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Weekly Parsha

Acharey Mot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"You shall not lie with a man as one lies with a woman, it is an abomination." (VaYikra 18:22)

This week's parasha outlines the Torah's prohibition against homosexuality. It is clear from articles that have appeared recently in the local Jewish press that there is a need for clarification of the Torah's

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RAMBAN: WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In preparation for Passover, my close friend Howard and I studied a Ramban on Exodus, 13:16. Although midstream through this particular commentary, Ramban says he will "Now tell us a rule in the reasons of the commands", he offers a great deal more that I wish to share. I feel his words addressing the reasons behind certain plagues will enhance our appreciation for the purpose of Passover in general.

Ramban commences with a brief history of three errors m a n

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Maimonides on the Haggadah

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Student's notes from lecture on 4/19/05

Rabbi Chait commenced citing the Ran: the Ran states that the correct manner of reading the Haggadah is that a "reader" recites it, while all others listen. The implication is that all present fulfill their obligation to 'read' the Haggadah, through the halachik mechanism of "Shomaya K'Oneh", "One who listens is as one who answers (recited)."

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EATING CHAMETZ ON PASSOVER CARRIES THE MOST SEVERE PUNISHMENT OF LOSING ONE'S SOUL. DON'T FORFEIT ETERNAL LIFE, JUST TO TEMPORARILY SATISFY AN URGE YOU CAN CONTROL. READ "CHAMETZ & MATZA" IN THIS ISSUE. UNDERSTAND REALITY. READ "THE MEANING OF LIFE". REALIZE YOU ARE CREATED. ACCEPT GOD'S AUTHORITY.

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In his Mishneh Torah, “Laws of Chametz and Matza” 7:4, Maimonides states, “And these matters are all called Haggadah.” The question is; to what does he refer - what is subsumed under “these matters”? Maimonides had already stated numerous ideas from the beginning of this chapter. Is he referring to all that he stated, or a smaller portion?

Rabbi Chait first stated that “these matters” (are Haggadah) refers only to his fourth and fifth laws in this chapter, and not to anything mentioned earlier. Let us review Maimonides’ laws:

Law 1: Maimonides records the obligation to transmit the miracles to our sons, when we must recite, and that no one is exempt regardless of age. Law 2: He continues to discuss ‘how’ we must relate the information, based on our sons’ understanding. Law 3: Maimonides discusses the obligation to act in a manner that will evoke interest and questions from the child. A “question” format is required, and questions are so vital, that were someone alone, he must verbally ask himself questions.

But in law 4, Maimonides describes the obligation that one must commence with the degraded state of the Jews, and conclude with our elevated status. Maimonides gives examples: we were first idolaters in Abraham’s day, but God eventually drew us close to His worship, teaching us his Unity, that he alone is the exclusive Creator. (One must say, “God brought us to the correct idea of God’s oneness”. Starting with our degraded state and concluding with our ‘elevated status’ refers to our realization of the ultimate truth: God is One.) He continues that we must also describe our Egyptian bondage under Pharaoh, and our freedom delivered by God’s miracles and wonders, provided that one explains the entire section commencing with Laban’s desire to annihilate Jacob and the tribes. In law 5, Maimonides discusses the obligation to discuss the Paschal Lamb, Matza, and Bitter Herbs, and their significances, as essential to fulfilling the command retelling the Exodus (Haggadah). He concludes as we mentioned at the outset, “And these matters are all called Haggadah.” So what is it to which Maimonides refers when he makes this conclusion, “And these matters are all called Haggadah”? What matters?

Two Forms of Haggadah

Rabbi Chait suggested that there are two forms of Haggadah. There is an informal retelling, and a formal retelling. This latter, formal retelling of the Exodus is what Maimonides refers to as “Haggadah.” The first 3 laws describe an informal guideline as to what “elements” must be incorporated, however, there is no set format. We simply must insure that the miracles are discussed, and done so on a level where our sons may comprehend. But in laws 4 and 5, Maimonides clearly describes texts, which must be read. And it is only in regards to a text, that the concept of listening and fulfilling makes sense. This complies with the Ran, that one reads for all others present. If one merely retells the story in his own words, he lacks in a complete retell of the Exodus. This is called an “Incomplete Mitzvah”. Therefore, one must also refer to texts to fulfill his “formal retell” of the Exodus. Thus, only in a formalized text may one achieve “listening is as if reciting”. This is because there is a discreet and precise “entity” - a formal text - there is a “prescribed vehicle” of fulfillment. But regarding an informal retelling of the Exodus, where one uses his own words, the concept of “listening is as if reciting”, or “Shomaya K’Oneh” cannot apply. For in this case, there is no universal “entity” of text prescribed by the Torah to fulfill one’s obligation. By definition, a subjective recital cannot function universally: that which is subjective is not universal.

This idea of a formal text, expresses the philosophy of the Torah; it is not a loose, subjective system, but a system that is well formulated with precision. A fixed text comprises the retelling of the Exodus for this reason.

What are the ingredients in the formal text?

It includes the following: 1) commencing with degradation and conclusion with praise; 2) explaining from Laban’s attempt to annihilate us; and 3) Mitzvah’s of the night, i.e., Paschal lamb, Matza and Bitter Herbs.

There are two forms of “commencing with degradation and conclusion with praise”: A) discussion of the elements, and B) studying at text. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik said that the very study of the commands is found in the Haggadah, as they contribute to the retelling of the Exodus. The command of retelling, itself, has its nature tied to the ‘reasons’ of the command. Thus, the laws of retelling actually form part of the command.

Why must we commence with our degradation? It is because if it is omitted, our retelling lacks in praise for God. The contrast created by discussing man’s lowly nature unveils

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Passover

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greater praise, as God is that much more praiseworthy. This is the first “commencing with degradation and conclusion with praise”. However, we must note that we cannot praise God, that is a foolish idea, as man has no concept of God. This is why our praise surrounds “our” change in status, and not God.

The Mah Nishtanah

Rabbi Chait now asked on Maimonides’ formulation in law 3: “And it is required that one make (behavioral) changes in this night, in order that sons may see, and ask, and say, ‘why is this night different than all other nights?’” Rabbi Chait asked why Maimonides added the phrase “and say”. Isn’t it sufficient that Maimonides writes, “and ask”? Why does Maimonides add the phrase “and ask, and say”? Additionally, if the child “says” the Mah Nishtanah, why must the reader recite it as well?

Rabbi Chait said that the night must commence with an idea: “this night is different”. Now, if there were a fixed answer, then one may simply state it. But here, there is no fixed answer; it is an “infinite” answer. Some questions have a single answer...but not so here. Here, the question about the difference of this night opens new worlds of answers of how different Passover is. The child must reach the point that he ‘says’... “How different is this night?!” This is not a question, but an exclamation. It is as if a child attends a circus for the first time, and says, “How great is this?!” The child is overawed. Here too during our retelling of the Exodus, the miracles, and God’s mercy in elevating us from idolatry and slavery to true monotheism and freedom, the child senses there is something different on Passover, something so grand that the child realizes it is incomparable. “Mah Nishtanah!”, “How Different?!” Similarly, Jacob said the word “mah”: “Mah norah hamakome hazeh”, “How great is this place?!” when he awoke from the famous dream of the ladder and the angels. This must be the opening statement of the Haggadah – both the informal and formal retelling. This explains why the reader also states “Mah Nishtanah”...as he too is about to enter the infinite answer of how different this night is.

A child commences life with an attachment to pleasure. What we desire in relation to the Haggadah is to attract and allow expression of the child’s pleasure seeking nature – his pleasure should find expression and increase in the Haggadah. We desire this “What a difference” response. In general, we must not dissuade a child from enjoying pleasures, as this will retard his ability to experience pleasure in connection with Torah. ■

Students

Yosef’s Column

YOSEF ROTH



RETELLING THE Haggadah

One of the mitzvos on the Seder night is when we praise God; we begin with our disgraceful situations and end with our praiseworthy situations. There is a disagreement among the Rabbis as to what these situations are. According to Rav, we begin by telling that our forefathers in the time of Terach, Abraham’s father, were idol worshippers and end by saying that now God has brought us close to him, taught us the true ideas, and distinguished us from the rest of the nations. Shmuel says that we begin by saying that our forefathers were slaves in Egypt and all the evils that happened to us there, and we end by telling how God freed us with all the wondrous miracles. In our Haggadahs we do both.

I believe it is possible to explain the argument between Rav and Shmuel as follows: According to Rav, the essential praise we give to God Pesach night is the recognition of our ‘spiritual’ freedom. But according to Shmuel, it’s the recognition of our ‘physical’ freedom. ■

The JewishTimes is happy to announce a new column, “Yosef’s Column”, delivered by our young friend Yosef Roth. He invites other young students to contribute your Divrei Torah. Email your Torah to Yosef here: yosef@mesora.org

This stela (monument) bears the Egyptian Pharaoh's record of the Jews dated precisely at the time of our bondage and Exodus

the Merneptah Stela

“Pharaoh Merneptah of Egypt makes the first extra-biblical reference to a people called Israel. In an inscription popularly called the “Israel stela” dating from 1207 B.C.E., Merneptah claims military victory over Ashkelon, Gezer, Yinoam, and Israel. The symbols following Ashkelon, Gezer and Yinoam indicate that they were city-states. The symbol following Israel, however, is one used to describe a more nomadic people. Thus, through this artifact, an Egyptian scribe identifies Israel as less politically established in the land – an identification that reflects the description of Israel in the first book of Judges.

Moreover, the description of contact between the Egyptians and Israelites is dated within 100 hundred years of the Exodus from Egypt.”

That was quoted from an online source. But as Jews – students of reality – the Torah’s proof of our history, the Ten Plagues and Sinai, are undeniable. We need no corroboration. Reason is sufficient. However, now, with this stela, Torah is also proved externally.



perspective on this weighty issue.

Some introductory comments are required. It is not the purpose of this analysis to suggest the any stance regarding gay marriage in the secular society of the United States. In other words, it is possible for a person to oppose homosexuality in the strongest terms – based on Torah doctrine – and yet not translate these sentiments into support for legislation banning gay marriage. One's position regarding the issue of gay marriage in the U.S. must be based not only on one's views regarding homosexuality but also on one's perspective regarding the role of government in regulating such issues. One may oppose homosexual behavior based on essentially religious grounds yet, posit that it is not the role of the government to legislate against such unions.

Let us consider a similar issue. I am a committed Jew. I believe that a person who participates in paganism commits a serious sin. This does not mean that I would support government legislations banning such practices. Judaism and the Jewish people have prospered in the United States specifically because of the absence of any state religion and the well established legal protections of freedom of religion. So, despite my opposition to paganism, I would oppose any serious erosion of these protections. Similarly, one's opposition may or may not translate into support for legislation banning gay marriage. However, I am not suggesting that it is inappropriate for a person opposed to gay marriage to support legislative initiatives in this area. I am merely pointing out that one's religious perspective may or may not dictate one's political stance. This is an independent issue that deserves and requires a separate discussion.

This discussion will deal with two issues. First, to what extent does the Torah oppose homosexuality? How serious a sin is this behavior? Many will feel that the answer to this question is obvious. However, a recent article demonstrated some confusion regarding this issue. Second, is the Torah's opposition reasonable and just?

The argument was made in a recent article that the Torah's does not express an intense opposition to homosexuality. The author argued that there are few references in the Torah to any prohibition against homosexual practices. Therefore, apparently, the Torah does not feel that the behavior represents a serious sin.

The premise of the author's argument is that we can gage the degree to which the Torah opposes a behavior or encourages a behavior or attitude based on the extensiveness of the Torah treatment of the material. This is clearly a flawed premise and a few examples will illustrate this point. Everyone would agree that Judaism is strongly associated with monotheism and the monotheism

is one of the most important tenets of the Torah. In the Torah, monotheism does not merely mean conviction in one G-d. It also includes conviction in the unity of the G-d. The Torah teaches us the Hashem is a unity – He is one. He does not have parts, qualities or attributes – in the typical sense. The principle of Hashem's unity is fundamental to Judaism. Maimonides includes as second in his list of the thirteen most fundamental elements of the Torah.[1] Yet, there is little explicit reference to Hashem's unity in the Torah. If one were, to judge the significance of the principle of Hashem's unity based upon the number of verses in the Torah that explicitly instruct us in this conviction, one would erroneously conclude that Hashem's unity is an insignificant issue.

“And it shall be for you as a permanent law. In the seventh month on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves. And you shall not perform any work – not the native or the convert who dwells among you.” (VaYikra 17:29)

This week's parasha discusses the service in the Bait HaMikdash on Yom Kippur. The service is described in detail. However, the requirements to fast on Yom Kippur and observe the other laws of the day are only mentioned briefly. Again, if we assess the significance of Yom Kippur based upon the number of passages that describe the manner in which it is observed, we would conclude that the fasting on this day and the other elements of its observance are insignificant. Yet, this is clearly not the case and Yom Kippur is one of the most sacred days of the calendar.

In short, although it is true that the various mitzvot and expectations are discussed by the Torah to varying degrees, it does not follow that this phenomenon can be used to gage degree of significance. In fact, if one were to consistently apply this thesis – that the degree to which an issue is discussed indicates the Torah's attitude – the religion that would emerge would be very different from anyone's understanding of Judaism.

“A man who lies with a man as one lies with a woman, they have both done an abomination. They shall be put to death; their blood is upon themselves.” (VaYikra 20:13)

This does not mean that there is no method for determining the relative significance of a commandment. Maimonides suggests a simple, common sense method for evaluating the relative severity of various transgressions. He suggests that the severity of transgressing a negative command is indicated by the consequence. In other words, the more severe the consequence, the more severe the violation. The most serious transgressions are punished by one of the forms of execution. Less severe violations are punished with less severe consequences – for example, lashes.[2] The logic

of Maimonides' thesis is so compelling and self-evident, it is virtually unassailable.

What does Maimonides' thesis tell us regarding the severity of the Torah's prohibition against homosexuality? Homosexual relations are punished with death. This clearly indicates that the Torah is unequivocal in its attitude regarding homosexuality and regards it as a severe transgression.

Furthermore, in this week's parasha the Torah refers to homosexual behavior as toevah. There is some difference of opinion regarding the exact meaning of this term. It is commonly translated as abomination. Regardless of the exact translation, the term certainly is an expression of uncompromising condemnation. The term is generally reserved for severe transgressions.

Another indication of the Torah's attitude towards homosexuality is found in the context in which the prohibition is discussed. The Torah deals with homosexual behavior along side its discussion of incest. Apparently, the Torah is equating the practices. Now, no one would contend that the Torah is not seriously opposed to incest! So, in view of the Torah's association of the two sins, it follows that the same conclusion must be applied in assessing the Torah's attitude towards homosexuality.

“Speak to all the congregation of Bnai Yisrael and say to them, “You shall be holy, for I Hashem you G-d is holy.” (VaYikra 19:2)

Finally, it is important to note the overall context of the discussion in the parasha of sexual behavior. This discussion takes place in the context of the Torah discussion of personal sanctity. The Torah maintains that personal sanctity and spiritual perfection is predicated upon – to a great extent – one's sexual conduct.[3] A concept of personal sanctity is obviously central in any religious system. The Torah's contention that homosexual behavior is inconsistent with personal sanctity is an indication of the fundamental basis of the Torah's opposition to homosexual behavior.

Now, it must be recognized that anyone who does not accept that the Torah is a revealed truth, need not attribute any significance to the Torah's attitudes. In fact, a person who believes that the Torah is the product of human wisdom – or folly – may contend that the attitudes is the Torah express outmoded prejudices and should not be taken seriously. But if one does professes to follow the values of the Torah, one must be honest in defining these values. One cannot claim to view the Torah as an authoritative source of moral guidance and at the same time fail to objectively distill the Torah's message. The Torah is clear and unequivocal in its condemnation of homosexual behavior.

But is the Torah's attitude reasonable and just? There is a growing body of research that supports the contention that in many individuals homosexual

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orientation is an innate disposition. In other words, these homosexuals do not choose their orientation; they are born with it. If this is true, then the Torah is denying these homosexual the opportunity to engage in a loving relationship with a partner. The need for love and intimacy is basic to the human being. Is it fair to deny a homosexual's this relationship?

There is a basic flaw in this question. The flaw relates to a misunderstanding of the Torah's attitude regarding the rights of the individual. In fact, the Torah's attitude is superficially confusing. On the one hand, the Torah is very protective of the rights of the individual. For example, the Torah strictly restricts the court's authority to punish a person for transgressing the law. The laws of evidence make it all but impossible for the court to punish an innocent individual. The Torah includes an elaborate system of laws governing property rights. The Torah's emphasis of this area of law expresses a deep concern with the rights of the individual. Perhaps, one of the most impressive expressions of the Torah's attitude regarding the sanctity of the rights of the individual is Shmuel the Prophet's response to the nation's request that he appoint the first king. Shmuel points out that a king will have the authority to abrogate personal rights. He can confiscate property; he has the authority to enlist members of the community into his service. Shmuel encourages the people to preserve their individual rights and forego appointing a king.[4]

“And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not complete your reaping to the corner of your field. And the gleanings of your field you shall not take ... for the poor and the convert you shall leave them. I am Hashem your G-d.” (VaYikra 19:9-10)

However, the Torah's goal is not merely to protect the rights of the individual. Instead, the Torah has a broader purpose. Its goal is to foster the development of the individual. This is an important distinction. In a society in which the sole objective is to protect the rights of the individual, there can be no compromise of these rights for the betterment of society as a whole. In contrast, when the goal is more broadly defined – where the goal is the development of the individual – the laws are designed to create a society that fosters the individual's personal growth. Achieving this goal results in a paradox. Sometimes it will be necessary to compromise the interests of some individuals in order to foster an environment in which the majority of individuals can best achieve their potential. Therefore, the Torah will restrict individual rights in order to create and preserve a society in which the majority of individuals can grow and develop.

Let us consider some examples. In a society in

which the rights of the individual are supreme, there can be no mandatory requirement to contribute to charity. In such a society, the decision to participate in charitable giving is strictly voluntary and personal. In contrast, the Torah includes many mitzvot that mandate providing financial support to the poor. Similarly, if the sole objective of a society is to protect individual rights, there can be no mandatory requirement to provide military service. However, in the interests of preserving and protecting society, the Torah does mandate military service, under certain specific circumstances. So, it is clear that the Torah's objective is the more broadly defined goal of fostering individual growth – even though this will sometimes result in a compromise of some individuals' interests.

Now, let us consider the implications of this social philosophy. Even if we accept that for many individuals' homosexual orientation is innate, it does not follow that these individuals are entitled to engage in homosexual practices. The Torah's position is that heterosexuality is consistent with personal sanctity and that homosexual behavior is inconsistent with this sanctity. Therefore, the Torah legislates against homosexual behavior. This does not reflect insensitivity or a disregard for the individual. Instead, this legislation reflects the goal of advancing the development of the majority of individual's within a society.

There is a related issue that must be addressed. Implicit in the criticism outlined above of the Torah's restriction against homosexual behavior is the assumption that it is the Torah's responsibility to assure the happiness of all members of its society. This is implied by the assertion that the Torah unfairly denies the homosexual the opportunity to fulfill the fundamental need to be involved in a loving and intimate relationship. However, this assumption needs to be considered carefully.

We all recognize that there tragedies in the world. A child is born with a crippling birth defect; a young person dies from a terrible disease; a child loses his parents in a tragic accident. We recognize that these tragedies demand a sympathetic response. But as terrible as the tragedies are we do not have a right to demand that Hashem protect us from all sorrow. We accept that somehow, in the Almighty's plan, these tragedies are inevitable. In other words, we accept that although Hashem created a wonderful system of physical laws designed to provide for our needs, there is room in this system for misfortune to occur. We accept that a system of physical laws cannot assure that every person's material needs will be fully fulfilled. We must approach the issue of homosexuality with same recognition. We are not entitled to demand of Hashem that he guarantee our happiness. Like the laws that govern nature,

the Torah is a system of laws for the optimal governance of society. Just as a system of physical laws cannot assure the health and welfare of every person, so too a system of social laws cannot guarantee that every member of the society will achieve happiness. It is a tragedy for a person to be denied the benefit of a loving and intimate relationship. We must appreciate the hurt that this person experiences. We cannot trivialize this issue. But at the same time, it does not follow that this person has been treated unjustly by Hashem. In His wisdom, Hashem created a system of laws designed to foster the growth and full development of the individual. But no system of laws can serve the self-interests of every individual at every moment.

In summary, it is clear that the Torah is unequivocal in its condemnation of homosexuality. The Torah's position is that homosexuality is inconstant with personal sanctity. It is true that the Torah places a premium on the rights of the individual. But the Torah's objective is not merely to protect these rights. Instead, its goal is to foster individual growth. This sometimes requires sacrificing the interests of some individuals in order to foster the development of the majority of individuals. The Torah is not insensitive to the plight of the homosexual. But its goal is to create a society in which heterosexuality is the standard behavior. Finally, although we must recognize that the Torah's restriction against homosexual behavior is a terrible hardship for some individuals, it does not follow that the Torah is unjust.

In closing it is important to recognize that we accomplish nothing positive through humiliating a gay person. If we express ourselves in a manner that humiliates others, we only misrepresent the Torah. We will certainly not succeed in educating others in regard to the Torah's attitudes. We must also recognize that a Torah observant Jew has the benefit of being guided by a revealed truth. Our attitudes regarding homosexual behavior are based on this revelation. Others, who do not understand the concept of revelation or are unaware of revelation, may come to very different conclusions than our own. We cannot simply condemn these conclusions. We must express ourselves in reasonable terms and educate others not humiliate them. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Meschet Sanhedrin 10:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Meschet Avot 2:1.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 19:2.

[4] Sefer Shmuel Alef 8:10-18.

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Passover

committed in his knowledge of God, and says that the Egyptians partook of these three: 1) the Earth is eternal and there is no God; 2) God has no ability to know man's actions; and 3) God does not intervene with mankind, and thus, there is no reward or punishment. Ramban continues, stating that when God creates a miracle or a wonder changing natural law with individuals or nations, these three opinions become nullified:

"For a wondrous miracle teaches that the world has a Creator, Who created it anew, and He knows all, and He guides this world, and He possesses full capabilities. And when this miracle was forecasted by a prophet, it is furthered clarified that prophecy is true, for God speaks to man and reveals His principles to His servants the prophets, and thereby, the entire Torah is [also] proven."

This all makes perfect sense. For when a miracle occurs, it teaches us that some intelligent Being exists, which controls the laws we witness. These laws governing nature have a design; something is forcing their repeated behavior. The idea of the true God, the Creator, is proven through a miracle: this Creator is responsible for the behavior - and thus creation - of these laws, for these laws only operate because an external force limits them to this select behavior. We also learn that a miracle, a change at a precise "time", means by definition, that God is in fact intervening and guiding His created world. Third, we learn that God is not restrained by anything, and is in complete, exclusive control. Prophecy is also proven when the miracle is forecasted; for how else can a human know when a suspension in natural law will occur? And once prophecy is proven, the entire Torah that was given by God to man with prophecy, is thereby sustained.

How God Addresses Man's Denial

Ramban continues to explain three verses found in connection with the Egyptian plagues. Exodus 8:18 reads, "And I will distinguish on that day the land of Goshen on which My people stand, that there shall be no wild beasts there, in order that you know that I am God in the midst of the land". God teaches that He does in fact intervene; He punishes one people while saving the other: "I will distinguish". Thereby, God removes the one of the errors listed above. God proves He is truly "in the midst of the land" and guides man's actions.

Exodus 9:29 reads, "And Moses said to him [Pharaoh] when I leave the city, I will spread my palms to God; the voices will cease and the hail will not continue anymore, in order that you shall know that the Earth is God's." Ramban says these words "you shall know that the Earth is



Egypt's Nile River – Hebrew calendar year 2447: the first plague of Blood

God's" teach that God created the Earth. As we explained, only the One responsible for putting laws into motion may be the One who suspends or alters them. Hail also displayed God's complete control over the heavens and not just the Earth alone. Hail commenced the third set of the plagues, now educating mankind on God's reign over the heavens. The first three plagues displayed God's reign over the Earth, as Blood, Lice and Frogs all emanated from the ground. The second three plagues displayed God's control over all events between the Earth and the heavens: Beasts roam the Earth's surface, and the Death of Flocks and Boils are also "on" the Earth. The last three, Hail, Locusts and Darkness displayed God's control over the heavens and atmosphere. Earth, the heavens and all in between were shown to be under God's hand.

The last verse Ramban quotes is Exodus 9:14, "For in this time, I send all My plagues to your heart, and in your servants and in your people, so that you shall know that there is none like Me in all the land." Ramban teaches that with this plague of Hail, he will be viewed as "all capable", thereby removing the notion that anything else exists that interferes with His will. No other powers exist. Why does God say He will send all His plagues to "Pharaoh's heart, and in his servants and in his people"? Why not group them all together? Perhaps God is indicating from 'where' the notions arise, that there are other forces besides Him: it stems from "each man's individual wishes." By stating that he will affect each Egyptian's heart, God means to indicate that other powers have no reality, other than in "each man's heart." He cannot simply affect Egypt, as there is no one source of idolatrous notion. The source is in "each and every individual" who

creates his own wishes, and assumes new gods to exist, which will cater to those wishes. Thus, God says he will affect "each" man.

Ramban is teaching us that God's very words in Exodus were directed at the primary confusions, which plagued man since the time of Enosh, Adam's grandson. Man's mind had become confused, and he made a few central errors about God's existence, His abilities and His knowledge. These verses address these precise faulty notions. Ramban tells us that so important are these ideas, that Chametz and the Passover sacrifice are met with excision if violated. So important are these concepts, these absolute truths, that we reiterate them in Mezuzah, the Shema, Tefillin and through Succah. Many other commands as well are "Remembrances of the Egyptian Exodus" because they teach these fundamental ideas concerning God. Ramban goes out of his way to again list in this commentary these fundamentals proven by miracles: Proof of God's act of Creation; God's knowledge; His providence over mankind; Prophecy; the truth of the entire Torah; and also, that God's mercy extends to those who fulfill His will, as we see He saved those Jews who killed Egypt's God - the Paschal lamb - and circumcised themselves at His command.

The Meaning of Life

As if we have already been sufficiently overwhelmed by such enlightenment, Ramban introduces an even greater concept. He states the reason for "The Initial Creation":

"We must know that God created us, and this is the purpose of creation. For there is no other reason for the Initial Creation, and there is no desire in God for man except

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Passover

this; that man should know, and thank His God that He created him."

Many ask what is the meaning of life. Ramban answers: we are to know God, and thank Him that he created us. We are to realize - what most of us with the desire to be free - suppress. For when one realizes he is created, his own wishes must be subjugated to God's commands. It is a most profound and emotionally impacting idea, to reflect on the conviction that "I am created." This is no small idea, and not one to be passed by. It takes time to digest. After all, we have been "free" to live, as we desire all our lives. But to confront this truth, that we once were not here, and that "God made me" is both a humble experience, but a liberating one. It liberates us from the bondage of our own fallacies, and allows us to live perfectly in line with God's plan, which means we will achieve greater satisfaction, as we no longer combat a truth, which only seemed restrictive. This truth that we are "created", will most certainly allow us to live in line with truth. And when one lives with truth, and does not follow his own agenda, then he also lives in line with God's plan, and this must infinitely surpass our imagined happiness, and enable the best experience for man.

Rabbi Reuven Mann asked, "Is this an ends, or a means? Is man to simply arrive at this knowledge that he is created and thank God for it, and that's it - he need not move any further with life?" Rabbi Mann answered that this realization that we are created beings, is perhaps the beginning, not the end of the line. Meaning, once man achieves this realization and it is true to him, he is now ready to embark on his true life, where he views the Torah as something he must do, and something he desires to do, as he sees the Torah as God's will, and himself, as God's creation. It is this false view that we are "our own people", ignoring the fact we are created, that causes man to sin, and many of our errors in life. But once man truly accepts himself as a "creation", then his life's perspective is completely changed, and now, he may perceive this existence untainted with personal wishes. He may now approach a Torah lifestyle completely objectively, where all he learns is no longer filtered through his wishes. Now...he finally sees truth.

All is Miracle

Returning to the topic of miracles, Ramban concludes, "man has no portion in Moses' Torah if he does not view everything as a miracle, and nothing is natural". But he qualifies this, "everything is God's decree, whether a righteous man receives reward or an evil man is punished." Of course when a leaf falls from a tree, it is not a miracle, but natural law, as Maimonides also



The eighth plague of Locusts

teaches ("Guide"; Book III, chap. XVII, pp 286-287; Dover ed.). What Ramban addresses here is not natural occurrences, but "man's fate". This, Ramban says man must view as directly from God, "all His ways are just." This means that each and every man and woman obtains what is exactly just for him or her. This too is sensible, as all is in God's control; there is nothing that can prevent God from being completely just, as the prophet says.

The Goal of the Commands

What then is it that Ramban commenced with, what he says is a "rule in the reasons of the commands"? It is clear: Ramban is teaching us that the commands have as their goal, our realization that God exists...He is responsible for all, He knows all, and He guides all as exact justice abounds everywhere for everyone. The commands are to enable us to arrive at the most dominant and primary truths about reality. And the best expression that we accept that God is all this, is when we accept that WE are created. It is only at this point that we truly admit of these ideas, when we view our very selves as "created".

What is the purpose of life? To accept with intelligent conviction that this life is created, that all is created, that WE are created, and Who this Creator is. We were given intelligence to arrive at truths...let's not pass by on the most essential truth as Ramban teaches. Let us be fortunate that we came across this Ramban. I truly thank Howard for bringing it to my attention, his brother Marc for teaching Howard about it, and our Rav Muvhak for his class on it last year. This is what we should get excited about in life, when we learn profound new ideas that will change us forever.

Happy Passover to everyone. ■

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Chametz & Matza

THEIR HISTORICAL & RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

When studying Passover in chapter XII in Exodus, we note its distinction from the other holidays. Passover was celebrated in Egypt - there were 'commands' even prior to the giving of the Torah. Today, we reenact those commands in the form of the shank bone, the matza, the bitter herbs, and other laws. Succos and Shavuot are commemorations of God's kindness to us. Passover is as well, but it differs from the other holidays with our pre-Torah, Passover observance in Egypt. Additionally, our adherence to God's commands in Egypt contributed to the holiday's structure. There is only one Succos holiday and one Shavuot. But there are two Passovers; the Passover of Egypt, and all subsequent Passovers. What may we learn from its distinction from the other two holidays? What differences exist between these the Passover of Egypt, and our Passover?

Reading the Haggadah, we note a conflict in the identity of the matza. The Haggadah commences by describing the matza as "lachma anya", poor man's bread. The Jews were fed this during their Egyptian bondage. However, later on, the Haggadah, quoting the Talmud (Pesachim 116b) says that matza is commanded in memory of the dough which did not rise due to the Egyptians swift, panic-stricken oust of the Jews. We are obligated by Torah law to recall God's swift salvation by eating the matza. The Jews were ousted from the Egyptian city Raamses, and arrived at Succot. When the Jews arrived, they were only able to bake that dough into matza, not bread. The matza serves as a barometer of the speed by which God freed the Jews. Was this matza part of God's orchestrated events? Did God desire this barometer in the form of matza?

We should note at this point that the Jews in Egypt observed only one day of Passover, according to Rabbi Yossi HaGalili in the Jerusalem Talmud 14a. The Torah laws describing those Jews' obligation also appear to exclude any

restriction of eating leaven. Certainly on the morrow of the Paschal Lamb the Jews were permitted in leaven. Rabbeinu Nissim comments that it was only due to the rush of the Egyptians that their loaves were retarded in their leavening process. Had the Egyptians not rushed them, the Jews would have created bread. There was no law not to have bread at that point.

But for which reason are we "commanded" in matza? The Haggada text clearly states it is based on the dough, which did not rise during the Exodus. This matza demonstrates salvation, the focus of the Passover holiday. This poses this serious problem: not only do later generations have the command of eating matza, but the Jews in Egypt were also commanded in eating the Lamb with matza, (and maror). If while still in Egypt, when there was yet no 'swift salvation', why were those Jews commanded in this matza? How can Jews in Egypt, not yet redeemed, commemorate a Redemption, which did not yet happen? (It is true; the Jews ate matza while slaves. However, the Haggada says the "command" of eating matza was only due to the speedy salvation. This implies the Jews in Egypt who also had the command of matza, were obligated for the same reason, which is incomprehensible.)

The Torah spends much time discussing the dough, and oddly, also refers to it in the singular, (Exod., 12:34), "And the people lifted up HIS loaf before it had risen..." "And they baked THE loaf..." (Exod., 12:39) Why this 'singular' reference to numerous loaves? Why so much discussion about the loaf?

Lastly, Rashi praises the Jews for not taking any provisions when they left: (Exod., 12:39) "And they baked the loaf they took out of Egypt into cakes of matza, because it did not leaven, because they were driven from Egypt, and they could not tarry, and also provisions they did not make for themselves." Rashi says the fact they did not take

provisions demonstrated their trust that God would provide. If so, why in the very same verse, did the Jews bake the dough? This implies the exact opposite of Rashi's intent, that the Jews did in fact distrust God. It is startling that a contradiction to Rashi is derived from the every same verse. Rabbi Reuven Mann suggested very simply: the Jews correctly did not rely on miracles, so they took the dough as food. Their act of following Moses into the desert also displays their trust in God, but this trust does not mean they should not take what they can for now.

In order to answer these questions, I feel it is essential to get some background. The Egyptians originated bread. Certainly, as they tortured the Jews, the Egyptian taskmasters ate their bread, as their Jewish slaves gaped with open mouths, breaking their teeth on dry matza, or "poor man's bread". The title of "poor man's bread" is a relative term - "poor" is always in comparison to something richer. "Poor man's bread" teaches that there was a "richer bread" in Egypt - real bread. The Egyptians enjoyed real bread, while they fed their Jewish slaves matza.

Let us now understand Rashi's comment. He said the Jews were praiseworthy, as they did not take food with them upon their exodus, thereby displaying a trust in God's ability to provide them with food. But we noted that in the very same verse where Rashi derives praise for the Jews who Rashi said took no food, it clearly states they in fact took the loaves! Rashi's source seems internally contradictory.

I would suggest that a new attitude prevailed among the Jews. I do not feel the Jews took that loaf from Egypt for the purpose of consumption alone. This is Rashi's point. The Jews took the loaf because of what it represented - 'freedom'. They were fed matza for the duration of their bondage. They were now free. They cherished this freedom and longed to embody it in expression. Making bread - instead of dry, poor man's matza - was this expression of freedom. They now wished to be like their previous taskmasters, 'bread eaters'. A free people. Baking and eating bread was the very distinction between slave and master in Egypt. The Jews wished to shed their identity as slaves and don an image of a free people. Baking and eating bread would achieve this. To further prove that the Jews valued such identification with the free Egyptians, Rashi comments that when the Jews despoiled the Egyptians of their silver, gold and clothing, at Moses command, they valued the Egyptian clothing over the silver and gold. (Exodus 12:35)

However, the Jews had the wrong idea. Their newfound freedom was not unrestricted. They were freed - but for a new purpose; following God. Had they been allowed to indulge freedom

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Passover

unrestrained, expressed by eating leavened bread, this would corrupt God's plan that they serve Him. Freedom, and servitude to God, is mutually exclusive. God therefore did not allow the dough to rise. They trusted God, they saw all the miracles. They needed no food for their journey, as God would provide. But they took the dough in hopes of making that "free man's food", leavened bread. The cakes of dough were not taken for subsistence alone, but to symbolize their freedom. They hoped upon reaching their destination, to bake bread, expressing their own idea of freedom. But the verse says the dough only became matza, not their intended end-product. Matza was a mere result of a hurried exodus. Matza was so significant, that the Torah recorded this "event" of their failed bread making. They planned to bake bread, but it ended up matza. The Torah teaches that matza was not the Jews' plan. It points out through inference that they desired leavened bread. It also teaches that bread was not desired so much for subsistence, as they verse ends, (Exod. 12:39) "and provisions they made not for themselves." They did not prepare food, as they relied on God for that. This is Rashi's point. The dough they took was not for provisions alone; it was to express unrestricted freedom. This unrestricted freedom is a direct contradiction to God's plan that they serve Him.

The Jews were now excited at the prospect of complete freedom. God's plan could not tolerate the Jews' wish. God desired the Jews to go from Egyptian servitude, to another servitude - adherence to God. He did not wish the Jews' to experience or express unrestricted freedom, as the Jews wished. To demonstrate this, God retarded the dough from leavening. The matza they baked at Succot was not an accident, but God's purposeful plan, that any expression of unrestricted freedom be thwarted.

Matza does not only recall God's swift salvation, but its also represents Egyptian servitude. In the precise activity that the Jews wished to express unrestricted freedom by baking bread, God stepped in with one action serving two major objectives: 1) By causing a swift ousting of the Jews, God did not allow the dough to rise. God did not allow the Jews to enjoy leavened bread, which would embody unrestricted freedom. 2) But even more amazing is that with one action of a speedy redemption, God not only restricted the dough's process, but He also "saved" the Jews - God became the Jews' savior. He replaced the Jews' intended, unrestricted freedom with the correct purpose of their salvation; to be indebted to God. The one act - God's swift Exodus - prevented the wrong idea of freedom from being realized, and also instilled in the Jews the right idea - they were now indebted to God, their Savior. They were not left to unrestricted freedom, but were now bound to God by His new act of

kindness. An astonishing point.

We return to the command to eat matza in Egypt. This command could not be to commemorate an event, which did not yet happen. This makes no sense. I feel God commanded them to eat the matza for what it did represent - servitude. While in Egypt, why did God wish them to be mindful of servitude? Here I feel we arrive at another basic theme of the Passover holiday; contrast between servitude and freedom. In Pesachim 116a, the Talmud records a Mishna, which states that our transmission of the Haggadah must commence with our degradation,

and conclude with praise. We therefore discuss our servitude or our ancestor's idolatrous practices, and conclude with our salvation and praise for God. We do this; as such a contrast engenders a true appreciation for God's salvation. Perhaps also the two Passover holidays - in Egypt and today - embody this concept of our salvation. A central goal of Passover is the resultant appreciation for God's kindness. A contrast between our Egyptian Passover and today's Passover will best engender such appreciation. It compares our previous 'bondage' to our current 'freedom'. Perhaps for this reason we are also commanded to view each of ourselves as if we left Egypt.

So in Egypt, we ate matza representing Egyptian servitude. Today we eat it as the Haggadah says, to recall the swift salvation, which retarded the leavening process, creating matza. We end up with a comparison between Passover of Egypt, and today's Passover: Servitude versus salvation. The emergence of the Jewish people was on Passover. We have two Passovers, displaying the concept of a transition, a before and an after.

An interesting and subtle point is that God

**Egypt, 3317 years ago:
Aaron & Moses at Pharaoh's palace
assisting in bringing about Blood**



mimicked the matza of servitude. He orchestrated the salvation around matza. Why? Perhaps, since matza in its original form in Egypt embodied servitude, God wished that servitude be the continued theme of Passover. He therefore centered the salvation on the dough, which eventuated in matza; thereby teaching that we are to be slaves to God. "You are my slaves, and not slaves to man", is God's sentiment addressing a Jewish slave who wishes to remain eternally subservient to his mortal master. The Torah clearly views man's relationship to God as a servant.

With this understanding of the significance of leavened bread, we understand why the Torah refers to all the Jews' loaves in the singular. The Jews shared one common desire; to express their freedom by eating what their oppressors ate. However, contrary to human feelings, "freedom" is an evil...odd as it sounds. God's plan in creating man was to direct us all in understanding and delighting in the truth of God, His role as the exclusive Creator, the One who manages man's affairs, and Who is omnipotent. (Ramban, Exod. 13:16) We have a purpose in being created, and it is not to be free and live as we wish. Our purpose

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is to engage the one faculty granted to us – our intellect. And the primary use of the intellect is forfeited when we do not recognize God, as the Egyptians faulted. Therefore, God freed us so we may enter a new servitude according to His will: serving Him. But this service of God should not be viewed as a negative, as in serving man. Serving God is achieved by studying Him, His Torah and creation – a truly happy and beautiful life. We could equate the enjoyment and benefit in serving God, to serving a human master who gives us gold if we simply look for it. We need not physically “dig” for it, just the act of seeking the gold would be rewarded with this master giving us abundant treasures. So too is the service of God. If we merely learn and seek new ideas, He will open new doors of wisdom. I am always amazed that we are so fortunate.

Finally, what is the significance of chametz, leaven? Perhaps, once leavened bread took on the role of freedom, exclusive of any connection with God, leaven thereby took on a character that opposes the very salvation, demonstrated by the matza. This now explains that leaven was not mentioned in connection with the instructions pertaining to the original Paschal lamb. The Jews had not yet displayed any attachment to bread. Only subsequent to the first Passover celebration do we see the Jews’ problematic tie to leavened bread. Therefore, only afterwards is there any prohibition on bread. ■

IBN EZRA

THE 10 PLAGUES

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Exodus, 8:12, Ibn Ezra directs our attention to the performers of the Ten Plagues:

“Know, that by the hand of Aaron were the first three plagues and these signs were in the lower matter as I explained earlier; because two (of them) were in water, and the third was in the dust of the earth. And the plagues performed by Moses with the staff were in the higher elements, just as his (Moses) status was higher than Aaron’s status. For example, the plague of hail and locusts were brought by the wind, and (so too) the darkness, it was in the air; also the plague of boils was through him (Moses). Only three (plagues) were without the staff; the wild animals, the disease of the animals, and the death of the firstborns. And one (plague) with no staff was through Moses, with a little connection with Aaron, and it was the plague of boils.”

Ibn Ezra focuses our attention on his first word, “Know”, which urges the reader to think into this specific commentary. He intimates that there is more here than meets the eye. He does not simply list each plague with its performer, or describe the involvement of the staff. We are not interested in dry statistics when studying God’s wisdom. Here, Ibn Ezra is teaching important principles. Beginning with the word “Know”, Ibn Ezra is teaching an important lesson.

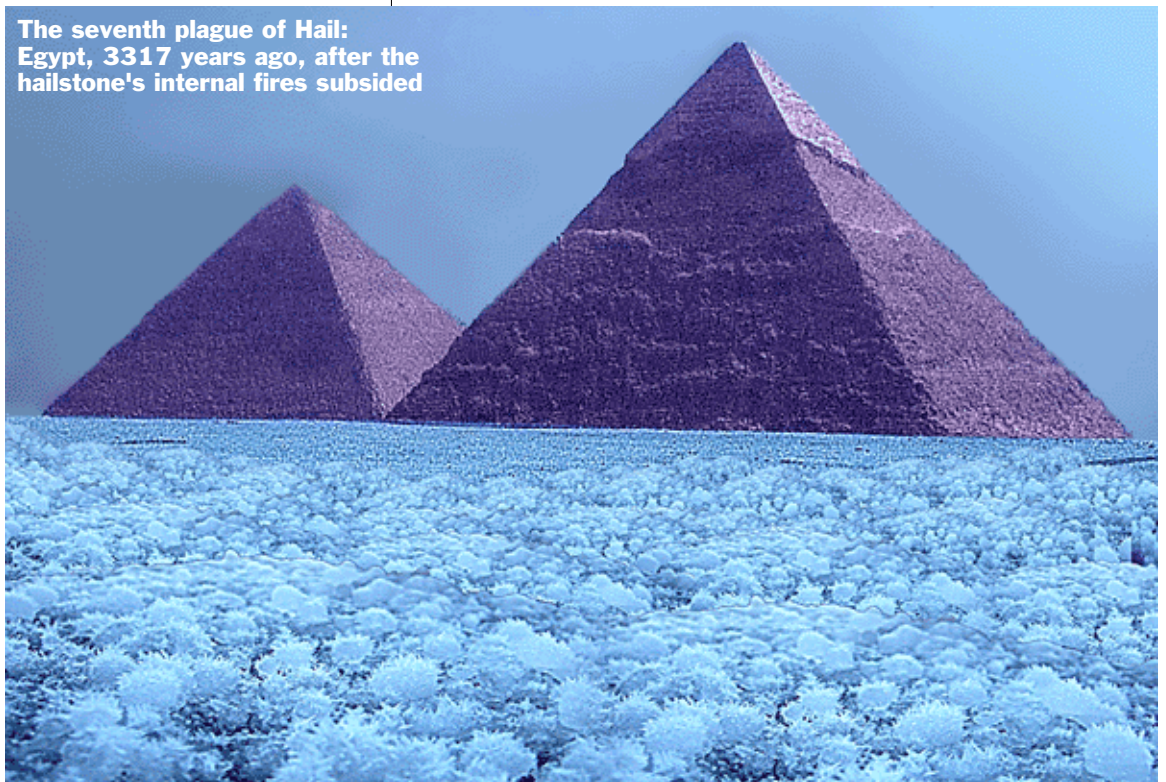
Each of the Ten Plagues was used as a tool to teach Egypt and the world the following: 1) Aaron and Moses were each assigned specific plagues, in the lower and higher realms

respectively, and they performed a similar number of plagues independently, 2) The staff was present in only certain miracles, 3) Moses joined with Aaron in a single plague of boils, 4) God distinguished between Egypt and the Jews through two plagues, in which no staff was used, and which was placed in the center of the series of plagues.

In his Laws of Idolatry, 1:1, Maimonides teaches that early man already began projecting greatness onto the heavenly bodies. Man thought, since the planets, stars and spheres minister before God, they too are worthy of man’s honor. Eventually, man’s sin increased as he replaced simple honor of stars with his worship of them as deities, until God was no longer recognized. Star worship reveals man’s false estimation that the heavens deserve to be worshipped. Man feared not only the spheres, but also the heavens. Jeremiah 10:2-3 reads, “So says God, ‘To the ways of the nations do not learn, and from the signs of the heavens do not fear, because from them the nations fear. Because the statutes of the peoples are false, because a tree from the forest they cut, fashioned by an artisan with an adze.’” Jeremiah teaches that man did in fact fear the heavens. But their fear stemmed from a false projection - not based in reality. Jeremiah’s lesson is insightful: he equates the fear of heavens with the idolatrous practice of prostrating to wooden idols. He wished to teach that the heavens do not hold any greater powers than wooden sculptures. Man’s idolatrous emotions project the same

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**The seventh plague of Hail:
Egypt, 3317 years ago, after the
hailstone's internal fires subsided**



imagined authority onto both, the heaven and the trees.

The primitive view of the heavens determining man's fate, was not alien to the Egyptians. God corrected this error with one aspect of His plagues. Commanding Aaron to perform the plagues limited to the earthly realm, and for Moses to perform those of the "higher", heavenly realm, God discounted the dangerous esteem man held towards the heavens. God showed that the only difference between the heavens and Earth is the level of understanding required to comprehend their natures, as the wiser man - Moses - addressed the heavenly plagues, and Aaron addressed the earthly plagues. Laws controlled both realms, and both could be understood. Understanding a phenomenon removes one's false, mystical estimations. Realizing they are 'guided' means they are subordinate to something greater. These realms did not "control", but were "controlled", teaching the Egyptians that their views were false. The Egyptians erred by assuming that the heavens were a governing and mystical realm. Earth, to Egypt, was not divine. God corrected this disproportionately high, heavenly grandeur. God did so in two ways: 1) by showing the heavens' subordination to a Higher will, God demoted heaven's status from the divine to the mundane, and, 2) by aligning the plagues with Moses' and Aaron's participation, Egypt would understand that not only are the heavens' not divine, but they are in equal realms, just as Moses and Aaron are of somewhat equal status. Additionally, Moses and Aaron each performed three miracles independently to equate heaven and earth, dispelling a false supremacy of heaven and meteorological phenomena. Hopefully, the Egyptians would comprehend that both heaven and Earth are equally under God's control, and that neither one is significantly greater. Egypt would then realize that Something higher was responsible for all creation. God wanted the good for the Egyptians. The 'good' means knowledge of what is true. As it says in the Torah (Exod. 9:16) with regards to these plagues, "...in order that they tell of My name in the whole world."

Interestingly, the three plagues designed in the heavens were hail, locusts and darkness. Why these three? Perhaps to address three errors of the Egyptians. Egypt assumed meteorological phenomena to be divine, so God responded with a hail/fire plague to display His exclusive control in this area. Wind was also a heavenly phenomena, but now they experienced an unnatural wind blowing the entire day, the entire night, until the next morning when it delivered the terror of locusts destroying all vegetation remaining of the hail's previous destruction (Exod 10:13). Finally, with the plague of darkness, God displayed control over the primary focus in heaven - the sun.

Weather, the atmosphere and outer space were all shown as false deities and under the exclusive control of Israel's God. Additionally, the plague of "darkness" had one other facet - it was palpable, perhaps to show that it was not a simple solar eclipse.

Ibn Ezra also made specific note of two plagues where no staff was used. These two also included the lesson of national distinction: Exod. 8:18, "And I will distinguish on that day the land of Goshen that My people stand on it, to prevent from being there the wild beasts..." Exod. 9:4, "And God will distinguish between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt, and nothing will die of the Israelites." Why were both of these plagues designed to distinguish Egypt from Israel? I believe the answer is that by designing not just one plague - which could be viewed as a freak incident, but two plagues which differentiated "Egyptians" and "Jews" - the goal was to teach that God works differently than Egypt's view of the 'divine'. The Egyptians thought that to please their gods was man's correct obligation, and precisely how gods operated - a natural outgrowth of a child/parent relationship. How would such an infantile idea be corrected in order to teach God's true system? By Egypt witnessing punitive measures only on their 'side of the river', they were awakened to a new idea: objective morality. They were held accountable. They also realized something even more essential: their relationship to their gods was one where their gods benefited from man's actions. Egypt felt that their gods need man to serve their needs, which were projections of man's own needs. But Judaism teaches that relating to God is not for God, but really only for man. God does not need man. Man must do that which is proper for himself, and if he does not, he will not only be punished, but he will lose the true good for himself. The Egyptian's exclusive receipt of these two plagues - a system of "reward and punishment" - awoke them to a realization that service of God means not catering to a god's needs, but rather, an alignment with proper ideals and morality. This is a drastic difference from Egypt's primitive notion of worship.

Simultaneously, these two plagues attacked the very core of Egyptian gods; animals. Their own animals died, and then, wild animals attacked them. It was a devastating blow to their esteemed deities. Their deification of animal gods was destroyed. Pharaoh's response (Exod. 8:21), "sacrifice to your God" confirms his lowered estimation of animals, to the point that he encourages Moses to slaughter them, and to do so to his God. In other cases, Pharaoh does gesture to free the Jews, but only here in connection with the animal plagues does Pharaoh say "sacrifice to your God." I believe the Torah includes these words of Pharaoh to inform us that the plague had

the desired effect on Pharaoh. God understands what will affect man, and so it does. The Egyptians were all the more confused when they saw that Israel was not affected, even though they did not serve animals. In Exod. 9:7, Pharaoh himself sends messengers to see if Israel was harmed. This plague of the animal's death concerned him greatly.

Why were these two animal plagues bereft of the staff? Perhaps the staff carried with it some element of cause and effect; man would hit something, and only then would the plague commence. Perhaps, God wished to teach that He is in no way bound by the physical. A plague may occur with no prior cause. Removing the staff might effectively teach this lesson, as nothing was smitten to bring on the plague.

I heard another explanation for the use of the staff: Although God did not need it (He needs nothing) for Moses and Aaron to initiate the plagues, it's presence was to remove any divinity projected by Egypt onto Moses and Aaron, lest onlookers falsely believe these two mortals possessed some powers. By seeing the staff incorporated into the miracles, Moses' and Aaron's significance was diluted in Egypt's eyes. But wouldn't people then believe the staff to have those powers? I believe for fear of this erroneous notion, God created a miracle where the staff itself turned into a snake. This was to show that it too was under the control of God.

Why did the plague of boils require Moses and Aaron to work together? My friend Jessie made a sharp observation. She said that just as Moses and Aaron addressed both the higher and lower forms of matter in their respective plagues, the plague of boils executed by both Moses and Aaron included the higher and lower matter - ashes are from Earth, and they were commanded to be thrown towards the heavens (Exod. 9:8). Her parallel revealed another facet of the boils, as God's plagues contain many strata of insights. I believe the boils' combination of realms was to teach that heaven and Earth do not operate in two separate, encapsulated systems. The very act of throwing ashes towards the heavens teaches that both Earth and heaven work together. This was a necessary lesson in the reduction of the heaven's exaggerated status. By showing this further idea that the heavens participate in earthly phenomena, the heavens' false, divine status was stripped that much further. Just as his subjects will view a king who spends time with commoners in a less regal light, so too the heavens now lost their reputation by participating in Earthly matters. Moses could have collected the ashes himself, but by working with Aaron, together, they underlined this point.

One question remains: Why are the two animal-related plagues placed in the middle of the series of the Ten Plagues? ■

Moses' Mission & Pharaoh's Free Will

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

I thank my friend Abe for raising this issue recently Rabbi Reuven Mann for his insights, and Rabbi Pesach for directing me to essential sources on this matter.

Two Purposes of the Plagues

Exod. 7:1-5: "And God said to Moses, 'Recognize, I have positioned you as a judge to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet. You speak all that I command you, and Aaron your brother will speak to Pharaoh to send the Children of Israel from his land. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, [1] and I will increase My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh will not listen to you, and I will place My hand to Egypt and I will take out My hosts, My people the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt with [2] great judgments. And Egypt will know that I am God when I stretch forth My hand on Egypt and I take out the Children of Israel from their midst.'"

God instructs Moses to speak to Pharaoh that he should free the Jews. God tells Moses that he knows Pharaoh will not free them, as He will harden Pharaoh's heart. God states the goal of hardening Pharaoh is to create wonders in Egypt, that Egypt will know God. One goal is for [1] Egypt's edification and hopefully, repentance. The verse also indicates that there is another goal, [2] "great judgments". What are these "judgments"?

(An important principle is spelled out by the Sforno on Exod. 7:3. He states that God's plagues are to allow Egypt to "recognize His greatness and goodness and repent in a truthful repentance". We must recognize God's kindness in such an act: Man sins, and is justly punished. However, before meting out punishments, God educates the Egyptians to their sin via the

plagues. He does one more act to afford the sinner path to repentance, and to circumvent any punishment. We learn that God works additional kindness gives man opportunities to correct his ways, be receiving punishment, or the loss of his soul.)

Just prior to the eighth plague, the Plague of Locusts, the Torah reiterates these two goals:

Exod. 10:1-2: "God said to Moses, 'Come Pharaoh because I have hardened his heart the heart of his servants in order [1] that I place these signs of Mine in his midst. And in order to speak in the ears of your son and your grandson that which I have [2] mocked Egypt, and My signs which I have placed in them, and they shall know that I am God.'"

(Before proceeding, I wish to clarify the term "mock". When applied to, or used by God, we cannot understand it as God expressing human characteristics of derision. To "laugh at", or to "mock", in connection with God, means He is assured of the sinner's downfall. So "certain" is God, it is as if He laughs, like a human would when he warns another of a negative result, yet the other person does not heed the warning, and inevitably suffers. The one who warned will say, "I told you so", as if to laugh at the ignorance of the other. God is said to "mock" Egypt, as their downfall is inevitable. God's warnings and knowledge are absolute, so one is wise to follow God exactly. Egypt didn't, so their devastation was certain.)

Here we see a new point, a "mocking" of Egypt, explained as God's withholding Pharaoh from repenting - the hardening his heart. Rashi says this means a laughing of sorts. Ramban says, "I (God) laugh at him (Pharaoh) that I harden his heart, and do vengefulness in him..." From these two verses, we learn two distinct purposes in the 10 plagues: Verse 10:1 teaches: [1] that God multiply His wonders for Egypt to learn of Him, and verse 10:2 teaches: [2] that



the Jews repeat this to their descendants that God removes Pharaoh's (man's) ability to repent, and that He and His miracles are made known. Clearly, Moses continuously approaches Pharaoh, knowing all too well that Pharaoh will not free the Jews. But Moses is commanded by God to do so, as God's purpose is to [1] publicize His name and [2] demonstrate His justice as meted out in Pharaoh's inability to repent.

This 2nd point is not too well known. The plagues' spectacular nature attracts our emotions to the visual phenomena. However, as 10:2 states, God also wished to "mock" Egypt. He desired that this principle of withholding repentance become clear. The Torah commentaries state, (paraphrased) "...it is unusual that a man can face such plagues of Hail, Locusts, and the like, and still remain obstinate. Man's nature is to be terrified, not to maintain his stubbornness." Such a steadfast attitude, even after receiving blow upon blow, is not natural for man, and must be by God's word. Pharaoh's resistance is to be a prime focus of the plagues. Moses' mission is to bring out into the open this aspect of God's justice: when man is too far-gone, God will restrain him from repenting. The plagues are to demonstrate how God does not allow a terribly corrupt person to repent. Intuitively, we would think that any man who sins, should be afforded the ability to repent. Why then in such a deviant person, does God withhold repentance? What is the justice in this restraint?

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Questions on the Loss of Repentance

1) In his laws of Repentance, chapter 5, Maimonides teaches that man is always the cause of his free will. If so, what did God do to Pharaoh that prevented him from freeing the Jews and from repenting? How does God "harden" Pharaoh's heart?

2) If God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and therefore, Pharaoh does not free the Jews, is it just that God punish Pharaoh?

3) In his Laws of Repentance, chapter 6, Maimonides states that a person may sin a very evil sin, or sin many times, until the sentence from God will be to remove his ability to repent, and that the sinner die in his sin which he did knowingly with his will at the outset. Maimonides states that Pharaoh's stubbornness is an example of this principle. What is the justice in this principle of "removal of repentance"?

4) In law 6:3 of his Laws on Repentance, Maimonides repeats eight times that the sinner sinned "on his own". What is Maimonides driving at? Ramban too states in Exod 7:3 that Pharaoh was punished with the loss of his repenting ability, as he initially sinned with his "own free will". How does this help us understand God's justice?

5) Ramban offers two reasons for the justice of Pharaoh's inability to repent. One reason given is that Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, but merely a tactic to remove the ever increasing pain of each successive plague. As the plagues progressed, Ramban teaches that Pharaoh became more inclined to free the Jews, and he would have, after the fifth plague. However, God removed his ability to repent, and he did not free them. We must ask: If Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, then what is the difference if he does or doesn't verbalize his repentance? Why does God deem it necessary that Pharaoh not utter his repentance, if it would be meaningless, as Ramban states?

6) In law 6:2, Maimonides says that repentance acts as a "shield" against punishment. Does Maimonides' statement have bearing on this Ramban above? Is repentance an absolute protection against punishment, and therefore God "had" to prevent Pharaoh from uttering even ungentle words?

The Plagues' Purpose: A Point of No Return

Despite Pharaoh's inability to concede to Moses' demand, Maimonides states that Moses' repeated approach to Pharaoh is to teach an important lesson: "In order to make known to those who enter the world, that when God holds back repentance from the sinner, he is not able to repent, but [rather] he dies in his evil that he initially committed with his own will." We are taught a crucial lesson: Man can sin to the point of no return.

Part of our human design - our free will - allows us to steep ourselves in corruption, to the point that we can no longer extricate ourselves. This was God's lesson to the world through restraining Pharaoh from repenting. He is the prime example of man's ability to

reach a point with no hope for repentance. God publicized Pharaoh's corruption as an act of kindness to "all others who enter the world", as Maimonides states. God teaches an invaluable lesson. If we forfeit this lesson, tragically, we can lose our eternal life.

Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

There are a few ways to understand God's restraint on man's ability to repent: Man reaches the point of no return, so God merely "reflects" man's own corruption by withholding an ungentle repentance. Rabbi Mann suggested a second theory: that man can do some form of repentance, but God does not allow him, as God's mercy grants repentance to man, but only up to a point, and no further. Accordingly, man is punished for the sins he initially committed on his own. God is kind to allow man repentance, but God determines for how long repentance remains available. So we must look at God's ultimate restraint on repentance in an opposite light: It is not a cruelty that He removes repentance, but a kindness that He tolerates sinners for so long. According to theory #1, man sins to the point where he is completely and irrevocably corrupt. He has the ability to go through the motions of repenting to avoid pain, but God does not allow him this right. In this case, God mirrors the sinner's exact corruption - he cannot truly repent, so God does not allow the act of a useless repentance.

Ramban: Preventing Ungentle Repentance

Ramban indicates that repentance is a shield against punishments - the question is how. To reiterate, Ramban's second answer for God restraining Pharaoh from repenting is as follows: "Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, but merely a tactic to remove the ever increasing pain of each successive plague." Therefore, he was not allowed to repent. Had he repented - even for this wrong reason - Ramban indicates it would have been effective in some manner. Thus, God prevented his repentance. How may we explain this Ramban?

Discussing this issue with Rabbi Mann, we agreed as follows: Had God allowed Pharaoh to repent an ungentle repentance, Pharaoh would justly deserve continued plagues, as the plagues' purpose of Pharaoh recognizing God would not be realized. However, Egypt would see Pharaoh "repenting" and would have a gripe against God's justice. They would not know that Pharaoh repented a false repentance, and would feel God is unjust to continue plaguing Egypt. We may suggest this explanation for the Ramban: for this reason, God did not allow Pharaoh's false impression of repentance. Such repentance would be of no use to Pharaoh's perfection, but it mattered to others, to Egypt. Rabbi Mann stated that Moses too was concerned that if God justly killed the Jews when they sinned with the Golden Calf, Egypt would say that God failed and smote his people in the desert. Due to the concern that all mankind recognize God as just, Moses asked God, "Why should Egypt say, 'with evil He took them out of Egypt to kill them in the

mountains and to consume them from off the face of Earth..." (Exod. 32:12) Moses did not desire Egypt to possess a false impression of God. What perfection Moses displays...even after hundreds of years of bondage, Moses has concern for God's reputation in his oppressors' eyes. Moses teaches that we must be concerned that God's reputation be completely just. We care that all mankind obtain the truth.

Maimonides: Free Will and a Hardened Heart - a Contradiction?

Maimonides states in his Laws of Repentance, chapter 5, God never removes one's free will. He calls this a "great fundamental". This makes sense, as the Torah is a system where 'reward and punishment' is a cornerstone. Thus, man must always be the sole cause of his actions. How then do we understand Maimonides' theory on God hardening Pharaoh's heart? In his Laws of Repentance 6:3, Maimonides writes, "And it is possible that man sin a great sin, or many sins, until the judgment is given before the True Judge that the punishment for this sinner on these sins that he did with his will and his knowledge, is that repentance is prevented from him, and he is not allowed permission to return from his evil so that he should die and expire in his sin that he did...Therefore it is written in the Torah, 'and I will harden Pharaoh's heart.' Since he sinned initially by himself, and did evil to the Jews living in his land, as it says, 'come, let us be wise', Judgment was passed to prevent repentance from him, until punishment was exacted from him. Therefore, God hardened his heart."

If free will is a fundamental, how can God seemingly violate this principle by preventing Pharaoh from repenting?

Free will is always under man's control. But free will "to do what"? This is the key point: it is the free will to "select evil or good" that God places in man's hand unconditionally. However, God will - in extreme cases - remove our free will to decide another matter: repentance. Eight times Maimonides stresses that man chooses to do good or evil, of "his own will." He wished to clarify this point that free will is never taken away from man in this single area of choosing good or evil. Man will always be the sole cause of this choice. The Torah says this openly, (Deut. 30:15, 19) "See I place before you today, life and good, death an evil...and choose life." Moses tells the people that they may choose between good and evil. This is the area where man is always in control. But in the area of repenting, if man already selected evil, and corrupts himself so grievously, God will prevent his free will from selecting repentance, "so he may die and expire in the sin that he did."

There is no contradiction in Maimonides' words. God gives man free will to do good and evil, and never removes this freedom. In one area however, God does compromise man's free will: the area of repentance. Restricting Pharaoh from repenting does not equate to God making him sin. Pharaoh sinned of his own free will, and so grievously, that God's justice

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demands he be removed from the system of repentance. Had Pharaoh been free to repent, he would avoid punishment he truly deserved. Maimonides argues with Ramban and Sforno on this point. Maimonides holds Pharaoh's repentance would have been genuine. This brings us to our next question.

If Pharaoh's repentance would be a genuine, why did God not allow him to repent? God allows others to repent! Perhaps it is possible that man sin with so much evil, that the normal repentance does not outweigh the evil. Let me explain: In normal cases, man sins, but then it is possible that his remorse for his evil is so genuine, that he is in fact not the same person who sinned. He has complete regret, and resigns himself to never sin this sin again. This is true repentance, when the new state of good in man completely erases any taint of the evil formerly held on to. As man learns the fault of his crimes, and sees clearly how hurtful his action was to himself or others, he now regrets his actions. In such a case, God completely forgives man, and "none of his sins will be remembered." (Ezekiel 18) But it can also happen, that a person sins, and repents, but any repentance does not completely correct his evil. Repentance can only correct a person up to a point. Repentance can be

an injustice, if someone sins so harshly, and would be let off. Just as free will to select good or evil is an institution that God never compromises, so too repentance is always accepted before God. Maimonides states this in law 6:2. This being so, the only solution is to remove repentance so Pharaoh and those like him pay for their crimes. It would be unjust to allow Pharaoh to escape punishment through repentance. How odd it may sound, repentance is not just in this case. The basic concept is that God forgives man, but only up to a certain level of corruption. Man may exceed forgiveness - a point of no return.

Sforno

Sforno is of another opinion. He states that had Pharaoh desired to, he could have repented, as "there is nothing preventing him." If this is so, how does Sforno understand the verse that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart"? Sforno explains this as God giving Pharaoh the ability to 'tolerate the plagues'. As Sforno states, if God did not harden his heart, Pharaoh would have freed to Jews, but not out of a desire to subject his will to God, performing a true, complete repentance. Pharaoh would have freed the Jews only to avoid any further pain, "and this is not repentance at all" as Sforno says. Sforno differs from Maimonides

and Ramban, in that he contests that God ever inhibits one's path back to God via repentance. Sforno quotes Ezekiel 18:23, "Do I really desire the death of the wicked, so says God? Is it not in his repenting from his path and that he live?" Sforno proves from this verse that God always desires, and makes available, one's repentance. God did not remove repentance from Pharaoh, as suggested by Ramban and Maimonides.

In summary, Moses' mission was twofold: He was to assist in delivering the Plagues so Egypt and the Jews would recognize God. An idolatrous culture would be shown false, and God's system of reward and punishment would be made clear. Additionally, some of our Rabbis teach that Pharaoh's reluctance was publicized to teach mankind that we have the ability to sink into sin, so far, that we have no way of removing ourselves.

It is then so crucial that we all examine our ways, and not forfeit a true, eternal life, due to temporal emotional satisfaction, or false ideas. ■

For further reading of the original sources, see Maimonides' "Laws of Repentance", chapters V and VI; Maimonides' introduction to Ethics of the Fathers, the "Shmoneh Perakim", Chapter VIII, and sources noted herein.

**The Jews traveling in the desert
protected in all four directions and above
by God's Clouds of Glory**



Passover: Day 7

the Splitting of the Red Sea



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Parshas Bishalach commences with the Jews' journey immediately following their Egyptian exodus, (Exod. 13:17) "God did not guide them via the path of the land of the Philistines, as it was near, lest the people repent when they see war and return to Egypt." As Maimonides teaches in his great work, *The Guide for the Perplexed* (Book III. Chap. 32), God's initial plan was not to lead the Jews towards the Red Sea, but towards the Philistines. A separate consideration demanded this route be avoided. But I ask, why would the Jews return to the very place they were now fleeing? Nonetheless, we are taught to prevent the Jews' return to Egypt, God circumvented their route.

We then read that God clearly orchestrated events to make the Jews appear as easy prey for Pharaoh, enticing him to recapture his fled slaves. God told Moses to encamp by the sea. What was the purpose? (Exod. 4:3) "And Pharaoh will say about the Children of Israel that they are confused in the land, the desert has closed around them." The purpose of traveling not by way of the Philistines, but towards the Red Sea now appears to have a different objective: to lure Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea, ultimately to be drowned. But it does not appear this was the plan from the outset. Had it been, God would not have taught of His consideration regarding the Philistines. That nation's war would not have entered into the equation.

The ultimate purpose in the death of Pharaoh and his army is stated in Exodus 14:4, "And I will strengthen Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them, and I will gain honor through

Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know that I am God..." God sought to gain honor by leading the Jews to the Red Sea, luring in Pharaoh, and creating the miraculous partition of waters. We are confused; did God lead the Jews to the Red Sea to circumvent the Philistines, or to lure Egypt to their death and gain honor? Furthermore, why does God seek to "gain honor" for Himself?

Upon their arrival at the Red Sea, the Jews soon see Pharaoh and his army in pursuit. Moses prays to God, and God responds, "Why do you cry unto me?" This is a surprising response. A basic principle in Judaism is the beseeching of God's help when in need, and the Jews most certainly were. So why does God seem to oppose such a principle at this specific juncture?

Another question apropos of this section is what the goal was of the Ten Plagues, in contrast to the parting of the Red Sea? If the Red Sea parting was merely to save the Jews and kill Pharaoh and his army, God could have easily spared this miracle and wiped out the Egyptians during one of the Ten Plagues. God prefers fewer miracles; this is why there is 'nature'. Our question suggests that the destruction of Pharaoh and his army had a different objective, other than the simple destruction of the Egyptians. What was that objective?

There is also an interesting Rashi, which states a metaphor taken from Medrash Tanchumah. Rashi cites that when the Jews "lifted their eyes and saw the Egyptian army traveling after them, they saw the 'officer of Egypt' traveling from

heaven to strengthen Egypt." (Exod. 14:10) What is the meaning of this metaphor?

Looking deeper into the actual miracle of the Red Sea splitting (Exodus 14:28-29) we read, "And the waters returned and they covered the chariots and the horsemen and the entire army of Pharaoh coming after him in the sea, and there was not left of them even one. And the Children of Israel traveled on dry land in the midst of the sea and the water was to them walls on their right and on their left." Ibn Ezra states that Pharaoh and his army were being drowned, simultaneously as the Jews crossed through on dry land. This is derived from the Torah first stating that Pharaoh was drowned, followed by a statement that the Jews traveled on dry land. Although one section of the sea turbulently tossed and submerged the Egyptian army, "...and God churned Egypt in the midst of the sea", the adjoining section contained waters parted into two calm walls on either side of the Jews, bearing the dry seabed. Ibn Ezra calls this a "wonder inside a wonder".

We must ask why God deemed it essential to combine salvation and destruction in one fell swoop. God could have exited the Jews completely, prior to allowing the Egyptians entrance into the sea. What is learned from God's planned simultaneity of Jewish salvation with Egyptian destruction?

Now we must ask an unavoidable and basic question which Moses pondered: why were the Jews subjected to Egyptian bondage? To recap, Moses once saved the life of a Jew, beaten by an Egyptian. Moses carefully investigated the scene, he saw no one present, and killed the Egyptian taskmaster and buried him in the sand. The next day, Moses sought to settle an argument between the infamous, rebellious duo, Dathan and Aviram. They responded to Moses, "will you kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses feared the matter was known. But how was this matter made public? The Torah described the scene just before Moses killed the taskmaster (Exod. 2:12), "And he turned this

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way and that way, and there was no man (present)..." So if there was clearly no one present, who informed on Moses? A Rabbi once taught there is only one possible answer; the Jew who Moses saved was there, he turned in Moses. We are astounded that one, whose life was saved, would inform on his savior. What causes such unappreciative behavior? The Torah's literal words describing Moses' astonishment are "(Moses said) therefore the matter is known", referring to the disclosure of Moses' murder of the Egyptian. Rashi quotes a Medrash on the words "the matter was known", paraphrasing Moses' own thoughts, (Rashi on Exod. 2:14) "The matter has been made known to me on which I used to ponder; 'What is the sin of the Jews from all the seventy nations that they should be subjugated to back-breaking labor? But now I see they are fit for this.'"

Moses now understood why the Jews were deserving of Egyptian bondage. This ungrateful Jew's backstabbing act answered Moses' question. But this ungrateful nature is not its own trait, but a result of another trait: The act of informing on Moses displays an inability to question Egyptian authority; "Even if my brother Jew saves me, Egypt is still the authority who I must respect". It wasn't aggression against Moses, but an unconditional allegiance

to Egypt. The Jews' minds were emotionally crippled by their decades as slaves. The famous Patty Hearst case teaches us of the Stockholm Syndrome, where victims sympathize with their captors. Israel too sympathized with Egypt. Such identification would cause one to inform on his own friend, even on his own savior Moses. Moses witnessed this corrupt character trait firsthand and realized that Israel justly received the Egyptian bondage as a response. But how does the punishment fit the crime? (You may ask that this is reverse reasoning, as this ungrateful nature came subsequent to bondage, not before. But I answer that Moses too knew this, yet Moses saw something in this ungrateful act which he knew predated Egyptian bondage, answering Moses' question why Israel deserved this punishment.) So what was Moses' understanding of the justice behind Israel's bondage? Seeing that the Jew informed on him even after saving his life, Moses said, "the matter is known", meaning, I understand why the Jews deserve bondage.

In approaching an answer, I feel our very first question highlights the central issue - the cause for the splitting of the Red Sea. The two reasons given for God redirecting the Jews' journey are not mutually exclusive. The latter, drowning of Pharaoh and God's gaining honor is in fact a

response to the former: the Jews' security in Egypt fostered by their extended stay. I suggest the following answer: God did in fact wish to take the Jews directly to Sinai. This is His response to Moses' question as to the merit of the Jews' salvation - "they are to serve Me on this mountain". Meaning, their merit of this Exodus is their future Torah acceptance at Sinai and their subsequent adherence. But due to a peripheral concern of the Philistines, a new route was required. And not just a route on the ground, but also a route that also addressed the underlying inclination towards an Egyptian return. God initially wanted only to bring Israel to Sinai. But now He sought to address the Jews' draw towards Egypt. God wanted to drown Pharaoh and his army to respond to the Jews' current mentality: the Jews preferred Egyptian bondage to warring with the Philistines to maintain freedom. This was unacceptable to God. God enacted the miracle of the Splitting of the Red Sea, for many objectives, but primarily to remove the security Egypt afforded these former slaves. Destruction of the Egyptian empire was a necessary step in Israel's development.

This answers why God responded to Moses' prayer when the Egyptian army drew near, "Why do you cry unto Me?" In other words,

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Day 7 after the Exodus:
The Jews cross the Red Sea on dry ground
with walls of water on their right and left

God was telling Moses that prayer is inappropriate right now. Why? Because the very act of traveling to the Red Sea was in fact the solution for what Moses prayed - the destruction of Egypt. God was informing Moses that what you pray for is already in the works, and therefore your prayer is unnecessary.

Egypt's destruction was not an end in itself. It had a greater goal - to replace Egypt's authoritative role with the True Authority - God. This dual 'motive' is displayed in a specific formulation of the Red Sea miracle. Moses tells the Jews "as you see Egypt today, you will never again see them. God will war for you, and you will be silent." There are two ideas here. The first is the termination of the Egyptians. The Jews had to be rid of the Egyptian 'crutch'. Seeing them dead on the seashore emancipated them psychologically: there were no more Egyptian taskmasters to direct their lives. The phenomena of a slave can be created by nature, or nurture. In Egypt, the Jews were nurtured into a slave mentality, a dependency on a dominating authority. This mind set actually affords some psychological comfort, despite physical pain. When one prefers slavery, he in other words prefers not to make decisions, and relies heavily on a leader. Perhaps for this reason, the very first laws given (in Parshas Mishpatim) address slavery. They outline this institution as a simple, monetary reality. One has no money, so he pays his debt via servitude. But in no way is human respect compromised when he is a slave. The master must give his slave his only pillow and suffer a loss of comfort himself to accommodate another human. The slave remains equal to the master in all areas and deserves respect as any other man. Slavery is simply an institution under the heading of monetary laws. This teaches the Jews that the slavery they experienced is not a way of life, but a temporarily state. The fact that God does not prefer slavery for man is His statement that "you are servants to Me and not to man." The Torah law of boring a slave's ear physically brands him of his corruption in not "listening" to God's command on Sinai, "servants to Me are you, and not servants to servants (man)". (Rashi on Exod. 21:6)

The second idea derived from "God will war for you, and you will be silent", is that God alone delivers salvation. Your "silence" means God alone will bring salvation. There cannot be another cause sharing God's role as the "Go'ale Yisrael" - the Redeemer of the Jews is God alone. Why is this necessary? This underlines the primary concept of the miracle of the sea. The goal was to instill in the Children of Israel an appreciation for God, and an acceptance of His authority. This authority would remain

compromised, had Egypt survived. Respecting God's exclusive authority is also a prerequisite for the Jews' impending acceptance of the Torah on Sinai. For this reason, many of God's commands are "remembrances of the Exodus" for the goal of engendering appreciation for the Creator's kindness. When man's relationship with God is based on appreciation for Him - as guided by the commands - man is thereby reminded that God desires the good for him. As man acts to fulfill his Torah obligations, he will not view them as inexplicable burdens, but he will seek to understand God's intended perfection in each command. Man will then arrive at his true purpose, and find the most fulfillment in his life. Man will be guided in all areas by Divine, rational and pleasing laws which conform perfectly to man's mind. All conflicts will be removed.

The males and females of the Children of Israel verbalized identical, prophetic responses to God's triumph, "God is greatly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea". God's objective of not only eliminating Egypt's authority, but gaining honor for Himself was achieved. This identical song of praise (Az Yashir) of both the male and female Jews displayed the newly instilled appreciation for their victorious God. The destruction of the Egyptians and the acceptance of God were the two primary issues that were addressed successfully. This explains why the Jewish salvation and the Egyptian destruction happened simultaneously. They formed one goal. Had God desired simple destruction of the Egyptians as its own ends, He could have done so in Egypt. But it was only in response to the Jew's overestimation of Egypt, that God destroyed them in the Red Sea, together with the Jewish salvation. The death of the Egyptians was a means for the acceptance of God, not obscured by any other master. Subsequent to the parting of the sea, the Jews in fact attested to God's success in His plan, as it is said, "and they believed in God and in Moses His servant."

Additionally, God's desire that the Jews glorify Him, is not "for" God. Nothing man can do may benefit God, nor does God share man's nature of "need", as in needing to gain honor for Himself. All that God does is to benefit man. This is most clearly witnessed in the great holiday of Passover, where the Creator of the universe educates man (both Jew and Egyptian) with the hopes of their conformity with reality, with monotheism. Only after the Egyptians displayed disobedience and ignored the fundamentals taught through the Ten Plagues, did God have no recourse but to destroy them. God then continued His acts of mercy on man,

and delivered the Jews to freedom so they could accept the Torah.

How do we explain the Medrash regarding the "officer of Egypt"? It now fits precisely with our theory: The Jews felt unconditionally bound to Egypt as inferiors. At the shores, they did not actually see any "officer of Egypt traveling from heaven." This metaphor means they looked at Egypt as invincible, as if some heavenly force defended Egypt over which they could not prevail. This is the meaning of the Medrash. It is a metaphor for Israel's vanquished state of mind.

In summary, the plagues of Egypt served to spread fame of God, "And you will speak of My name throughout the land." The splitting of the Red Sea had a different purpose, "And I will gain honor through Pharaoh and his entire army." The honor God acquired is for the good of Israel, not just Egypt. The Jews will view God, as One who is incomparable, the true Creator, and the One who take notice of man and mages his affairs. (Ramban, Exod. 13:16) The Red Sea miracle was executed as a response to the crippled mentality of the Jews, as God stated, "...lest they repent when they see war and return to Egypt." The circumvention from Philistine to the Red Sea was to avoid an inevitable return to Egypt, and to also correct that very impulse by the Jews witnessing God's triumph over Egypt, simultaneously instilling tremendous appreciation for God. In one act, the corruption in Israel was removed and a new faith in God was born, "and they believed in God and in Moses His servant." This simultaneous termination of Egypt and salvation for themselves was reiterated twice in the Az Yashir song, "God is greatly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea". This response displayed how effected the Jews were by God's miraculous wonders and salvation.

In all honesty, the Jews do revert to "fond" recollections of Egypt not too long after these events, and in the Book of Numbers. However, we cannot judge any acts of God's as failures, if His subjects subsequently err. God's method - and perfection - is to offer man the best solution at a given time. This is a tremendous kindness of God. Man has free will and can revert back to his primitive state even after God steps in to assist him. This human reversion in no way diminishes from God's perfect actions. Our appreciation of His wisdom and His precision in His divine actions remains firm. All of God's actions displaying His perfection and honor are not for Him, as He does not need a mortal's praises. He does it for us, so we may learn new truths and perfect ourselves in our one chance here on Earth. ■



Passover 5765

Thoughts on Pesach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“Raban Gamliel said, “Anyone that does not discuss these three things does not fulfill one’s obligation. And these are the things: the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror.” (Hagaddah of Pesach)

This selection from the Hagaddah is derived from the Talmud in Tractate Pesachim. Raban Gamliel explains that in order for a person to fulfill his obligation on the night of Pesach, he must discuss the mitzvot of the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah and Marror. There are two difficulties with Raban Gamliel’s law. Raban Gamliel does not specify the obligation that is fulfilled through this discussion. In other words, if a person does not discuss the mitzvot of Pesach, Matzah and Marror, what is the obligation that the person has failed to fulfill? Second, Raban Gamliel does not indicate the source for his law.

First, let us focus on the first question. What obligation has not been fulfilled if the Pesach, Matzah and Marror have not been discussed? Maimonides provides a simple answer to this question. Maimonides places Raban Gamliel’s law in the chapter of his code that discusses the laws regarding the mitzvah to discuss the redemption from Egypt on the first night of Pesach. It is clear from the placement of Raban Gamliel’s law in this chapter that Maimonides maintains that the discussion of Pesach, Matzah and Marror is essential to the mitzvah of retelling the events of our redemption from Egypt. Furthermore, Maimonides explains that the discussion of these three topics – Pesach, Matzah and Marror – is referred to as Hagaddah.[1] This seems to confirm that the discussion is part of the mitzvah to retell the events of the redemption.

“And you shall say, ‘This is the Pesach sacrifice to Hashem who passed over the homes of Bnai Yisrael when He struck Egypt and our homes He saved.’ And the nation bowed and prostrated itself.” (Shemot 12:27)

Tosefot do not directly deal with our first question. Instead, they discuss our second question. What is the source for Raban Gamliel’s law? Tosefot explain that the source is the above passage. The passage indicates that there is an obligation to explain the significance of the Pesach sacrifice.

However, Tosefot realize that this answer creates a problem. The passage only specifies that the Pesach sacrifice must be discussed. Raban Gamliel extends this obligation to the Matzah and Marror. The pasuk makes no mention of Matzah and Marror. What is the source for the obligation to discuss these mitzvot? Tosefot offer a rather strange answer to this question.

“And you shall eat the flesh (of the Pesach) on this night roasted by fire and with Matzah and Marror you should eat it.” (Shemot 12:8)

Tosefot suggest that the obligation to discuss Matzah and Marror is derived from the above passage. According to Tosefot the pasuk equates or associates the Matzah and Marror with the Pesach. Tosefot explain that based on this association, the requirement to discuss the Pesach is extended to the Matzah and Marror.

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Tosefot's reasoning is not immediately obvious. The above passage tells us the Pesach must be eaten with Matzah and Marror. In other words, the obligation to eat the Pesach is not fulfilled in its entirety by eating the Pesach alone. Instead, in order to completely fulfill the mitzvah of eating the Pesach, it must be eaten with Matzah and Marror. Tosefot's contention that the pasuk associates the Pesach with Matzah and Marror is certainly accurate. However, this association is insofar as the obligation to eat the Pesach. The passage does not discuss the obligation to speak about the Pesach. In no sense does the pasuk associate the Matzah and Marror with the Pesach in regards to the obligation to discuss the Pesach.

Rav Yitzchak Mirsky suggests that according to Tosefot, the obligation to discuss the Pesach sacrifice is part of the mitzvah to eat the Pesach. In other words, the eating of the Pesach must be preceded by a discussion of the significance of the mitzvah. Based on this insight, he explains Tosefot's reasoning. Since the eating of the Matzah and Marror is part of the mitzvah of eating the Pesach – as indicated by our pasuk – the obligation to discuss the Pesach extends to the Matzah and Marror which is eaten with the Pesach.[2]

So, although Tosefot do not directly discuss the mitzvah that is not fulfilled if Pesach, Matzah and Marror are not discussed, their position has emerged. This discussion is needed in order to completely fulfill the mitzvah of eating the Pesach with its Matzah and Marror.

Tosefot's position presents an interesting problem. Generally, in performing a mitzvah we are not required to understand the purpose and full significance of the commandment. At most, we are obligated to be cognizant of the obligatory nature of the performance. But according to Tosefot, the mitzvah of eating the Pesach with its Matzah and Marror must be discussed and understood in order to be completely fulfilled. Why is the mitzvah of the Pesach different from other mitzvot?

“And you should tell to your son” One might think that the mitzvah can be fulfilled from the beginning of the month. The Torah tells us, “On that day.” If one was only told that the mitzvah must be fulfilled on that day, one might think that it can be fulfilled before nightfall. The Torah tells us “For the sake of this.” “For the sake of this” only applies at the time the Matzah and Marror are placed before you.” (Hagaddah of Pesach)

This section of the Hagaddah is derived from and paraphrases the Mechilta. The section deals with the

derivation for the proper time for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of recounting our redemption from Egypt. The Mechilta explains that the mitzvah can only be fulfilled on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan. This requirement is not explicitly stated in the Torah. Instead, it is derived from a passage that indicates the mitzvah can only be fulfilled at the time at of the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror. The mitzvot of Matzah and Marror are fulfilled on the fifteenth of Nisan after nightfall. Therefore, according to the Mechilta, the mitzvah of Sippur – the retelling of the redemption – is also relegated to the night of the fifteenth of Nisan.

The implications of this lesson from the Mechilta are very important. According to the Mechilta, the mitzvot of Matzah, Marror and Sippur are inextricably interrelated – to the extent that the mitzvah of Sippur can only be fulfilled at the time of the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror. What is the basis of this interrelationship? It seems clear from the Mechilta that the Torah designed the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror to be fulfilled in the context of Sippur. These mitzvot do not merely coexist on the night of the fifteenth. Together, they merge into a single entity.

This relationship is reflected in Maimonides' treatment of these mitzvot. In his code, he discusses the mitzvah of Matzah, then the mitzvah of sippur. He then describes how these mitzvot are performed on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan. In other words, after discussing the various mitzvot performed on the night of the fifteenth, Maimonides provides a detailed description of the Seder.

From Maimonides' treatment of these mitzvot and the Seder, it seems that the Seder is more than a set of instructions for the fulfillment of a set of unrelated mitzvot that happen to occur at the same time. Instead, the various mitzvot of the night merge into a single unified and coordinated entity – the Seder. In other words, the Seder is the halachic entity in which the various mitzvot of the night merge and become unified.

We can now more fully understand Tosefot's reasoning. Why do the mitzvot of Pesach, Matzah and Marror require discussion, explanation and understanding? This is because the mitzvot are designed to occur in the context of the mitzvah of Sippur. Because of this context the mitzvot cannot be properly fulfilled without explanation and understanding. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 7:5. [2] Rav Yitzchak Mirsky, Haggadat Hegyonai Halacha (Jerusalem, 5762), p 111