

In this Issue

- **Growth through Torah** by Sarah Maddali
- **Shraga's Weekly** by Rabbi Shraga Simmons
- **Torah for Your Table** by Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis
- **Rabbi Avraham Twerski's Insights on the Torah** by Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski



Even In the Darkest Places

In this week's Torah portion the opening words, "*Bo el'Pharaoh* – Come to Pharaoh" are curious, as the normal terminology would be "Go to Pharaoh".

Rabbi Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, explains that when the Torah uses the word "Come to Pharaoh" God is telling Moses "come with Me to Pharaoh", reassuring Moses that God is right there by his side – delving in the depths of evil and impurity to help Moses in his endeavor and quest of being redeemed.

Our sages tell us that we all have a Moses and Pharaoh within us: a Moses that has aligned our will with God's will, that clings to holiness and righteousness. And then we all have a Pharaoh: the part of us that is obstinate, selfish, stubborn, and keeps us enslaved. While we hope that we are more aligned to the Moses side of us, the Pharaoh side is important to address: to delve in the depths of our psyche – to discover that which is holding us back, that which keeps us enslaved to our self-imposed limitations. This could be based on our physical, emotional, and/or spiritual make up, history, experiences, etc. Often, it's easier to go with the status quo than to shake things up. To address these issues, takes work, determination, and courage.

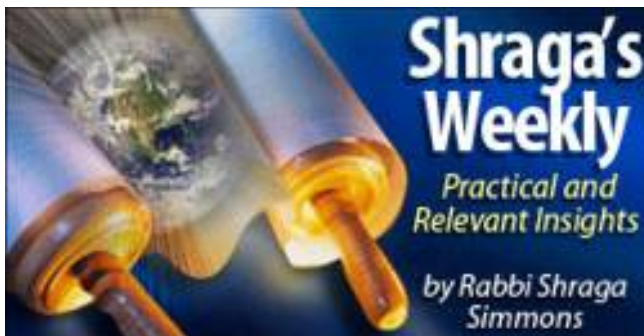
Even though things in Egypt were horrible for the Jews, four fifths of the Jews died during the plague of darkness because they wanted to remain in Egypt. Why would they want to stay there as slaves? Because change is hard. Addressing issues is hard. Getting past limitations is hard. Getting to truly know yourself to see where you can better fulfill your potential, connect to those around you and to God on a deeper, more expansive level, takes a lot of introspection and inner work. It takes change and that's not always easy.

Yet, this is what's needed to get to that next level and what God wants from us. So when we delve into the depths of ourselves, those parts of us that we're apprehensive of exploring, of finding out why we are triggered by certain things in order to heal them, that Pharaoh part of ourselves – God encourages us and tells us that He is right there with us. He created us and created every situation

- tailor made for us out of love to help fulfill our highest potential and to give us the highest pleasure.

Each part of ourselves that keeps us enslaved is just a door, waiting to be unlocked and explored, propelling us to further growth. God is there with us, just as He was with Moses. When we do this introspection and work, often those Pharaoh parts of ourselves are transformed to Moses – those parts of ourselves that then become aligned to God's highest will and fully redeemed.

Exercise: When something triggers you, ask God to help you go inward to see why you were bothered by that. See if there is a bigger underlying reason and ask God to help you heal it.



Who Is a Leader?

The issue of national leadership is grabbing headlines around the world. What better time for learning the Torah's view of leadership than this week's Parsha – which tells of Pharaoh and Moses leading their respective nations.

Let's first look at Pharaoh. God sends one plague after another against the Egyptian people, trying to convince them to "Let My people go." The

water supply is ruined (blood), the animals die (pestilence) and the crops are destroyed (hail). The people themselves are subjected to lice, boils, darkness – you name it. And as the months of plagues wear on, the Egyptian people become more and more convinced that it is in their best interest to let the Jews go!

Everyone is convinced except Pharaoh. Why? Because for Pharaoh, this is not merely a pragmatic issue of saving the country. This has become a personal battle between himself and God. Pharaoh had spent years building up his image as an immortal god; he wasn't about to be upstaged by the God of "those lowly Jewish slaves."

Pharaoh in Pajamas

The issue comes to a head in this week's Parsha, when Moses informs the Egyptians of the upcoming "plague of the firstborn" (Exodus 11:4-8). The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni reports that all the first-borns of Egypt pleaded with Pharaoh to grant the Jews freedom. Pharaoh's response: "No way!"

Pharaoh's ego has taken over and he is now beyond the point of rationality. He is willing to completely destroy his country and himself rather than admit defeat. So as the ship sinks, Pharaoh calls on his people to make a "national sacrifice."

In the meantime, Pharaoh – also a first-born – is negotiating to save his own skin. He begs Moses to pray to God: "*Bless me that I should not die along with the other firstborns!*" (12:32, Rashi)

Pharaoh is in a panic, backed into a corner and trying to figure a way out. In a desperate attempt

to save face, he shifts the blame. The Midrash says that following the plague of the firstborn, he blamed his servants and advisors for the debacle and had them all killed. Pharaoh was over the edge. With nothing left to lose, he'll try anything.

At this point, Pharaoh realizes he has to free the Jewish people. The Torah (Exodus 12:31-32) describes Pharaoh going out in the dead of night, looking for Moshe and Aaron to tell them the news. But in a classic display of Jewish satirical humor, the Jews intentionally give Pharaoh the wrong directions and he gets lost! Imagine the scene of Pharaoh running around frantically in his pajamas in the middle of the night begging the Jews to leave.

In the end, the great leader – the Egyptian god – is completely humiliated. The Talmud (Moed Katan 18a) metaphorically describes Pharaoh as a midget, just two feet tall.

The King's Torah

One of the 613 mitzvot is for each Jew to write his own Torah scroll (or at least to own a printed copy of the Five Books of Moses). But the Torah specifies an unusual mitzvah that applies only to a Jewish king:

"It shall be that when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself TWO copies of the Torah ... It shall remain with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life, so that he will learn to have awe for the Almighty, and to observe all the mitzvot the Torah – so that his heart does not become haughty over his fellow countrymen ..." (Deut. 17:18-20)

It all comes down to ego. Every action of a Jewish leader must be for the good of the people alone. The Torah tells a Jewish leader: Don't fall into the trap. Keep your perspective. Don't forget you are a servant of the people, not the other way around.

This defines the precise difference between Pharaoh and Moses. A person's ability to ignore reality (and even destroy the world) is tested most when his ego is at stake. And the more power, the more likely the danger. Imagine the internal struggle when a world leader has to admit: "I'm wrong; there's a force greater than me that I can't control." Pharaoh cannot acknowledge the supremacy of God. Whereas a true Jewish leader is by definition subjugated to the will of God.

King David writes in Psalms the secret of humility: "*Zivchei Elokim ruach nishbara*" – the sacrifice the Almighty wants is a humble spirit. King David is telling us that the battle of life is to acknowledge God and appreciate all He does for us. Ultimately it's not in your hands. We make the effort, but God signs the checks.

Arrogance Or Humility?

In the material world, the biggest personalities – movie stars, politicians, business tycoons – are usually the most arrogant. Somehow arrogance is regarded as a virtue, a sign of having risen above the others.

In contrast, the higher a person becomes spiritually, the more humble he becomes. As we get closer to God, we become more realistic about our own limitations, vulnerability and mortality. We internalize the reality that every human's

position is tenuous and only God is eternal. Moses was called "the most humble" because when he stood before God he knew his place. Anything else precludes room for God to fit in. That's why the Talmud likens arrogance to idol worship; both push away the presence of God.

Just look at the great rabbis of the last generation and you will see. The house of the Chofetz Chaim was furnished with just one table and a bench. Another great rabbi, when firewood was delivered in the winter to heat his house, personally redistributed the wood to the poor families in town. Jewish leaders are servants of the people. They bear the burdens of the nation.

Leadership Qualifications

How does one become a leader? In the secular world, a person voluntarily runs for office, usually out of a desire for power.

Contrast this to Torah leadership, where there is no term of office and no contracts. The Talmud even suggests that a leader shouldn't accept money from the community he serves – so they don't "own" him. His integrity must not be tainted by salary negotiations or a board of directors.

One becomes a leader only because the people respect his character and trust his judgement. He doesn't go in search of the honor. They approach him and they ask him to become their leader.

In fact, a Torah leader will resist the honor. When first approached by God at the Burning Bush, Moses protested: "*Who am I that I should take the Jews out of Egypt?!*" (Exodus 3:11)

A modern-day example is Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. In the introduction to "Iggress Moshe," his monumental compendium of responsa, Rabbi Feinstein writes: "I would not have volunteered for the job of leading the Jewish people. But since this is the role that God has selected for me, I have no choice but to accept it."

Maimonides lists the qualifications for Jewish leadership: "A Jewish leader must be a scholar in both Torah and secular wisdom, God-fearing, non-materialistic (as a guard against bribes), a seeker of truth, mitzvah observant (i.e. practices what he preaches), and modest." (see Laws of the Sanhedrin 2:7, derived from Yisro's description in Exodus 18:21)

Wouldn't the world be different today if all leaders were accountable to such standards?

The truth is that people get the leader they deserve. If there is to be a revolution against selfish and corrupt, the change must come from below.

Maybe it's time to demand integrity of our government leaders. Because if we let it slide, we all slide down with it.



Exodus: Elevating Yourself and Others

At the beginning of the *parashah*, we are told that one of God's goals for the Exodus from Egypt was to insure that we tell that story to our progeny: "... and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt, and My signs that I placed among them – that you may know that I am Hashem."¹

After reading this passage, an obvious question comes to mind: If we are commanded to teach our children, then it is *they* who will know, but the text reads "that *you*," the teller of the story, may know. Furthermore, the order appears to be reversed: Should not one have knowledge before teaching? The Torah is revealing a profound truth regarding human nature.

The best way to acquire understanding is by accepting responsibility and instructing others, for that experience compels us to study and seek insights. Thus, it is not unusual for men or women who never gave too much thought to their Judaism to undergo a total transformation once they become parents. They realize that if they are to convey something of lasting value, and if they

are to tell "the story" to their children, they must first and foremost possess that knowledge. This logic holds true, not only vis-à-vis raising children; every time we are challenged to explain ourselves as Jews, we are prompted to explore our roots.

THE LEGACY OF PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

The text also shows us how we might best impart this lesson: "Relate in the *ears* of your son" – the teaching must be personalized and intimate. The study of Torah cannot be simply a cerebral experience, but it must be an emotional and spiritual one as well. It must be transmitted from heart to heart with love and passion. It is this that enabled Joseph to retain his faith as a lone Jew in Egypt. Despite his suffering, he never faltered, for engraved upon his heart and mind was the image of his father's teaching.

From this passage our Sages also conclude that if three generations (fathers, sons, and sons' sons) in one family are committed to the study of Torah, we may be assured that the Torah and the mitzvos will never depart from that family. The litmus test of Jewish continuity is whether Judaism continues into the third generation. In our contemporary society, in which demographics demonstrate that so many of our people are assimilating and intermarrying, this question weighs heavily upon us. Every Jew must ask himself, *Am I doing enough to insure that my grandchildren will remain Jews?*

Tragically, ours is a generation that has become spiritually orphaned, and most of us do not have *zeides* who can tell the story. Therefore, we must

seek out our rabbis and Torah teachers and ask them to "relate the story in [our] ears." We have survived the centuries because this commandment to tell the story to our children and our children's children is at the heart of our faith. No matter where destiny may have taken us, we continued to relate that tale and shall continue to do so until the end of time.

THE GIFT OF TIME

This month shall be for you the beginning of months...."² With this proclamation, Hashem endowed us with the greatest of all gifts: *time*.

During our bondage in Egypt, our time did not belong to us. Our days meshed one into the other. Every day was painfully and monotonously the same. In the life of a slave there is no hope, there is no creativity, there is no future. But free men have choices to make, and the most important choice is to *use time wisely* and not fritter it away.

This teaching is especially pertinent to us in the 21st century. While technology and modern scientific inventions have freed us from much drudgery and hard labor, and we have more time at our disposal than our forefathers ever dreamt possible, we have also, unfortunately, come to abuse that time and squander it on pointless, meaningless pursuits.

Our technology has actually created inane programs that serve only to kill time. However, when God spoke to us and entrusted us with that great gift of time, He demanded more from us than just using time expeditiously. He charged us with the command of *sanctifying* time and making

it holy. The court would do this through sanctifying the New Moon.

In contrast to the solar calendar used by much of the Western world, ours is a lunar calendar; in that, too, there is a profound teaching to be found. Unlike the sun, the moon does not generate its own light, but reflects the sun's rays. Similarly, we, the Jewish people, do not put forth our own light, but reflect the light of God; it is not our own will or desire that is the focus of our lives, but rather, the fulfillment of the will of God. Even as the moon illuminates the night, our task is to illuminate the darkness of the world with the Word of God: the Torah.

Another reason why we have a lunar calendar is that the moon waxes and wanes every month; even as the moon renews and regenerates itself, so, too, we have a mandate to rejuvenate and revitalize ourselves through *teshuvah*. This mitzvah of establishing the calendar and thus sanctifying the new month was chosen by God to be among the first of our 613 commandments. Freedom from Egyptian bondage did not mean that we became free from responsibility. It did not mean that we could do what we chose with our time. On the contrary, when God charged us with the mitzvah of sanctifying time, He entrusted us with the greatest of all responsibilities: to utilize every moment of our lives for His Holy Name's sake.

As Jews, we must be ever cognizant that our lives here are temporary and that we must make the most of every moment, for the time will come when God will ask us to give an accounting for every day of our existence. So let us sanctify our

time here on earth through our holidays, through our Sabbaths, through our Torah studies, through our prayers, and through our mitzvos, and let us be ever mindful that there is only one thing that, if lost, can never be retrieved: not money nor precious gems, but the time that God has granted us on this earth.

DO YOU FEEL THE PAIN OF YOUR BRETHREN?

And Pharaoh rose up at midnight.... (Exodus 12:30)

Regarding this passage, Rashi, whose commentaries are always concise and pithy, and whose work is a key component to understanding the Torah, explains: "Pharaoh got up from his bed." It is difficult to understand what Rashi intends to teach with this comment. It seems so obvious; from where, if not from his bed, would Pharaoh have risen? Our beloved father, Rabbi Meshulem HaLevi Jungreis, *z"tl*, told us a story that clarifies Rashi's remark.

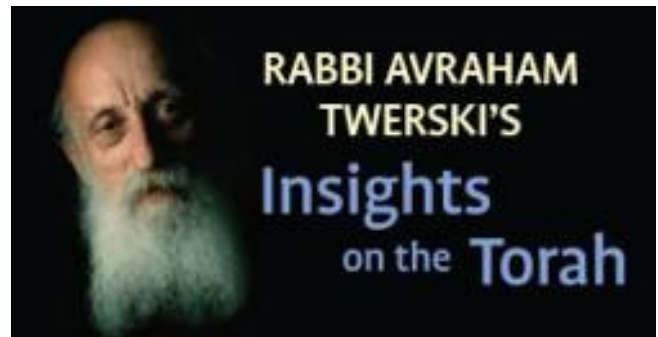
During World War II, Hungary was one of the last countries in Europe to be occupied by the Nazis, but prior to the German takeover, young Jewish men were conscripted for slave labor. Our father's older brother, Yosef Dov, a brilliant young Talmudist, was forced onto a truck one night by the Hungarian military police and taken to a slave-labor camp. From that day, his mother, our grandmother, the Rebbetzin Chaya Sora, o.b.m., refused to go to bed. Instead, she sat in her chair the entire night, weeping and praying for Yosef Dov. The youngest son, our father, was the only one remaining at home. He felt a responsibility to

care for his mother, and ever so gently, he would plead with his mother to lie down and rest.

"How can I rest? How can I lie down in my bed when my Yosef Dov is not here?" she wept. And so, she sat in her chair, night after night, until the day that the Nazis came and deported her and the entire family to Auschwitz, where most of them were murdered in the gas chambers.

Egypt was on fire. In every home there was devastation, but the heartless Pharaoh slept in his bed.

1. Ex. 10:2.
2. *Ibid.* 12:2.



Visualizing the Exodus Experience

And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, "It is because of this that God acted on my behalf when I left Egypt" (13:8)

The Haggadah says that the mitzvah of narrating the story of the Exodus is on the night of the fifteenth day of Nissan, when the matzah and *maror* (bitter herbs) are before our eyes on the Seder table. This is derived from the above verse.

The phrase, “It is because of this” indicates that one is referring to some object, i.e., the matzah and *maror*.

The Alter (Elder) of Kelm says that the patriarchs had an intellectual knowledge of God, which was sufficient for them. However, for the average person, an intellectual knowledge is inadequate to bind him to the will of God. Our conviction of the reality of something we see with our own eyes is greater than something whose reality is known to us only because we can reason its existence. God, therefore, showed the Israelites the awesome miracles of the Exodus, to impress upon them a firm conviction of His sovereignty over the world.

As the generations became more distant from the Exodus, the sense impression of the miracles faded, and we are now left with only an intellectual knowledge of the Exodus. To reinforce our conviction of the events of the Exodus, we use tangible objects, such as matzah and *maror*, to stimulate a sense impression.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, says that we must use the powers of our imagination to strengthen our convictions. The Torah says, “Beware for yourself, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life... the day that you stood before God at Horeb . . . You stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain was burning with fire up to the heart of heaven...God spoke to you from the midst of the fire” (Deuteronomy 4:9-12). This was said to the people who personally witnessed the revelation at Sinai, but it applies to us as well. With our imagination we must see ourselves as our

ancestors were at Sinai, seeing the mountain aflame, hearing the thunder, witnessing the lightning and hearing the sound of the shofar.

The Haggadah says that in every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as though he was personally delivered from Egypt. We must visualize in our minds the plagues inflicted upon Pharaoh, the scene of three million people leaving Egypt and the dividing of the Reed Sea.

The accoutrements of the Seder are indeed helpful, but we should use the powers of our imagination to experience the Exodus.

**Get more great parsha
content:
[aish.com/weekly-
torah-portion](http://aish.com/weekly-torah-portion)**