



ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

DEVOTION TO GOD

RABBI CHAIM LANNER

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ETAN WINOGRAD ('18)

NETANYA MEYEROWITZ ('17)

LANA ROSENTHAL ('17)

ADAM SHALLOWAY ('17)

I imagine how frustrating it must have been working for Pharaoh as the ten plagues were raining down on Egypt. Blood, frogs, vermin, beasts, cattle disease...you

name it. Moshe is single-handedly decimating Egypt and its entire economy and agricultural prowess while Pharaoh simply opts to look the other way. It's like being on the Titanic as it's precipitously drowning and being told that no one may escape. At the outset of the parsha, Pharaoh's servants plead with him to let the Jews go:

הֲטָרָם תִּדַע כִּי אֲבָדָה מִצְרַיִם

"Before long, Pharaoh, Mitzrayim as you know it will be lost forever."

(Shmot 10:7)

How was Pharaoh able to ignore that which was keeping everyone else up at night? At precisely midnight on the night of the 15th of Nissan, God strikes and kills every single first-born in the land of Egypt.

וַיִּקָּם פְּרֹעֹה..אֵין שָׁם מֵת

"And Pharaoh got up...for there was no house in which no one was dead."

(Shmot 12:30)

Pharaoh arose in the middle of the night to the pervasive screams of his people. Rashi, almost comically, injects one extra, seemingly superfluous, word into the verse: ממתתו. Pharaoh arose that night from his bed. With all due respect to Rashi, who was quite successful at his job, what has he added to the conversation? What did Rashi feel was missing that he was trying to make sure we noticed?

The Kotzker Rebbe suggests the following: Pharaoh, explains Rashi through his depiction of Pharaoh lifting his head off his pillow, was sound asleep while God was

smiting every firstborn child in Egypt. Nine out of nine times Moshe had correctly predicted precisely what God was going to do. And now Moshe had told Pharaoh that every first-born in Egypt was going to die tonight. Pharaoh had a firstborn child. Pharaoh himself was a firstborn child. And yet, courageously, defiantly, and comfortably, Pharaoh went to bed that night, lay down on his pillow, and fell fast asleep. Pharaoh had entirely rejected the God of the Jews. He had his own sets of gods that he dutifully worshipped, and he was exclusively loyal and devoted to his gods. There wasn't a plague in the world that Moshe could have sent his way that would have caused him, for even one moment, to doubt the capabilities and strength of his invincible and impregnable gods. Pharaoh had more faith and trust in his gods, with a lower case "g" than, arguably, many Jews have in ours with a capital "G". Pharaoh may have been worshipping a false god, but he worshipped it truthfully. We, thankfully have the privilege of worshipping the true God. Do we worship Him truthfully?

A CALL FOR TESHUVA

ETAN WINOGRAD ('18)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, THE EGYPTIANS ARE INFLICTED WITH THE LAST THREE PLAGUES of locusts, darkness, and death of the first-born. Moshe then instructs the Jews regarding what to do at the Seder and for the Korban Pesach. After the final plague, Pharaoh demands that the Jewish people leave Egypt.

The opening pasuk in this week's parsha reads as follows: "and Hashem said to Moshe, 'come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants in order to place my wonders in his midst'" (10:1). Hashem is giving a reason for Moshe to go to Pharaoh and warn him about the next plague, but shouldn't this be a reason not to go? If Pharaoh's heart was hardened, why should Moshe go warn him? He won't listen!

The Sforno explains the seemingly strange request. He says that this is exactly what Hashem wanted

Moshe to know. Hashem was informing Moshe that Pharaoh would not listen to his warning about the upcoming plague, but that there was still a valuable reason to warn him. The reason Hashem had Moshe warn Pharaoh was not for Pharaoh to listen and let the Jewish people go, but that maybe others will heed the warning and repent. In addition, the warning would show Bnei Yisrael the strength of Hashem, due to the wondrous plagues he promptly performed, in spite of Pharaoh's stubbornness.

PUTTING FORTH EFFORT

NETANYA MEYEROWITZ ('17)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, PARSHAT BO, THE JEWS ARE taught the halachot of the Korban Pesach, the Pesach offering. Four days before offering the Korban Peach, the head of each household would select an animal he intended to offer. For four days following this animal's selection, the head of the household would examine the animal for any blemishes or imperfections that would prevent that animal from being able to be sacrificed.

However, isn't it a little premature to examine the animal four days before it has to be sacrificed? Why not wait to meticulously examine the animal the day before the sacrificing, or even the day of?

This halacha helps illuminate the characteristics that Hashem wants of the Jewish people; He wants us to examine the animal extremely carefully to show Him that His mitzvot are precious to us. It is necessary to show Him that we believe each mitzvah is very important to us, even if we may not personally think it is an important mitzvah.

This portrayal of how one should act in order to show that something is of importance to him or her can be understood in a very basic way; if one has a major exam that is coming up in a week, it is not smart to merely study the night before the exam, as preparing the night before will probably not lead to success. Studying the night before the exam also indicates to the teacher giving the exam that that particular sub-

ject is not very important to the student, or the student would have tried harder.

Therefore, by stating the seemingly strange laws of the Korban Pesach, Hashem is teaching us that in order to have a strong connection and relationship to Him, we have to put in the effort and show Him that we are prepared to follow His laws. Similar to the example of the student preparing for his/her exam, preparing for and acting on Hashem's mitzvot in the correct way will ultimately benefit us and indicate that we value His mitzvot.

THE IMPORTANCE OF QUESTIONS

LANA ROSENTHAL ('17)

JUDAISM IS SOMETIMES CRITICIZED AS BEING A RELIGION REQUIRING UNWAVERING OBEDIENCE: the Torah provides laws that we are obligated to follow, sometimes for no more apparent reason than "God said so." The beginning of our national relationship with God is discussed in this week's parsha. The parsha details the final three plagues, the bringing and eating of the korban Pesach, the first mitzvah given to Bnei Yisrael, their preparations to leave Egypt, and Hashem's commandment to commemorate these events every year on Pesach. Buried in the description of these momentous events that shaped our history as the Jewish people are three pesukim:

1. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians.'" (12:26-27)
2. In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (13:14)
3. On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' (13:8)

These verses are three of the four (the fourth being "In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand" (Deut. 6:20-21).) that we use to depict the *arba banim*, whom we discuss on Pesach.

Each of these four boys asks a different question (or in the case of the she'eino yode'a lishol, who does not know how to ask, no question at all) about our history and our nationhood. The questions and answers spelled out in the Torah correspond to each of the boys, the chacham, rasha, tam, and she'eino yode'a lishol.

The *arba banim* tie into a greater theme of Pesach: questioning. Almost everything we do on Pesach is intended to encourage the children at the seder to ask questions, to involve them in the story and to pass on our history and our triumph. In fact, some rabbis hold that a person can only fulfill his obligation of telling the story of Pesach through asking and answering questions.

Really, the significance of the *arba banim* is not limited to Pesach. In Judaism, we are constantly encouraged to question, to ask. Some of our greatest role models in Tanach, including Avraham, Moshe, and Yirmiyahu, questioned nature and justice and the order of the world. The gemara is essentially a compilation of questions, answers, refutations, and more questions. We pride ourselves on our intelligence and our analytical skills, which allow us to question, so much so that we ask Hashem for "knowledge, understanding, and discernment" in the first "bakasha" bracha of the Shemoneh Esrei.

Judaism's emphasis on questioning proves that it is not simply a religion based on obedience. In fact, Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes that there is no biblical Hebrew word meaning "to obey." Questioning is essential not just on Pesach but it is also a part of the essence of what it means to be a Jew.



PHARAOH'S ADDICTION

ADAM SHALLOWAY ('17)

THE TORAH IS GOD'S HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE FROM the inception of the people with Avraham all the way to the Jewish people entering the land of Israel. But the Torah is not only a historical narration, the historical accounts in the Torah are meant to teach the Children of Israel valuable lessons.

In Parshat Bo, Moshe returns to Pharaoh to plead for the release of the Jewish people, and he is refused. As we all know, after each refusal came a plague which changed Pharaoh's mind, but just after the plague ended Pharaoh went against his word and would not let the people go. This was repeated ten times! Why did Pharaoh continue to do this?

Pharaoh could be compared to an alcoholic. As a result of their alcoholism, people often are in dangerous situations, sometimes near death. They then swear off alcohol only to return to it weeks or sometimes days later.

The alcoholic's friends and family tell him about how dangerous alcohol is for him and the horrible consequences that can come of it but he continues to drink. What makes it so hard for people to learn from their mistakes?

Humans tend to not want to change their lifestyles. The alcoholic enjoys the sensation he gets from drinking and doesn't want to lose it. Pharaoh did not want to admit that he was wrong. This self-centered feeling prevented him from learning even after a painful experience.

Just like Pharaoh, our self-centered nature can get the better of us and cause us to become oblivious to our misactions and mistakes. What solution can be found to help us overcome this obstacle? Having a mentor, someone we trust and feel comfortable receiving criticism from, can allow us to see more clearly and to learn from our mistakes.

B'ezrat Hashem, we can all overcome our self-centered natures and become better people!



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