire people of Israel: “now, let Me be, ... that I may destroy them” (Ex. 32:10). The Israelites were saved from annihilation only by virtue of Moses’ intense pleading on their behalf, saying, “now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from the record which You have written!” (Ex. 32:32). In the end the Holy

One, blessed be He, accepted Moses’ pleading, but punishment for the sin of the golden calf was not waived. The Holy One, blessed be He, only replaced it with a conditional punishment, hanging over their heads until the day they sin again: “But when I make an accounting, I will bring them to account for their sins” (Ex. 32:34). The next sin was not long in coming. Several months later the Israelites sinned once again, this time in the episode of the spies; one sin brings another in its wake. The sin of the golden calf was compounded by the sin of the spies, and the fate of the Israelites in that generation was sealed.

Why did the Lord pronounce such a harsh sentence – destruction of the entire Israelite people – for the sin of the golden calf? To appreciate the severity of the punishment it

suffices for us to compare the sin of the golden calf to another sin of idolatry, described in Numbers:

The people profaned themselves by whoring with the Moabite women, who invited the people to the sacrifices for their god. The people partook of them and worshiped that god. Thus Israel attached itself to *Baal-Peor*.” (Num. 25:1-2)

This was not only a case of idolatry, but also of partaking in illicit sexual relations and eating forbidden foods. Nevertheless, there is not the slightest hint in the Torah that the Lord intended to wipe out the Israelites. Why was the sin of the golden calf so much more terrible in the eyes of the Lord than the sin of idolatry that the Israelites committed in their involvement with the Moabite women?

The key to the answer lies in the timing of the sin of the golden calf. This event took place immediately after the Israelites had experienced the splitting of the Red Sea, immediately after they had witnessed a series of miracles in the Ten Plagues, and immediately after the revelation at Mount Sinai at which they had been given the Torah. If after all these wondrous acts the Israelites were still so easily drawn to the golden calf (due to a miscalculation of but one day in Moses' schedule), they certainly did not deserve to enter the Land of Israel.

Faith and Miracles

The Torah reveals an extremely important message in the accounts of the splitting of the Red Sea and the golden calf. The prevalent view that miracles bolster faith is fundamentally wrong. The way to true faith is not the short road of wonders and miracles, no matter how impressive they may be. The way to true faith is only the long, arduous road of daily devotion to studying the Torah, to observing its commandments, to deep thinking, and to living in a community of others sharing the same faith. There is no shortcut to faith. The situation of the people having “faith in the Lord and His servant Moses” does not endure at all.

An interesting story illustrates this point. In the twenties and thirties of the previous century there was an English professor at Harvard University by the name of George Kitredge, a great expert of international stature in Shakespeare and his period. For decades Professor Kitredge was outstanding both in his research and in his teaching, legendary in the academic world for his fascinating lectures. One day the president of Harvard University decided to hire an expert to investigate how the academic faculty divides their time between research, teaching, academic committee work, etc. When Kitredge was asked how much time he spends preparing a single lecture, he answered, “a lifetime.” Each and every lecture he gave was the fruit of decades of deep thought and extensive research, and that is what made his lectures so brilliant.

Similarly, in order to attain complete faith in the Holy One, blessed be He, one needs devotion that lasts an entire lifetime. True faith is acquired through long years of pondering, studying Torah, observing commandments, and improving oneself; it is not the product of momentary elation that comes in the wake of one or another miracle, no matter how impressive. The latter sort of fervor comes in a flash but also dissipates in a flash, as Maimonides wrote, “those who have faith because of miracles, their hearts are not true” (*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, ch. 8, *halakah* 1).

The miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea, along with all the other miracles of that period, could not save the Israelites from the most base of sins, which led to the entire adult population perishing in the wilderness. Indeed, even after years of faith one can have failings, as in the sin of worshipping *Baal-Peor*. Nevertheless that generation was deemed worthy by the Holy One, blessed be He, of entering the land of Israel, to establish there the religious tradition of the Torah that continues to this very day.

Professor Aviezer is the former Chairman of the Physics Department of at Bar Ilan University and the author of several books.

The SCA would like to thank **PROFESSOR AVIEZER** for making himself available to the community on his recent visit. His presentations at Magen David Yeshivah, Sephardic Rabbinical College, Flatbush High School, Barkai Yeshivah and Congregation Beth Torah were very well received and appreciated. May it be the first of many more visits!



Sephardic Pizmonim Project

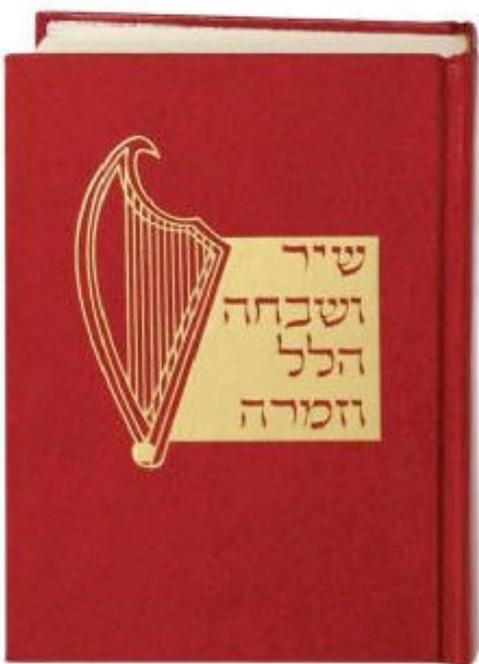
MAQAM OF THE WEEK

www.pizmonim.com

For **Shabbat Bo** (Exodus 10:1- 13:16), the third perasha of Sefer Shemot, the morning prayers are conducted in Maqam SIGAH (Persian: “third”) according to SUHV (Red Pizmonim Book) and at least 9 other sources. It is written that while the Egyptians were afflicted with the plague of darkness, the Israelites had “light” in all their dwellings. Some commentators say that this was actually the light of the Torah. SIGAH relates to the Torah, because it is the maqam applied for the melody of chanting the Torah. Dissenting maqam opinions include: RAST, NAHWAND, BAYAT, or RAHAWI-NAWAH (similar to Shabbat Hagadol). PIZMON SEFER TORAH: *Mi Yemallel* (page 361-II) describes the story of the Ten Plagues.

On **Shabbat Beshalah** (Exodus 13:17- 17:16), we read the “Song of the Sea (Shirat Hayam).” According to ALL Syrian sources, Maqam AJAM, commonly referred to as “the happy maqam,” is most appropriate to express our joy. As far as the word “Ajam,” which is Arabic for “foreigner,” the Israelite people were always treated as “foreigners” when living in Egypt. HAZZANUT: Semehim: *Yah El Gadol VeNe’edar* (page 397) in honor of Tu Bishbat. PIZMON SEFER TORAH: *Rahum Atah* (page 216-II).

Sephardic Pizmonim Project, www.pizmonim.com



Sefer Shir Ushbaha Hallel Ve'Zimrah, "The Red Book"

שצו	זומרה	מקאם צבא	הלל	397
יבנה בית הבחירה.	יבנה בית הבחירה.		האל לי לעזרה.	
יקריבו קרבן כל-יום:	יקריבו קרבן כל-יום:		ומקום תפארה.	
יחזק עם ישראל.	יחזק עם ישראל.		תזק רם מחולל.	
ברוך אדני יום יום:	ברוך אדני יום יום:		או נאמר כהלל.	
חם				
תפא				
לט"ו בשבט				
יא מרה אפרשי אל דאר			יה אל גדול ונאדר.	סימן יעקב
מלך במרומים דר.			לבוש תפארת הדר.	
מתוך עמו לא נעדר:			עשה עולם בשישי.	
ונח בשבת קדשי.			ובו מתענג נפשי.	
בלי עצב ובלי מר:			קול רנה וקול שמחה.	
ביום שבת מנוחה.			יהיה לנו סליחה.	
וקל-עון יקפר:			ביום שבת תתקדש.	
דבורה יהיה קדש.			למקטרג תגרש.	
פיהו מאתמול סגר:			ברא שבת לדורות.	
נחת רוח לבריות.			דגים ומיני פירות.	
ויזן המשמר:			רצה נא במנוחתי.	
ביום זה הוא שמחתי.			בו תוספת נשמתי.	
תאיר כאור השחר:				

Sefer Shir Ushbaha Hallel Ve'Zimrah, "The Red Book" Yah El Gadol VeNe'edar , page 397



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Sephardic History

NEVER FORGET OUR NOBLE HERITAGE

NUNCA OLVIDES MUESTRA HISTORIA DESTINGUIDA

נונכה אולבידיס מואיסטרה איסטוריה דיסטינגיידה

Mr. Sheldon N. Goldman

Chapter 14- Fall of the Omayyads

Trade and especially “world trade” was particularly lucrative. Jews did business all around the Mediterranean Sea as well as Europe and Asia. One of the famous Jewish firms participating in this trade was the Radhanites. Their success came from the fact that they did business with their co-religionists all over the world. They were also multi-lingual, being able to communicate in Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, Persian, Greek, French, Spanish and Slavic. While Cordova was the leader in these areas, it was soon followed by the growth of Sevilla, Granada, Malaga and Lucena. These were all leading urban and commercial centers with strong participation by Jews. The Omayyads were falling apart. This had important consequences for the Jews of Muslim Spain. Eliyahu Ashtor describes this well in his book:

The temporary disintegration of the Spanish-Muslim kingdom at the end of the ninth century and the confusion into which the government sank for a full generation held some important consequences for the Jewish community. During the reign of the first Omayyads the Jewish community increased, in consequence of the Jewish immigration that streamed into Spain from North Africa and the East. Large Jewish communities came into existence in important cities, especially in southern Spain. When the Omayyad kingdom disintegrated and was followed by small principalities, their chief cities, where the rulers lived, became the focal

points of economic and cultural life.¹

Up until the time Abd ar-Rahman III (912-961) came to power in 912 the Omayyad kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula was in a state of disintegration. Miniscule princedoms sprung up weakening the kingdom. The fighting between the princes weakened the government even more. This chaos and disintegration had a deleterious effect on the Jewish community as well. The disintegration ended when Abd ar-Rahman III reunited Muslim Spain.

“Large Jewish communities came into existence in important cities, especially in southern Spain.”

Abd ar-Rahman III was the son of Abdallah who ruled from 888 to 912. Abd ar-Rahman was born in 891. He succeeded his father as “emir.” He declared himself “Caliph” or supreme religious ruler of Islam in 929. He then officially took the title “Caliph” and he assumed the

surname of “an-Nasir li-din Allah,” which means “he who gives victory to Allah’s creed.” In 929 Abd ar-Rahman III embarked on an active foreign policy and launched wars with the Christians in the north. Within his kingdom he maintained peace, prosperity and extensive trade with the other Mediterranean countries. In 936 he erected a new capital city near Cordova, in the town of Madinat az-Zahra. It was believed that he built this city to house his beautiful concubine Zahra. Madinat az-Zahra became a story-book town made up of talented people of all faiths and from all parts of Spain. There were jugglers, storytellers and all forms of entertainment. There were poets, writers and musicians. There were craftsmen,

¹ Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Muslim Spain* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society 1973).

artisans, jewelers and gardeners. Abd ar-Rahman III surrounded himself with very talented people including many Jews.

Abd ar-Rahman III was a hands-on king. At first he had a prime minister (*hajib*) Musa b. Hudair who died in 932 and was not replaced. Most of Abd ar-Rahman III's royal court was from noble Arab families, but some were Berbers. He also had courtiers who were not of Spanish descent. Some were former "slaves." It was the custom in the past to bring in "slaves" to work in the royal court. The "slaves" who were most influential were the Slavs of Eastern Europe. There were other non-Muslims who

achieved prominence in Abd ar-Rahman III's court. Abd ar-Rahman III was famous for his "tolerance" on the issue of "faith." He practiced his religion but was not a zealot.

Sheldon N. Goldman is a retired Chemical Engineer who is a member of Congregations Beth Torah and Kol Israel. From 1978 through 1992 he was the Editor of the Beth Torah Bulletin. He was Secretary of Beth Torah from 1980 through 1995 and is still the Editor of the Beth Torah Calendar.



Málaga: View of Alcazaba



Sephardic Rabbis

RABBI HAYIM CARIGAL (1732-1777) AND YALE UNIVERSITY

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

The first Jews who came to America in colonial times, were Sephardic Jews who had escaped from Recife, Brazil, where they were persecuted by the Portuguese Inquisition. In September 1654 a group of about 25 Jews arrived as refugees at the port of New York, which was then called New Amsterdam. Over time other communities were formed in the American colonies.

The most important of these communities was established in the city of Newport, Rhode Island.

The Newport Jewish community flourished especially in the eighteenth century, under the leadership of Aaron

“The Newport Jewish community flourished especially in the eighteenth century...”

Lopez. Aaron Lopez arrived in Newport in 1752. He was originally from Lisbon, Portugal. There, he was known as Don Duarte Lopez. For 150 years his ancestors had lived in Portugal as “Marranos”, i.e., pretending that they were Catholics, to escape the Inquisition, which forbade the practice of Judaism. Aaron Lopez became an important and very successful businessman. At one point he had his own fleet of 80 merchant ships.

Rabbi Hayim Rafael Carigal (or Karigal) was born in 1732 in the former Sephardic Kehilá of Hebron. He studied at the Yeshiba of Hebron, founded and maintained by Abraham Israel Pereira, from Amsterdam. Rabbi Carigal was a prodigious student and was ordained a rabbi at the age of 17. Although it was the spiritual center of

the Jews throughout the world, the Jewish community of Israel, was very poor. It needed the ongoing support from the Jews of the diaspora. Rabbi Carigal was appointed by his colleagues to be a “Shaliach deRabanan” a representative



Rabbi Hayim Carigal

of the Rabbis, to raise funds to help the Yehudim of Israel. In those days, the rabbis assigned to these missions were chosen based on their erudition. The wisest men were elected for the mission because it was expected of them not only to raise funds for Israel, but also to teach Torah

to the Jews of the diaspora.

Rabbi Carigal reached Newport, Rhode Island, in 1773. He was welcomed and hosted by Mr. Aaron Lopez, who said that Rabbi Carigal was the most prominent Jewish scholar who had ever reached the Americas. Ezra Stiles was a Protestant Minister and friend of Aaron Lopez. Stiles fervently loved and admired all matters related to Judaism, and especially the Hebrew language. He said that without a solid knowledge of Hebrew language, it was impossible to understand the Bible. When Stiles learned



Touro Synagogue, Exterior



Touro Synagogue, Interior

of the arrival of Rabbi Carigal to Newport, he came to the famous “Touro” Synagogue to hear the sermon of Rabbi Carigal. According to Stiles’ memoirs, it was on the day of

Shabuot, May 28, 1773. Rabbi Carigal, as was the custom in the Sephardic communities, delivered his sermon in Spanish, with a few words in Hebrew. Stiles was fascinated with the personality and erudition of Rabbi Carigal and asked to meet with him. Ezra Stiles and Rabbi Carigal met 28 times. Stiles became one of the greatest admirers of Rabbi Carigal. He asked the rabbi many questions about the Jewish religion and the Hebrew language, and carefully recorded all the answers he received. Before leaving Newport, Stiles commissioned a portrait of Rabbi Carigal.

In 1778 Ezra Stiles was appointed as the 7th president of Yale University. Stiles established that all freshman students take a Hebrew language course. While this course is no longer mandatory, much remains in Yale of what



Yale University Seal

Rabbi Carigal taught Ezra Stiles. Among other things, the seal of Yale University, reads the Hebrew words URIM VETUMIM.

Rabbi Bitton is the rabbi of Ohel David U'shlomo.

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