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Fateful Memory

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

A common motif in our parshah is the repeated requirement to remember *yetziat Mitzrayim*, our departure from Egypt. The theme appears immediately, at the very beginning, when G-d explains to Moshe that the purpose of the plagues befalling Egypt is "so that you will tell, in the ears of your child and your child's child, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians..." (Shemot, 10:2, per Rashi) It appears again as Hashem commands Moshe regarding the mitzvot of the korban pesach, as a reminder of the Exodus. (ibid. 12:25-28) It is again reiterated in the last two paragraphs of the parshah, with additional commandments aimed at ensuring that *yetziat Mitzrayim* won't be forgotten: sanctification of the firstborn, and the mitzvah of tefillin.

Why is remembering *yetziat Mitzrayim* so crucial?

A window into the past

The Torah itself provides one obvious answer, in the second sentence of our parshah: "And you will know that I am Hashem". (ibid. 10:2) In other words, the memory of the miraculous event serves to preserve our awareness of G-d's omnipotence, as revealed during the ten plagues and the splitting of the sea which followed; of His providence, as evidenced by the distinction between Egyptian and Israelite (ibid. 11:7); and of His direct involvement in human history, as exemplified in the plague of the firstborn - "I and not a messenger, I and not an angel." (The Haggadah) Hashem Himself uses *yetziat Mitzrayim* as his 'business card', opening the ten commandments with the declaration, "I am Hashem

your G-d who took you out of Egypt, from the house of slaves", rather than present himself as Creator.

Further, it seems that our understanding of ourselves is also shaped by our memory of *yetziat Mitzrayim*. In the famous biblical passage (Devarim 26:5-8) we quote every year at the *seder*, the farmer brings his first fruits to the Beit Hamikdash and tells the national foundation story, dwelling at length on *yetziat Mitzrayim*.

Our nation's identity was formed in Egypt, conceived in the miseries of hard labour and born at Yam Suf; and to there we return once a year as well as every day, to remind ourselves who are we, as well as who is our G-d.

However, these important and meaningful lessons are still lacking. Within their scope, the moment of direct knowledge and reorganization is lost in the past, and the best we can do is to revive it. It is clear that however sincere and dedicated we are in our efforts to see ourselves as having just left Egypt, we will never be able to experience the same emotions felt by that generation, by the maid who saw on Yam Suf what the prophet Yechezkel ben Buzi was never able to see. (Rashi to Shemot 15:2) If this is all we have, then our moment of glory is behind us, and our religious deeds are archaeological attempts to retrieve that which has already passed. [See Maamarei haRa"ayah of Rav Kook, page 18.]

A keyhole to the future

Indeed, there is another way in which the memory of *yetziat Mitzrayim*

benefits us, not merely as a window to a long gone past, but also as a keyhole through which the light of the future can penetrate.

When the child asks his father about the special mitzvot of Pesach, the father responds (Shemot 13:8), "Because of these mitzvot, Hashem acted for me when I left Egypt." As Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra notes, the order of cause-and-effect should have been, "I am performing these mitzvot because G-d took me out of Egypt." However, the Torah states the reverse: G-d took us out of Egypt so that we would remember that he did so! In other words, Ibn Ezra sees *yetziat Mitzrayim*, the past, as serving the present and the future!

The importance of the Exodus, according to this, is as the trigger which started a still-unfinished process. The moment of redemption gave us a glimpse into what freedom can mean and into the true meaning of Revelation, into the right attitude toward the stranger and into the terrible outcome of not developing it. The memory of *yetziat Mitzrayim* is not only a memory of one historical event, but a roadmap to the final redemption.

"Behold, days are coming, says Hashem, and it shall no longer be said, 'Hashem, Who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt', but, 'Hashem, Who brought up the children of Israel from the north, and from all of the lands where He had driven them'." (Yirmiyahu 16:14-15)

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Who is the prophet of our Haftorah?

Yirmiyahu was the last major prophet of the first Beit haMikdash, and his experience may well have been the most bitter of any prophet in Tanach. He lived in the 6th century BCE, and his task was to warn the Jews of his day that time was short and destruction was coming. The nation did not heed Yirmiyahu's words; instead, they beat him and imprisoned him (Yirmiyahu 20 and 37), threw him into a cistern (ibid 38) and threatened to kill him. (ibid)

Rembrandt's *Jeremiah Weeping Over the Destruction of Jerusalem* is hauntingly evocative of the mood of Yirmiyahu's book; the image of the despairing prophet of G-d, leaning upon his book of warnings, backlit by flame and devastation, has captured the imagination of millions over the past four centuries. Indeed, the word "jeremiad" was coined to refer to a prophecy of doom and gloom. Throughout his misery, though, Yirmiyahu carried with him a Divine promise, "I am with you, to save you." (ibid 1:8)

At times, Yirmiyahu was instructed to act out scenes in order to convey a message to the nation. These ranged from wearing a yoke upon his neck to demonstrate the enslavement of the Jews by the Babylonians (ibid 27), to smashing a jug to demonstrate the smashing of Judea (19), to purchasing a

field and preserving the deed in order to demonstrate our eventual return to the land. (32)

According to the Talmud (Bava Batra 15a), Yirmiyahu authored his own book, the book of Melachim, and the book of Eichah.

What is the message of our haftorah?

Yirmiyahu depicts Egypt as a pretty calf, fat and pampered, (46:20-21) and he emphasizes an anticipated Babylonian demolition of her idols as well as her population. (46:25) This is the link between the haftorah and our parshah, which also depicts the destruction of Egypt and its idols.

The prophets of the 7th and 6th century BCE saw the growing Babylonian Empire as a Divine tool, a sword to be wielded in punishment of the rapacious Assyrians and idolatrous Egyptians. So Nachum 2:12-14 is understood by some commentators as a direct prediction that G-d would bring the Babylonians – symbolized by a lion – to destroy Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. And so Yirmiyahu predicted in our haftorah, "I will give them into the hand of those who seek their lives, in the hand of Nevuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, and in the hand of his servants." (46:26)

The haftorah also supports a warning Yirmiyahu continually expressed to the Jews, that they should not depend upon Egypt as a source of salvation from the Babylonians. To the end, there were Jews who hoped to ally themselves with Egypt and so escape Divine retribution at the hands of Nevuchadrezzar's forces, but they were unsuccessful.

What is that king's name?

The Babylonian king of our haftorah is named Nevuchadrezzar, and this is how his name is presented in much of the book of Yirmiyahu and throughout the book of Yechezkel. On the other hand, the same king is named Nevuchadnezzer in some passages in Yirmiyahu, as well as in Daniel, Ezra, Nechemiah and Divrei haYamim.

According to scholars of ancient languages, the more accurate version of the king's name is Nevuchadrezzar, and it is Akkadian. [Akkadian was the central Babylonian tongue before Aramaic became dominant.] It means, "May Nebo [a Babylonian deity] protect my heir."

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**613 Mitzvot: #338
Verbal Abuse**

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Mitzvah 338 instructs us to avoid *onaat devarim*, or verbal abuse. Examples include reminding a person of his sinful past, playing painful tricks on others, and misleading people. (For greater background and more examples, see Bava Metzia 58b-59b.)

The Sefer haChinuch writes regarding the punishment for violating this mitzvah, "One who violates this prohibition is not lashed, for there is no physical deed, but the Master who commanded us in this mitzvah can give many lashes even without a leather whip."

Despite the Torah's severe outlook regarding verbal abuse, one is permitted to respond to aggressors in kind. As the Sefer haChinuch writes, "This law does not mean that if one Jew were to initiate and wickedly pain another verbally, that the recipient could not respond; it is impossible to be like a stone which cannot be overturned. Further, one's silence would be taken as admission to the insults! In truth, the Torah will not command someone to be a silent stone before those who insult him, as he is before those who bless him. The Torah only instructs us to distance ourselves from this trait, and not to start quarrels and insult other people.

Through this a person will be saved from such matters, for one who is not aggressive will not be insulted by others, other than total fools – and one should ignore fools."

Having acknowledged that one may respond to another person's verbal abuse, the Sefer haChinuch cautions us to be careful about how we do it: "Should an abuser compel one to respond, it would be appropriate for a wise person to respond pleasantly, without great rage, for rage rests in the bosom of fools (Kohelet 7:9). One should apologize to those who hear his insults, placing the burden upon the abuser; this is the way of good people... However, the piety of some people is so great that they do not wish to put themselves in this halachic category [permitting] responding to their abusers, lest their anger build and spread inappropriately. Regarding them the sages have said (Shabbat 88b), 'Those who are shamed and do not shame, who hear their insults and do not respond – upon them Shoftim 5:31 says, 'Those who love Him are like the Sun's emergence, in its strength.'"

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Biography

Rabbi Moshe ben Yosef di Trani (Mabit)

Rabbi Meir Lipchitz

Rabbi Moshe ben Yosef di Trani, the Mabit, was born in 1505 in Salonika. Son of Castillian Jews who were Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497, his family contained many illustrious Rabbis. His father, Rabbi Yosef, was a leading scholar in Salonika, and his uncle, Rabbi Aharon, was the leading Rabbi in Adrianople. His first cousin was Rabbi Avraham di Biton, author of the *Lechem Mishneh* on the Rambam's Mishneh Torah.

As a child, young Moshe was sent to study in his uncle's Yeshiva in Adrianople, and at the tender age of sixteen he moved to Tzfat to complete his studies under Rabbi Yaakov Berab.

It was in Tzfat that Rabbi Moshe truly flourished. At the time, Rabbi Yaakov Berab was attempting to re-establish *semichah*, the official rabbinic ordination that had not been practiced in over a millennium. Rabbi Moshe was among the first to receive *semichah*, along with such giants as Rabbi Yosef Caro, the author of the Shulchan Aruch; the kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordevero; and Rabbi Moshe Galanti.

As a leading scholar in both the revealed and hidden Torah of the day, Rabbi Moshe ben Yosef di Trani served on the rabbinical court of Tzfat. In 1525, he became the rabbi of Tzfat, until he moved to Jerusalem in 1535.

Rabbi Moshe ben Yosef di Trani is perhaps best known under the name "Mabit", an acronym using his initials; his responsa were published under the name "Responsa of the Mabit". The Mabit's son, Rabbi Yosef di Trani (Maharit), was one of the leading halachic authorities of the subsequent generation.

Most famous among the Mabit's writings are his commentary on the Rambam, entitled "Kiryat Sefer", and his 842 published responsa. Rabbi Moshe passed away in 1585 in Jerusalem. He was interred in Tzfat.

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Torah and Translation

Why do we pray?

Rabbi Moshe ben Yosef di Trani

Beit Elokim, Shaar haTefillah 2

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

וכמו שצריך לסדר שבת קודם, צריך לתת הודאה בסוף על חלקו שהוא כעבד שקבל פרס מרבו שמשבחו והולך לו, כמו שדרשו ז"ל (ברכות לד) וצריך לתת טעם למה אמרו שהוא כעבד שקבל פרס מרבו שמשבחו והולך לו, שנראה שהוא מקוה שמיד תשמע תפלתו!

ואפשר שהורו לנו כאן עיקר מעקרי התפלה, והוא שלא ישים אדם מגמת פניו כשמתפלל שתשמע תפלתו, וכמו שאמרו (שם לב:), סוף בא לידי כאב לב... ואם כן מה שאמרו כעבד שקבל פרס מרבו הוא שיחשוב בעצמו כאלו כבר נענה כי לא היתה תכלית התפלה כדי שיענה, אלא להורות שאין בעולם למי שראוי להתפלל אלא לקל ית', ולהכיר שהוא חסר מכל וכל בזה העולם ואין מי שימלא חסרונו אלא הוא ית'. ומספר לפניו חסרונותיו, להורות זה הענין, וסוף השכר לבוא, אבל לא שתהיה התפלה לתכלית השגת המבוקש, שנראה שאם היה יודע שלא יהיה נענה באותה התפלה לא היה אומר אותה.

ובזה יתורץ דבר קשה בענין התפלה שנראה דבר בלתי הגון ונאה לשאול שאלה א' כמה פעמים, כי לפני מלך בשר ודם אם ישאלו ממנו דבר א' פעמים או שלש יחרה לו על השואל, כי אם היה רוצה המלך להשלים לו שאלתו בפעם הראשונה או השניה היה משלים חפצו, ואם כן ההפצר הוא דבר מותר ומזיק להשאלה, ואנחנו מתפללים לקל בכל יום ערב ובקר וצהרים תפלה א', י"ח ברכות שתקנו, וגם כי אין אנחנו נענים ברובם, אין אנו נמנעים מלאומרם בכל יום! אלא שכוונת התפלה היא להכיר ולהורות כי אין בעולם למי שראוי להתפלל כי אם לו ית'... ודי הטוב בעיניו יעשה

Just as one must arrange praise first, so one must thank at the end for his lot, like a servant who has received a gift from his master, and who then praises him and departs, as the Sages taught. (Berachot 34) One must explain, though, why they said that one is like a servant who has received a gift from his master, who praises him and departs. Apparently, [this means] one expects his prayer to be heard immediately!

Perhaps they taught us here one of the fundamentals of prayer: That one should not make his goal, in praying, that his prayer be heard; as they taught (Berachot 32b), such a person will come to heartache... If so, then when they said "like a servant who has received a gift from his master," they meant he should **view himself as though** he had already been answered. The goal of prayer is **not** to be answered, but to demonstrate that we should pray to no one other than G-d, that we lack so much in this world and only G-d can fill in that which we lack. One speaks before G-d of his lacking in order to demonstrate this. The reward will come in the end, but the goal of prayer is not achievement of a sought-after item, such that one would not pray if he knew that he would not be answered with that prayer.

This may resolve a difficult matter regarding prayer. It appears inappropriate and unseemly to ask for the same thing multiple times; if one were to ask a flesh and blood king for the same item twice or three times, he [the king] would be angry at the supplicant! Had the king wished to honour his request on the first or second time, he would have honoured his request, and persisting would be excessive and harmful to the request. And [yet] we pray to G-d daily, evening, morning and afternoon, with the same prayer, the eighteen enacted blessings! Even though we are not answered for most of them, we do not stop saying them daily! But the intent of prayer is to recognize and demonstrate that we should pray to no one other than Him... and G-d will do as good in His eyes.

This Week in Israeli History: Shevat 5 1948 - The Convoy of the Lamed Hei **Adam Frieberg**

5 Shevat is Monday

Four kibbutzim in Gush Etzion were under siege, cut off from access to supplies, during the War of Independence. After a particularly brutal Arab attack on these kibbutzim on January 14th, 1948, 38 young men, most of them students at Hebrew University and acting with Haganah guidance, set out on foot to deliver supplies.

They set out on the night of January 15th, 1948, hoping to reach the communities before sunrise. One sprained his ankle, an event that would save his life, and returned to Jerusalem with two others. The other 35 students, led by Danny Mass, continued on their mission.

Despite their best efforts, the group was caught. As David Ben-Gurion told it in his eulogy for the 35, they were seen by an Arab shepherd. They mercifully let the shepherd go, but the shepherd then reported their presence. However, it

seems that the more accurate account is that they were detected by two Arab women. The women quickly informed the surrounding towns, and hundreds of armed villagers, as well as hundreds of Arabs from a nearby training base, surrounded them. A fight ensued, but after the "Lamed Hei" (as these 35 men became known) ran out of ammunition, they were all killed.

The fate of the 35 was not known until the British reported the details, and their bodies were not returned until after the War of Independence ended. Twelve of the bodies were unrecognizable; Rabbi Aryeh Levin performed a rare *goral haGra* ceremony, a kabalistic rite whereby the bodies were identified before being buried. . May the souls of these 35 young men, together with all those who have fallen defending our homeland, be bound up in the bond of eternal life.

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Highlights for January 4 – January 10 / 3 Shevat - 9 Shevat

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
SHABBAT JAN. 4				
Before minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Daf Yomi	BAYT	
After minchah	Adam Frieberg	Rejoicing at the downfall of our enemies	Shaarei Tefillah	
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah: Intermarriage	BAYT	
6:45 PM	Adam Frieberg	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	
MONDAY JAN. 6				
8:00 PM	Adam Frieberg	Cooking on Shabbat	Shaarei Shomayim	Community Beit Midrash Night
8:00 PM	Josh Gutenberg	Parshah		
8:00 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Medical Halachah		
8:00 PM	Rav Shlomo Gemara	Prophets of Israel	Bnai Torah	
TUESDAY JAN. 7				
12:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Living Midrash	Shaarei Shomayim	
8:00 PM	Adam Frieberg	Exploring Laws of Shabbat	Shaarei Tefillah	
WED. JAN. 8				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Giants of Sephardic Jewry 1: Rabbi Saadia Gaon	BEBY	<i>with Toronto Morasha</i>
8:00 PM	Adam Frieberg	Kuzari	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Community Beit Midrash Night
8:00 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Business Ethics: Lending		
9:00 PM	R' Yehoshua Weber	Responsa: Surrogacy		
8:45 PM	Josh Gutenberg	A Changing World, Week 1 Yom Tov Sheni shel Galuyot	BAYT	
THU. JAN. 9				
7:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Book of Daniel, Week 1	Kehilat Shaarei Torah	<i>Begins January 16</i>

And coming on Sunday January 12

8:45 AM at BAYT - Dentistry in Tanach, Talmud and Jewish History, with R' Mordechai Torczyner

7:30 PM at Clanton Park - Jewish Ethics vs. Society's Ethics: The Talmud's Most Controversial Cases with Rabbi Mordechai Scheiner, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner and Rabbi Yehoshua Weber