

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

There is an enduring message here. Leadership, even of the very highest order, is often marked by failure. The first Impressionists had to arrange their own exhibition because their work was rejected by the Paris salons. The first performance of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* caused a riot, with the audience booing throughout. Van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime despite the fact that his brother Theo was an art dealer.

So it is with leaders. Lincoln faced countless setbacks during the civil war. He was a deeply divisive figure, hated by many in his lifetime. Gandhi failed in his dream of uniting Muslims and Hindus together in a single nation. Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison, accused of treason and regarded as a

violent agitator. Churchill was regarded as a spent force in politics by the 1930s, and even after his heroic leadership during the Second World War was voted out of office at the first General Election after the war was over. Only in retrospect do heroes seem heroic and the many setbacks they faced reveal themselves as stepping stones on the road to victory.

In every field, high, low, sacred or secular, leaders are tested not by their successes but by their failures. It can sometimes be easy to succeed. The conditions may be favourable. The economic, political or personal climate is good. When there is an economic boom, most businesses flourish. In the first months after a general election, the successful leader carries with him or her the charisma of victory. In the first year, most marriages are happy. It takes no special skill to succeed in good times.

But then the climate changes. Eventually it always does. That is when many businesses, and politicians, and marriages fail. There are times when even the greatest people stumble. At such moments, character is tested. The great human beings are not those who never fail. They are those who survive failure, who keep on going, who refuse to be defeated, who never give up or give in. They keep trying. They learn from every mistake. They treat failure as a learning experience. And from every refusal to be defeated, they become stronger, wiser and more determined. That is the story of Moses' life in last week's parsha and in this.

Jim Collins, one of the great writers on leadership, puts it well: The signature of the truly great versus the merely successful is not the absence of difficulty, but the ability to come back from setbacks, even cataclysmic catastrophes, stronger than before... The path out of darkness begins with those exasperatingly persistent individuals who are constitutionally incapable of capitulation. It's one thing to suffer a staggering defeat... and entirely another to give up on the values and aspirations that make the protracted struggle worthwhile. Failure is not so much a physical state as a state of mind; success is falling down, and getting up one more time, without end. (Jim Collins, *How the mighty fall: and why some companies never give in*, New York, Harper Collins, 2009, 123)

Rabbi Yitzhak Hutner once wrote a powerful letter to a disciple who had become discouraged by his repeated failure to master Talmudic learning: A failing many of us suffer is that when we focus on the high



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attainments of great people, we discuss how they are complete in this or that area, while omitting mention of the inner struggles that had previously raged within them. A listener would get the impression that these individuals sprang from the hand of their creator in a state of perfection...

The result of this feeling is that when an ambitious young man of spirit and enthusiasm meets obstacles, falls and slumps, he imagines himself as unworthy of being "planted in the house of G-d"...

Know, however, my dear friend, that your soul is rooted not in the tranquillity of the good inclination, but in the battle of the good inclination... The English expression, "Lose a battle and win the war," applies. Certainly you have stumbled and will stumble again, and in many battles you will fall lame. I promise you, though, that after those losing campaigns you will emerge from the war with laurels of victory on your head... The wisest of men said, "A righteous man falls seven times, but rises again" (Proverbs 24:16). Fools believe the intent of the verse is to teach us that the righteous man falls seven times and, despite this, he rises. But the knowledgeable are aware that the essence of the righteous man's rising again is because of his seven falls. (R. Yitzhak Hutner, Iggerot u-Ketavim, 1998, no. 128, 217-18)

Rabbi Hutner's point is that greatness cannot be achieved without failure. There are heights you cannot climb without first having fallen.

For many years, I kept on my desk a quote from Calvin Coolidge, sent by a friend who knew how easy it is to be discouraged. It said, "Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent." I would only add, "And seyata diShmaya, the help of Heaven." G-d never loses faith in us even if we sometimes lose faith in ourselves.

The supreme role model is Moses who, despite all the setbacks chronicled in last week's parsha and this, eventually became the man of whom it was said that he was "a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his energy unabated" (Deut. 34:7).

Defeats, delays and disappointments hurt. They hurt even for Moses. So if there are times when we too feel discouraged and demoralised, it is important to remember that even the greatest people failed. What made them great is that they kept going. The road to success passes through many valleys of failure. There is no other way. © 2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the Lord, and I shall remove you from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will save you from their labor, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I will take you to Me as a people and I will be a G-d to you...And I shall bring you to the land which I swore to give...to you as a heritage...' (Ex. 6:6-8).

This most stirring passage presents the four (actually five!) expressions of redemption, which are the source for our four (actually five) cups of Passover Seder wine (the fifth referring to the Divine promise to "bring you to the land").

And this Biblical text tells us the coming attractions when it speaks of G-d's redemption by means of His "outstretched arm and with great judgments." It is referring to the supernatural ten plagues against the Egyptians, the awesome wonder of the splitting of the Reed Sea, which drowned the Egyptians and enabled the Hebrews to escape freely onto dry land, and the Revelation at Sinai, when G-d took the Hebrews to Himself as His covenantal people.

As we shall see, the expressions of Divine Redemption set the stage of contrast between our Biblical history and Post-Biblical history. In the earlier period, G-d played the star role (as it were) in effectuating our national freedom and in establishing our national constitution to form us as a "holy nation and kingdom of Kohen-teachers" to all humanity (Ex. 19:6), whereas during our subsequent second commonwealth (Talmudic times) and Post-Talmudic history leading up to Redemption, it is Israel who must take the responsibility and assume proactive leadership as G-d's senior partners in the international arena.

The Talmudic Tractate Shabbat (88a) teaches as follows: "And they stood at the bottom of (tahtit) the mountain" (Ex 19:17). Rabbi Abdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said, 'This verse teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, hung the mountain over them like a barrel, and said to them, "If you accept the Torah it will be good; if not, there shall be your grave!" Rabbi Aha bar Jacob said, "This constitutes serious grounds for protesting the validity of our acceptance of the Torah!" (If our obligation to uphold the Torah today harks back to our acceptance of Torah four thousand years ago at

Sinai which was based on duress, our commitment then and now is not binding!).

How can Rabbi Abdimi logically-and textually-maintain that G-d "forced us" into accepting Torah? The Biblical chapter relating the Sinaitic Covenant clearly states: "The entire nation responded in one voice and said, 'all the words which the Lord has spoken we shall do'" (Ex 19:8), and then, for emphasis, once again, "Everything which the Lord has spoken, we shall do and we shall internalize." (Ex. 24: 7). The Sages dare not "remove a Biblical verse from its literal and contextual meaning!"

What Rabbi Abdimi may be referring to is the supernatural, Divinely orchestrated context within which the Revelation was placed: the outstretched arm of G-d that had wrought the judgments of the plagues and the Reed Sea upon the Egyptians, along with "the thunder, the flames, the sound of the shofar and the smoking furnace" (Ex 19:16) which accompanied G-d's words. Rabbeinu Tam (Tosafot to Shabbat 88a s.v. moda'a) goes so far as to say that no covenants agreed upon by Israel after hearing Divine Speech can be seen as voluntary commitments; "G-d's awesome communication in itself creates a situation of duress," it removes the individual's uninhibited power of free choice.

The question then remains; are we or are we not obligated to keep the commandments of Torah? In the previously cited Talmudic passage, Rava explains why we remain obligated: "Despite the (coercion at Sinai), Israel freely accepted the Torah in the days of Ahashverosh, as it says, 'the Jews confirmed and received' (Esther 9:27) that is, they confirmed then what they had previously received (at Sinai)"

Allow me to explain. During the Biblical period, Israel was in diapers, slowly advancing to bar-mitzvah. It was essential that our Parent-in-Heaven assume center stage by establishing our status as a free nation and communicating His Torah as our Divine Constitution and Mission Statement.

As we developed, from the Second Commonwealth and onwards, we were given the charge to complete an incomplete world and also to complete an incomplete Torah which had to remain relevant through changing times and circumstances (the Oral Law, interpretations by the Sages of every age). From then on, we became responsible to lead ourselves and the world in the path toward redemption.

The story of Esther took place and was written just as the period of the second commonwealth was about to begin. G-d's name does not appear in the Scroll of Esther; He has a significant role, but He remains behind the curtain, and the crucial decisions must be made by the human participants: Esther, Mordecai and Haman. The victory of Torah Jewry over Persian assimilation, which takes place in the Scroll of Esther demonstrates the new age which is dawning. The Scroll of Esther confirmed the Jewish acceptance

of Torah commitment as an act of free choice even without the overwhelming Divine Presence taking center stage. © 2013 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Lord, so to speak, bemoans to Moshe the lack of faith exhibited by him and the Jewish people during the moments of crisis in their encounter with Pharaoh and their Egyptian taskmasters. G-d points out that the previous generations of the founders of the Jewish people never wavered in their faith and belief that G-d's covenant would be fulfilled, no matter how harsh the circumstances of their lives were.

And now when the process of redemption from Egyptian slavery is already underway, whenever there is a hitch or a delay or an apparent reversal, the complaint immediately arises against G-d and against Moshe as well. Now the Torah itself clearly makes allowances for this behavior due to the bone -- crushing physical work imposed on the Jewish slaves by their Egyptian taskmasters.

It is difficult to be optimistic when one's back is being whipped. Nevertheless, the Lord's reproof of Moshe and of Israel is recorded for us in strong terms in the opening verses of this week's Torah reading. G-d, so to speak, is pointing out to Moshe the existence of a generational disconnect. The previous generations were strong in belief and faith and possessed patience and fortitude in the face of all difficulties.

Moshe's generation and in fact many Jewish generations throughout history demand action and that action must be immediate. Their faith is conditioned upon seeing and experiencing immediate results and the changed society and world that they desire. Otherwise they are prepared to abandon ship. That is what the prophet means when he chides Israel by saying that "your goodness and faith resemble the clouds of the morning that soon burn off when the sun rises."

Faith to be effective has to also be long-lasting. Since mortality limits our vision and naturally makes us impatient it is often difficult for us to see the big picture and witness the unfolding of a long-range historical process. Our generation, unlike those of our predecessors -- even our immediate predecessors -- has rightly been dubbed the "now generation." Instant gratification is not only demanded but is expected and when it does not happen our faith is sorely tested, if not even diminished.

Patience and faith is the essence of G-d's message to Moshe. Part of Moshe's leadership task will now be to instill this sense of patience and long lasting faith within the psyche and soul of the Jewish people. This daunting task will take forty years of constant challenges and withering experiences before it will see results and accomplishments. At the end of the forty

year period -- forty years after the Exodus from Egypt -- Moshe will proclaim that the Jewish people have finally attained an understanding heart and an appreciation of the historical journey upon which the Lord has sent them.

Both patience and faith are difficult traits to acquire and they remain very fragile even after they have been acquired. But in all areas of human life -- marriage, children, professional occupations, business and commerce, government and politics, diplomacy and conflict -- patience and faith are the necessary tools to achieve success. That is the message that G-d communicates to Moshe and to Israel in all of its generations and circumstances in this week's parsha. © 2013 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Raise the Baton!

In this week's portion, once again, Hashem sent Moshe and Ahron to Pharaoh in a second effort to sway his heart and have him change his mind to let the Hebrews leave Egypt. Unlike the unembellished appeal in last week's portion, this time they were equipped with more than pleas -- this time they came with miracles. Standing in front of the ruler, Ahron threw his stick down and it turned into a snake. Pharaoh was not impressed. He countered with a little magic of his own. His sorcerers matched the miraculous stick-to-snake act by having his spooks throw down their sticks and by transforming them into snakes.

Ahron one-upped the Egyptian magicians as his stick swallowed all of their sticks. But that obviously was not enough. Pharaoh's heart was once again hardened and he refused to let the Jews leave Egypt. And so, Hashem decided that the benign miracles would not be effective with the stubborn king. It was time for the heavy artillery -- the ten plagues.

Hashem commands Moshe: "Go to Pharaoh in the morning -- behold! He goes out to the water -- and you shall stand opposite him at the river's bank, and the staff that was turned into a snake you shall take in your hand" (Exodus 7:15). A simple question bothers me. Moshe had only one special stick. There are various Midrashic explanations as to its origin, but everyone agrees it was a unique one. It was a special one with special powers. Moshe may have been a leader of many hats, but he only carried one stick. Why did Hashem need to define the stick as the one that turned into a snake? He could have simply asked Moshe to come with his stick. Moshe would surely have known exactly which stick Hashem wanted him to take.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson is better known to us as Lewis Carroll, author of the 1865 children's fantasy story, *Alice in Wonderland*. What most of us do

not know about him was that he was also a brilliant mathematician spending more than twenty-five years teaching at Oxford University.

An apocryphal story relates that Queen Victoria was so delighted after reading his fantasy-laced novel, *Alice in Wonderland* that she asked him to send her any other works penned by the same quill. Dodgson responded immediately, but the Queen was somewhat taken aback when she received two of his other works, *Syllabus of Plane Algebraical Geometry* and *An Elementary Treatise on Determinants*.

We tend to look at the world and forget that routine natural events are also replete with awe-inspiring miracles and supernatural properties. We become acclimated to the mundane miracles of life so that we also shrug when Hashem turns proverbial sticks into proverbial snakes. We feel we can do that too!

Therefore, before orchestrating the largest insubordination of natural law in world history, by turning the flowing Nile into a virtual blood bath, Moshe is told to bring with him the stick that Pharaoh only considered to be capable of performing minor miracles. Moshe is told that the same stick that was not able to impress Pharaoh has the ability to shatter the Egyptian economy and with it the haughty attitude that kept the Hebrew nation enslaved.

Sometimes our marvel of G-d's wonders is dulled by the scoffing of the naysayers. They lead us to forget that the same power behind the minor miracles of life are the generators of great miracles that we can hardly fathom and surely not anticipate! Even the incomprehensible miracle of life itself is blunted by its ongoing regularity. Our emotions become bored and our intellect spoiled with the majestic events that are considered trite by their regular reoccurrence. And when we fail to see the greatness of genius in the wonderland in which we live, we expect G-d to send us a more prominent message. But we must never forget that even the most awe-inspiring message comes from the same Hand and Stick that bring us the simplest benign worms! © 2013 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

If the Egyptian magicians did not have godly powers, how were they able to perform miraculous feats and match Moshe (Moses) act for act by duplicating the first two plagues? A closer look at the text reveals that these people did not actually duplicate the acts, for they were charlatans.

In the plague of blood, the Torah states: "And Moshe and Aharon (Aaron) lifted up their rod...and all of the waters turned to blood." (Exodus 7:20) Soon after, the Torah states: "And the Egyptians did in like manner with their secret arts (lateihem)." (Exodus 7:22) Here, the magicians apparently proved that Moshe and Aharon's powers were limited as they easily performed

the same feat. But the fraud surfaces from the precise language of this verse. First, the expression in "like manner" may mean that the Egyptian magicians were not able to bring forth blood at all, they merely copied the way Moshe and Aharon moved their hands.

Second, the Hebrew for "secret arts" – lateihem, literally means, "with a flash of fire." The magicians, using the cover of fire, moved their hands quickly to make it appear as if they brought forth blood, when indeed they did not.

This same language ("like manner" and "secret arts") is found prior to the plague of blood (when the rod is turned into a serpent) (Exodus 7:11) and in the second plague of frogs (Exodus 8:3) as well.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch points out that if the magicians were truly powerful and were looking after Egypt's best interests, they would have used their powers to remove the plague altogether. Instead, they seem to bring more of it to Egypt. In fact, Rabbi Hirsch suggests that they produced nothing new. They merely took a bit of the blood that Moshe and Aharon brought forth and deceptively placed it before Pharaoh.

By the third plague, Pharaoh finally catches on to the reality. After Egypt is full of lice, he turns to his magicians demanding that they use their powers to help remove the swarm. The magicians were obviously unable to follow the order. Hence, the Torah states that the Egyptians attempted to remove (lehozi) the lice but could not. (Exodus 8:14) This finally led to an admission by the magicians that their abilities never did and never could match those of G-d for the plagues revealed the true power of the true G-d. (Exodus 8:15) The gig was truly up.

Charlatans in any realm, whether they be in the world of magic, in the world of business or the world of politics, cannot fool people forever. In the end, their sham will be revealed, and the truth will become apparent not only to everyone around them, but even to themselves. © 2012 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Moshe was 80 years old, and Aharon was 83 years old, when they spoke with Pharaoh” (Sh’mos 7:7). My 6th grade son came home last week with the following "bumba question of the week" from his rebbe: If Moshe was 80 before the plagues started, and the "judgment" against Egypt lasted for a year (see Eduyos 2:10), and the nation spent 40 years in the desert, when Moshe died he should have been 121 (80+1+40), not 120 (which is how old the Torah says he was when he died, see D'varim 34:7). Marvin Stiefel posed this question a few months ago to his email list, providing the sources for each of the numbers. Although I told my son what I thought the

answer was, along with another possibility, he seemed excited when I said maybe I'd write about it this week (I guess because then he could just show this piece to his rebbe instead of having to remember the answers I gave him). After I mentioned this question to my chavrusa, R' Yitzchok Steinfeld, he pointed out that the Aruch L'ner (Rosh Hashanah 2b) and Rav Chaim Kanievsky, sh'lita (Ta'ama d'Kra, Vayelech) both ask the question, leaving it unanswered. (As we shall see, Chasam Sofer discusses it as well.)

This question could also apply to Aharon, as he was 83 before the plagues and 123 when he died in the 40th year in the desert (Bamidbar 33:39). However, he died more than eight months before the 40th anniversary of the exodus from Egypt (see Bamidbar 33:38), so it's certainly possible, even likely, that he would have been 124 had he made it to the end of the 40th year. [I haven't found a source for when Aharon's birthday was; Aruch L'ner assumes that, like Moshe, he died on his birthday, but Abarbanel (Bamidbar 33:39) assumes that his birthday was sometime between Av and Nisan, but not the 1st of Av (when he died).] Moshe, on the other hand, was born on the 7th of Adar and died on the 7th of Adar (Kiddushin 38a; see also Rashi on D'varim 31:2), so we can't attribute the missing year to his birthday being between the calendar day of his death and the calendar day that the nation left Egypt/entered Israel.

One possibility, suggested by Rabbi Michael Taubus in response to Mr. Stiefel's email, is that the expression "80 years old" doesn't mean that his 80th birthday had already past, but that he was in his 80th year (after his 79th birthday, before his 80th birthday). To back up his suggestion, Rabbi Taubus referenced Seder HaDoros, which lists the year Moshe was born as 2368, the year of the exodus as 2448, and the year of the burning bush and when the plagues started (including when Aharon's staff swallowed the magician's staff, which occurred right after we are told that Moshe was "80") as 2447, which was when Moshe was 79 years old (having past his 79th birthday), in his 80th year after being born. [It should be noted that the Torah refers to an animal that is not yet one year old as "ben shana" (see Rashi on Sh'mos 12:5), the same terminology used when giving human ages.] Mr. Stiefel brought a further proof for Rabbi Taubus' suggestion, quoting Ibn Ezra on B'reishis 10:21, where he says explicitly that when the Torah provides ages it includes incomplete years, meaning that Moshe would be referred to as "80" the entire year after his 79th birthday. Based on this, the math would really be 79+1+40=120. (Had Moshe lived one day past his birthday, he would have been listed as having died at 121 rather than 120.) Chasam Sofer (Chasam Sofer al HaTorah, Sh'mos 7:7) suggests this as well, although when he discusses it elsewhere (Sh'uT Chasam Sofer 6:29, quoted in Likutim and in a footnote to Chasam Sofer al HaTorah) he doesn't seem completely comfortable with this

suggestion. Abarbanel (Bamidbar 33:39) also seems to be working with this assumption.

If this was how ages are to be understood, we would expect this to be consistent throughout the Torah. For example, when the Torah says Avraham was 100 years old when Yitzchok was born (B'reishis 21:5), it would mean he was in his 100th year, but had only celebrated his 99th birthday (unless Yitzchok was born on Avraham's birthday, in which case it was the day he turned 100 years old). When the Torah says that in order to be counted for the census one had to be "from twenty years old and up" (Bamidbar 1:3) it should therefore mean "past his 19th birthday," not "past his 20th birthday." However, if that were the case, when the Levi'im were counted "from one month and up" (Bamidbar 3:15; see also 3:40), it would mean "from before they are a month old and older," or from the moment they were born. Similarly, when setting the values for donations, those "from one month until five years" (Vayikra 27:6) would mean from birth until after their fifth birthday. Why call it "from one month" if it really means "from the time they are born"? Even though we aren't fully confident that an infant will survive until they have lived for a month, if the term "ben chodesh" is parallel to how we are understanding "ben esrim," it would refer to infants who hadn't yet lived for a month, not those who have. Because of this, Chasam Sofer (in his responsa) differentiates between when an age is given and when an age range is given (i.e. including the expressions "from" and "and up"), with the latter referring to that number birthday and the former referring to the year after the previous birthday. When Moshe says "today I am 120" (D'varim 31:2), Chasam Sofer understands it to fit into the latter category, although I'm not sure why. (Nor can I explain how he deals with D'varim 34:7.) However, since both of those statements refer to his actual birthday, he hadn't yet started his "121st year," so there is no need to fit it into only one category.

The common explanation for "ben" something is how many birthdays have been celebrated, not what year of life the person is in; I'm not sure that this question (and others like it, such as the ones Ibn Ezra is addressing) is reason enough to change how we understand this very common expression, which is used throughout both biblical and rabbinical literature.

Elsewhere (D'rashos I, page 117a), Chasam Sofer suggests another possibility, based on whether ages are counted by birthdays or by calendar years. If everyone's "age" changes at the beginning of the calendar year (Tishray; see Rashi on Sh'mos 30:16), Moshe would have lived for 121 years when he died (80+1+40), but was considered 120 until the next Tishray (which he didn't live to see). Although it was not yet Tishray when the Egyptians' "year of judgment" started either, Chasam Sofer suggests that before the Torah was given, ages were counted from birthday to birthday, not from Tishray to Tishray. Therefore, when it

says that Moshe was "80" when he spoke to Pharaoh, it meant that his 80th birthday had passed, but when it gave his age when he died, it was using the "new" method of counting, i.e. how many Tishrays had passed, and there had only been 120. As we shall see, it is not clear that it wasn't already Tishray (or later) when the Torah says Moshe was 80 years old. Additionally, some are not comfortable with the "accounting method" changing without any indication that how we calculate ages had changed.

This question started because of the Talmudic statement that the judgment of Egypt lasted a year, a statement that appears in Seder Olam (3) as well. Since the ages of Moshe and Aharon were given before the plagues started, the assumption was that this was when the year of judgment started too. However, Seder Olam (5) says explicitly that the "year of judgment" started from the burning bush (see Rabbeinu Bachye on Sh'mos 10:5, who says that it started when Pharaoh was warned that G-d would kill his firstborn if he didn't listen). After returning to Midyan to get his family and to say goodbye to his father-in-law (Sh'mos 4:18-20), Moshe met Aharon and went to Pharaoh the first time (Sh'mos 5:1). This caused things to get worse (Sh'mos 5:5-9), after which Moshe left Egypt and "returned to G-d" to complain about it (5:22-23). Sh'mos Rabbah (5:19) tells us that Moshe returned to Midyan for six months (other versions have it as three months), which means that when Moshe returned (again) from Midyan, it was well into the "year of judgment" (perhaps even after Tishray). It was at this point that the Torah tells us that Moshe was 80 and Aharon was 123.

The wording of the "snapshot in time" where these ages were given is "when they spoke to Pharaoh." Although Or Hachayim says that this refers to when they first started speaking to Pharaoh, the syntax (present tense rather than past tense) indicates that it was an ongoing conversation with Pharaoh that is being referred to. It doesn't say that this is how old they were when G-d sent them to Pharaoh (see Netziv), but when they were speaking with him. The previous verse, which is said in the past tense, refers to the entire process, not just the beginning of the process ("and Moshe and Aharon did all that G-d commanded them"); the plagues, Pharaoh not responding to them, and the Children of Israel leaving Egypt (Sh'mos 7:3-5) are all included in what Moshe and Aharon "did." It would therefore seem that the expression "when they were speaking with Pharaoh" refers to the entire process as well, up to and including when the nation was freed from slavery.

According to Ramban (Sh'mos 10:4), the last three plagues occurred in the month of Nissan, with the sixth plague occurring in Adar (Moshe's birth month). Since a number of the plagues (and, it could be argued, the main ones, as they brought about the redemption) came after Moshe's 80th birthday, when the Torah describes his age during the redemption process, and

this was his age after the goal was achieved (with the goal being mentioned right before his age), this is the age that is given. [This works with Seder HaDoros' chronology, as the burning bush (et al) did occur in 2447.] Moshe did turn 80 during the period of time that he spoke with Pharaoh, and (almost) 40 years after that conversation ended, Moshe turned 120. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The Holy One, Blessed be He, describes the stages of the redemption to Bnei Yisrael. Four different terms are used to describe the stages, and as a symbol of them we drink four cups of wine on the night of the Seder. But the pinnacle of them all is the fifth stage, "And I will bring you to the land... I am G-d" [Shemot 6:8]. This is symbolized by a cup set aside for the Prophet Elihau.

Corresponding to this, we read in the Haftara this week, "Here is what G-d says: When I gather the House of Yisrael from among the nations where I dispersed them, I will be sanctified through them in the eyes of the nations and they will dwell on their land." [Yechezkel 28:25]. What is there about the ingathering of the exiles that is an inherent sanctification of the Holy Name?

This is explained by the continuation, in Chapter 36. "The House of Yisrael dwells on their land, and they have defiled it... And I dispersed them among the other nations, and they were dispersed among them... And he came to the nations where they came to, and they desecrated My Holy Name, saying about them, these are the nation of G-d, but they have left the land. And I will have pity on My Holy Name... And I will sanctify My Name, which has been defiled among the other nations... And the nations will know that I am G-d... And I will take you from among the nations, and I will gather you from all the lands, and I will bring you to your land..." [36:17-24]. What is there about the dispersion of Bnei Yisrael among the other nations that is a desecration of the Holy Name in and of itself? After all, the other nations are right when they say that Bnei Yisrael have been sent into exile because of their sins!

We note also that all the verbs in the passage are in plural ("they dwell... they defiled") except for one phrase, in singular: "And he came to the nations where they came to..." And why the repetition, "he came... where they came..."?

The sages teach us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, tells the angels that He is descending below in order to hear the reaction of the nations of the world about the exile. And what He hears is not only that they do not see the exile as a punishment but their conclusion is, "If these are the nation of G-d, why have

they left the land?" That is, until this point everybody knew that Yisrael is the chosen people, but the fact that they were forced to leave the land shows that they were replaced by others. This was in fact the proof used by the Christians to show that they had replaced the nation of Yisrael. And this is indeed a great desecration, to believe that G-d would break His promise. That is why it is written, "He came," in the singular -- that G-d came to the nations and heard them. He therefore decided to sanctify the Divine Name by gathering His people back into the land, showing that the prophecies in the books of the prophets refer to Yisrael and not to any other nation.

And in fact our generation was privileged to see the great sanctification of the Name, when out of the ashes of the furnaces we were able to wake up and return to our land. The nations of the world see what happened and rub their eyes in surprise in disbelief. The GRA commanded his followers to return to the land before the year 5600 (1840), about a hundred and seventy years ago, to correspond to the verse, "The sound of the dove can be heard in our land" [Shir Hashirim 2:12], where the numerical value of "tor" -- a dove -- is 600 (without the letter vav). At the time about six thousand Jews lived in Eretz Yisrael. About seventy years later, at the time of the Balfour Declaration, there were already about sixty thousand Jews living here. In 5708 (1948) six hundred thousand Jews lived here, and today there are more than six million. Can there be any greater proof that the Holy One, Blessed be He, guides the events of the world and of His nation, Yisrael? © 2013 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet. Translated by Moshe Goldberg

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Being born and bred in England has its advantages, as the British culture inculcates the importance of conducting oneself in a dignified, gentlemanly fashion. Having been raised in this environment by parents who themselves were products of it, my siblings and I absorbed at an early age the standard etiquette: saying please, thank you; maintaining silence when appropriate, and in general, being well-behaved little children. There was little tolerance in our home for any behavior that was out of step. Although at the time I resented it, I now appreciate this genteel upbringing.

In our own family, my wife and I dispensed with many of the formalities we were raised with. But the essentials remain firmly in place. Without "please," a child will not get their serving at the dinner table; without "thank you," it may be taken away. Yet, I sometimes wonder whether the training we try to instill is merely superficial, as one might train an animal to perform.

What makes routine expressions of appreciation more than perfunctory and dutiful? How can we invest true feeling and meaning into what seem to be little more than politically correct clichés?

My wife and I realized over time that teaching a correct code of conduct is more than mere behavior-conditioning. For deep within the recesses of every child is a neshama that understands the need for appreciation and acknowledgment. When we train children in good behavior patterns, our hope is that this will arouse the inner consciousness within them, and with time, shape their value system as well.

As children mature, expressing thanks will hopefully be far more than a mechanical, rote formula. It will be a tool to arouse the heart to gratitude. But that is only when our educational program is motivated by a genuine desire to implant proper values, not merely an exercise in political correctness.

As our sages tell us, *chitzonius me'orres es hapnimius*, external actions can, with the proper motivation, arouse our inner spiritual values.

The commentaries tell us that this message can help us understand one of the more challenging and complex details in this week's parsha.

We read how Hakadosh Baruch Hu hardened Pharaoh's heart after he continuously defied Moshe's message and Hashem's command. How then did Pharaoh exercise freedom of choice, ask the classical commentaries. With a Divinely hardened heart, what hope was there that he could reform his behavior?

The commentaries explain that once Pharaoh had demonstrated that he was incorrigibly evil and had not the slightest interest in acknowledging Hashem, forcing his submission to the Divine will would be worthless. Far from indicating a true surrender to Hashem's will, Pharaoh's submission would be merely a panicky desire to escape pain and punishment.

This is a prime example of when the "*chitzonius*"-the outer behavior-fails to influence the inner self, because the person's inner core has been too corrupted.

Once Pharaoh had demonstrated that he was irredeemable, and any act of submission on his part would be purely utilitarian, Hashem hardened his heart even further so that he could not submit even if he wanted to.

Hashem then used him as a tool to perform wonders and miracles for the Jewish people, revealing His presence to the entire world, and enabling all of mankind to see the Creator in creation.

There is a famous halachic ruling of Maimonides that is used to support this theme. The Rambam addresses a recalcitrant husband whom *bais din*, a Jewish court, can physically coerce to provide his wife with a bill of divorce. Of course, we know that any action that is forced cannot be legally, halachic binding and the bill of divorce must be willingly presented by the husband.

However, deep within every Jew is the genuine desire to abide by His Creator's command. Once the *beis din* has determined that a divorce is warranted, the husband's recalcitrance is merely a *fa'ade*. When he is

forced to utter the words, "I desire to give the divorce," he is expressing his innermost yearnings, even though it may seem forced.

In our own lives, we may be performing our daily rituals and obligations in a perfunctory manner. We are in the groove, so to speak, and tend to utter our blessings and prayers at lightning speed, oftentimes lacking the proper intent. Of course, we need to address this deficit and upgrade our performance of mitzvos. But we can gain some consolation in the knowledge that the external expression of compliance with Hashem's will is really a reflection of an innermost longing to achieve closeness with Him, by fulfilling His mitzvos with total and absolute devotion.

Just as our children, who are trained to say "please" and "thank you" in an almost rote manner, will hopefully imbue these amenities with sincerity as they mature, so too we must aim for the time in our own lives that our service of Hashem will similarly be infused with purpose and meaning. © 2013 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

In speaking with Moshe, the Almighty says: "Also, I have heard the outcry of the Children of Israel." What do we learn from the seemingly superfluous word "also"?

Rabbi Moshe Sofer, author of Chasam Sofer explained that "also" indicates that not only G-d, but the people also hear one another's cries. Even though the entire Jewish people were enslaved and afflicted, they did not forget the plight of their fellow man.

Never say to someone, "I have my own problems. I don't want to hear about yours." If two people are in a hospital, each should take an interest in the other's condition.

When Rabbi Dov Bairish Wiedenfield, the Rabbi of Tshabin, heard that his wife died, he felt deep anguish. Immediately afterwards, however, he asked about the welfare of the other woman who was hospitalized in the same room. He expressed his hope that the death of her neighbor would not aggravate her illness.

The mother of Rabbi Simcha Zisel Ziv had a custom to collect money for the poor at funerals. At the funeral of her only daughter, she also collected charity. When asked how she was able to compose herself in

the summit of her grief, she replied, "Just because I am suffering does not mean that the poor have to suffer also."

Based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2013 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com

