

A PARASHA THOUGHT

The "Show Me" People

RABBI  
MOSHETZVI  
CRYSTAL



One Shabbos in Camp Nageela Midwest, a Jewish hypnotist put on a memorable show for the camp. Everyone in the audience was invited to be hypnotized. There were not so many who actually allowed themselves to enter into a state of hypnosis (although those cases were quite memorable!). After the show, some of us asked the hypnotist if he sees a difference in a Jewish vs. non-Jewish audience, and he answered in the affirmative. He found that Jewish audiences were much more reticent to allow themselves into a state of hypnosis. Apparently, he hypothesized, the Jewish mind has a hard time letting go. The Jewish mind does not like to be silenced, and our inborn skepticism won't let us relax.

These traits are used by Harav Samson Raphael Hirsch, ז"ל, to explain a puzzling exchange in our *parasha*. As the Egyptian army bears down upon the Jewish people who have nowhere to flee, the Jewish people turn

to Moshe and say, "You didn't have enough graves in Egypt so you brought us out here die!\*" (For emphasis, read with a nice *heimishe* accent from the Lower East Side). How can this be - with all that was already done, the Jews still don't believe? The answer is yes, the Jew is a skeptic, and that is not a bad thing either. The Jewish people did not yet feel sure of the plan and what Moshe was there for. They did not assume that Hashem would help in a way completely beyond the natural world, with no precedent or proof to rely on. How dare they make assumptions about what Hashem would do to extricate them from their predicament! Interestingly enough, the *Kuzari* actually uses this exchange and the emergence of this character trait to show the authenticity of Torah. The Jews are a "clear-minded people" who are not easily convinced. If the Jewish people are willing to live and lay down their lives for Torah, it can only be because its truth and the veracity of its teacher, Moshe, have been proven to us beyond doubt. When understood this way, it is actually a running theme throughout the rest of the Torah. Where is our water to come from? Where is our food to come from? How do we plan to go into the promised land? There are

THE RABBI WAS ASKED  
ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH  
RABBI DOVID SPETNER

**Q.** In last week's *parasha* (*Bo*), the Jews asked the Egyptians for vessels of silver and gold plus clothing. However, earlier in the *parasha* when Hashem commands Moshe to tell the people to request from the Egyptians, He only mentioned the vessels but not clothing. Why did the people add clothing to their request? Also, Rashi writes that the requested items were in ascending order of significance, that is, silver, gold, clothing. How are we to understand that clothing is more significant than gold?

**A.** In the *posuk* before the request (12:34), we are told that the Jews wrapped the remainder of their food in their clothing. We have to consider that a slave has virtually no clothing. It seems likely, then, that the request for clothing was not related to Hashem's command, but due to an immediate and pressing need. When you have literally nothing

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## THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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to wear, gold and silver vessels are not so important.

**Q.** At the beginning of the *parasha* the Torah says that Hashem went before them via the pillars of cloud and fire. These seem like an incredible display of Hashem's *Shechina*. In other instances, the arrival of the *Shechina* (like at the dedication of the *Mishkan*) is itself a major event. Yet here we are just told that it was happening. When did it start?

**A.** I would suggest that it began with what we read in the *Hagada*, “*Uv'morah gadol – Zo gilui Shechina*. And with great fear – this is the revelation of the *Shechina*.” It would seem this began at *chatzos*, midnight, when Hashem Himself killed the firstborn of Egypt. 🕍

*Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! Submit a question on the parasha by Monday at noon by emailing [parasha@cincykollel.org](mailto:parasha@cincykollel.org). Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.*

## HAFTORAH HAPPENINGS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

The Haftorah of *parshas Beshalach* is the story of the victory over Sisera and the song Devorah sang over the victory. This is a mirror image of the *parasha* itself, which discusses the Egyptians drowning in the sea, and the songs of both Moshe and Miriam. It has the unique distinction of being the longest of the year, even longer (three more *pesukim*) than *Sefer Yonah* that we read at *Mincha* of Yom Kippur.

In the song Devorah sang following the victory (*pesukim* 3-6), Devorah discusses not the most recent victory over Sisera, but rather the greatness of Hashem and the giving of the Torah. Ralbag explains that besides the obvious importance of thanking Hashem for the kindness He bestows upon us, there is an additional value to letting people know that all good in our life is from Hashem. For this reason, writes Ralbag, Devorah included other kindnesses of Hashem, most notably giving us the Torah, as part of the *shirah*.

Perhaps we can take this idea a step further. The Ramban, at the end of *parshas Bo*, asks why the Torah gives us so many *mitzvos* that are “To remember the Exodus of Egypt.” Ramban explains that Hashem does not do miracles every day for every generation; rather, Hashem did miracles for our forefathers and gave us many different *mitzvos* to constantly remind us of those miracles. Ramban continues that an additional value in all the remembrances of the Exodus is to tell us that everything that happens in our life is really a miracle, that what we call nature is merely a miracle we got used to. So next time we read about the Exodus of Egypt, let's remember that our whole life is truly one big miracle. 🕍

## A PARASHA THOUGHT

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lessons from all these episodes – not least of which is that asking must be done in the right manner – but this is the Jew. As Rav Hirsch describes, this is the “witty vein” inherent in our people from their earliest beginnings.

The Jew is skeptical, the Jew probes, the Jew asks. This is how we learn and this is how we grow. And when we understand and see the truth, we hold on to it with a tenacity that lasts through the ages. 🕍

## TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI MORDECHAI BERINSTEIN

Tu B'shvat, or the 15th of Shevat, arrives as the trees generally begin to blossom in Israel, and is entitled by the Mishna as the “New Year for the tree.” Strictly speaking this term refers only to Tu B'shvat's designation as the calendar date on which the year is considered to have begun in regards to calculating tithing obligations in Israel and other agricultural laws. However, as a “New Year,” the day is considered a festive one and is accompanied by certain observances, such as the prevalent custom of eating fruits on Tu B'shvat. This practice is quoted by the Magen Avraham in the name of the *Tikkun Yissachar*, a 16th century work by Rabbi Yissachar Ben Mordechai ibn Sasun, and appears in many records of *minhagim* spanning the ages. The Nitei Gavriel offers a rationale for this tradition by explaining that as the trees begin to bloom it is an appropriate time to thank G-d for gifting us with delicious fruit. A fitting way to express our appreciation to Hashem is by reciting a blessing on the produce we enjoy, thereby glorifying His name and expressing our desire for increased connection to Him. While there are various approaches to the specifics of this custom as well as many *kabbalistic* undertones, it is clear that in one way or another Jewish people across the globe have been celebrating Tu B'shvat by enjoying fruit for at least five hundred years. 🕍