



Daf Hashavua

25 January 2020
Shabbat ends

28 Tevet 5780
London 5.28pm
Jerusalem 5.45pm

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Va'era

וַאֲרָא

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Shabbat Mevarechim. Rosh Chodesh Shevat is on Monday

In loving memory of Avraham ben Yehoshua



"Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail and the thunder ceased, and he continued to sin; and hardened his heart, he and his servants. Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he did not send out the Children of Israel" (Shemot 9:34-35).

Sidrah Summary: Va'era

1st Aliya (Kohen) – Shemot 6:2-6:13

God reassures Moshe that He will keep His promise to the forefathers to bring the nation into the Land of Canaan (later Israel). God has heard the crying out of the enslaved Israelites; He instructs Moshe to tell them that He will redeem them from slavery. The Israelites, exhausted from their labour, do not accept Moshe's reassurances.

2nd Aliya (Levi) – 6:14-6:28

The Torah details the genealogy of Moshe and Aharon. They are the sons of Amram and Yocheved, who were both descendants of Levi, the third son of Yaakov.

Point to Consider: *Why does the Torah break from the previous narrative to discuss this genealogy? (6:14)*

3rd Aliya (Shlishi) – 6:29-7:7

Moshe re-expresses his reluctance to speak to Pharaoh, given his speech impediment. God restates that Aharon will be Moshe's spokesman. God will harden Pharaoh's heart and He will send plagues. This will make Egypt aware of God's omnipotence.

Question: *How old were Moshe and Aharon at the point? (7:7) Answer on bottom of page 6.*

4th Aliya (Revi'i) – 7:8-8:6

Upon God's command, Aharon throws down his stick in front of Pharaoh; it turns into a snake. Pharaoh's magicians duplicate this. However, Aharon's stick swallows up their sticks. **The 1st Plague:** Moshe and Aharon confront Pharaoh while he is bathing in the Nile and warn him that if he does not let the Israelites leave, the waters of Egypt will turn to blood. Pharaoh ignores the warning; Aharon strikes the water with a stick and it turns into blood. Pharaoh's

magicians duplicate this. The plague lasts a week. (This pattern follows for most of the rest of the plagues – three weeks of warning and a week of plague – see Rashi's commentary.)

The 2nd Plague: Aharon strikes the waters of the Nile. A plague of frogs emerges, which covers Egypt. Pharaoh asks Moshe to pray for the frogs to die.

5th Aliya (Chamishi) – 8:7-8:18

The 3rd Plague: Aharon strikes the ground with his stick and lice spread all over Egypt. The Egyptian magicians fail to duplicate this, admitting it is the 'finger of God'.

6th Aliya (Shishi) – 8:19-9:17

The 4th Plague: A plague of wild beasts spreads over Egypt, apart from Goshen, where the Israelites live. Pharaoh agrees to let the Israelites leave for three days to bring offerings in the desert. Moshe prays for the plague to stop but Pharaoh reneges on his promise.

The 5th Plague: The Egyptian livestock is killed, but the Israelites' animals are untouched.

The 6th Plague: Moshe throws a fistful of ash in the sky. This turns into dust covering all of Egypt, which then turns into boils on the Egyptians and their animals. God hardens Pharaoh's heart.

7th Aliya (Shevi'i) – 9:18-9:35

The 7th Plague: A fiery hail falls on all of Egypt, apart from Goshen. Pharaoh admits that he has sinned and that God is righteous. After Moshe has prayed for the hail to stop, Pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites go.

Haftarah

The prophet Yechezkel (Ezekiel) prophesies about the downfall of the future Egyptian empire, after Israel will have mistakenly relied upon them as an ally. Egypt will be invaded by the Babylonian leader Nebuchadnezzar.



United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

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Broken Spirits

by Rabbi Barry Lerer, Central Synagogue



Last week's sidra ended with a worsening of the slavery, rather than liberation. At the beginning of this week's sidra, God reassures a despondent Moshe who then brings God's encouraging message

to the Israelites, that the redemption was imminent. However, we see that "they did not listen to Moshe because of *Kotzer Ruach uvavodah kashah*, "broken spirit and hard work (Shemot 6:9).

After this, Moshe argued with God. He questioned his own leadership and, in doing so, used the form of argument found in the Talmud known as a "*kal vechomer*". In 6:12 he says "The children of Israel did not listen to me, how will **Pharaoh** listen to me?" If the Israelites, who have everything to gain from my mission, ignore me, then why should not Pharaoh, who has everything to lose?

Yet, one could suggest that the Israelites were broken, frustrated and overworked. It is no wonder then that they could not listen to Moshe. Pharaoh, on the other hand, lived in the comfort of his palace and his spirit was far from broken. He should be very receptive to Moshe's message. If so, Moshe's logic makes no sense.

The truth of the matter is that a broken spirit can affect anybody, rich or poor, enslaved or free.

The Jewish people were unable to think clearly. They were preoccupied with their day-to-day burdens. But Pharaoh was even more so, for Paroh had portrayed himself to the world as a god.

We read before the first and fourth plagues, that Moshe and Aharon met Pharaoh early in the morning on the banks of the Nile. According to the Midrash, Pharaoh studied the times of the tides of the Nile carefully and entered the river at

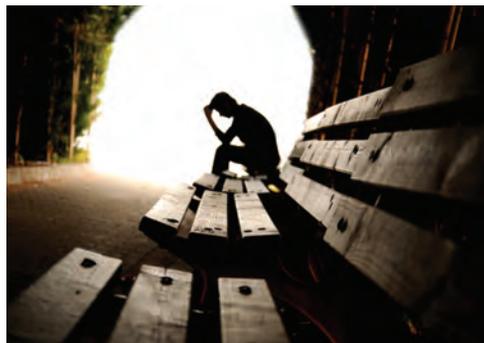
precisely the moment that the water began to rise, so that it should appear to be rising to honour him. Furthermore, while bathing, he took the opportunity to relieve himself, so that he need not do so the rest of the day, which he used as proof that he was a god!

When you set yourself up as something you are not, every moment of life is consumed with preserving the image. The slave labour of the Jewish people was minor compared to the amount of work Pharaoh had to do on a minute-by-minute basis, always looking over his shoulder, always needing to be something he was not.

In our image-obsessed society, the media portrays celebrities as being all-happy, all-beautiful and all-loving. Under intense media glare, it would be hard for even the world's best actors to pretend to be something that they are not and the truth does come out.

Perhaps we ourselves suffer from *Kotzer Ruach* in certain ways. We spend time and energy being consumed with keeping up a delusionary image that is not ours. We ask ourselves: Do I wear the right clothes? Do I live in the right house? Do I drive the right car? Am I seen in the right places?

The Torah guides us to be in touch with ourselves. Rather than suffer from *Kotzer Ruach*, we can achieve true ruach, spirituality.



Sefer Yehoshua (the Book of Joshua)

Chapter 9 The Givonim's Deception

by Rabbi Michael Laitner, US Jewish Living Division and Finchley Synagogue



Chapter Overview

Yehoshua, with God's help, had achieved two resounding victories, at Jericho and Ai. The stunned Canaanite kings on the western side of the River Jordan gathered

together in an accord to oppose Yehoshua's advance.

There was, however, one exception: the people of Givon, whose principal town we understand to have been situated in an area close to the contemporary town of Givat Ze'ev, north-west of Jerusalem.

Givonite representatives disguised themselves as weary travellers from a distant land. Wearing worn-out clothing, they approached Yehoshua at Bnei Yisrael's camp in Gilgal. Recounting their knowledge of how God had redeemed Bnei Yisrael from Egypt and subsequent foes, the Givonim declared themselves as servants of Bnei Yisrael who now wished to make a covenant.

At this point, the leaders of Bnei Yisrael, in particular Yehoshua, made a critical mistake, so that, as the Rambam (1188-1198) explains on verse 15, the text implies a rebuke to Yehoshua in particular.

Instead of seeking God's counsel, Yehoshua and the other leaders concluded a covenant and peace treaty with the Givonim. Only three days later, after discovering the Givonim's true identity, did Yehoshua and the other leaders realise that they had been deceived.

Yehoshua now faced a difficult decision. The deceit of the Givonim should have annulled the covenant and some of Bnei Yisrael wanted to attack them. Yet the consensus amongst the leaders of Bnei Yisrael was not to do so, due to the sanctity they attached to taking an oath which they had done when making the covenant.

The Talmud (Gittin 46a) discusses this decision. It notes that even though the covenant was not binding since it was procured under false

pretences, annulling it was not acceptable. Annulment would cause a desecration of God's Name, since the other Canaanite nations, perhaps unaware of the circumstances, would think that Bnei Yisrael did not treat oaths seriously and did not truly have awe of God, as explained by Rambam (ibid).

Instead, Yehoshua both cursed and reproached the Givonim who were designated to work as woodchoppers and water drawers, occupations which were arduous and unpopular.

The Givonim accepted this designation. They explained that their deception was due to their fear of their fate when Bnei Yisrael conquered the Land as commanded to do so by God.

Was deception the only option?

The Jerusalem Talmud (Sheviit, chapter 6) mentions three letters which Yehoshua sent to the Canaanite nations before the conquest began. The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204), in his Mishneh Torah (Laws of kings and their wars, chapter 6), focuses on one particular topic of those letters, that Bnei Yisrael may not wage war without offering peaceful terms first, even when the war in question has been commanded by God.

The Canaanite nations, including the Givonim, rejected Yehoshua's offer of peace, with the exception of the Girgashi tribe. The initial defeat at Ai and the hidden, rather than overt, miracles at the second battle of Ai when Yehoshua used more conventional military means, may have encouraged the other Canaanite nations to oppose Yehoshua.

Subsequently though, the Givonim changed their minds, but wrongly reasoned that Yehoshua's offer of peace no longer stood. This led to their act of deception.



Givat Ze'ev

Rabbi Meir Shapiro and the *Daf Yomi* Revolution – Part 4

by Rabbi Yoni Birnbaum, Hadley Wood Jewish Community



Siyum Hashas celebrations this January took place around the world, principally at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, where an estimated 93,000 people attended as well as for several thousand people at

the Wembley Arena here in London. In addition, we are exceptionally proud that the United Synagogue launched its 150th anniversary year with its own *Siyum Hashas*, which took place at Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue. This event celebrated those members of the United Synagogue who have completed the *Daf Yomi* cycle, especially the groups which meet at Barnet and Finchley Synagogues, as well as the ongoing commitment to Torah study of United Synagogue communities as a whole.

What did Rabbi Shapiro and others see in the Babylonian Talmud that encouraged them to make it the centrepiece of their global strategy to unite Jews around the study of Torah? The answer lies in a proper appreciation that the Talmud is the single most important repository of Jewish teachings which guide the manner in which Judaism is lived, experienced and practiced today. It is the home of the famous rabbinic debates and discussions, buttressed with innumerable personal stories and anecdotes, which bring Jewish law and lore to life.

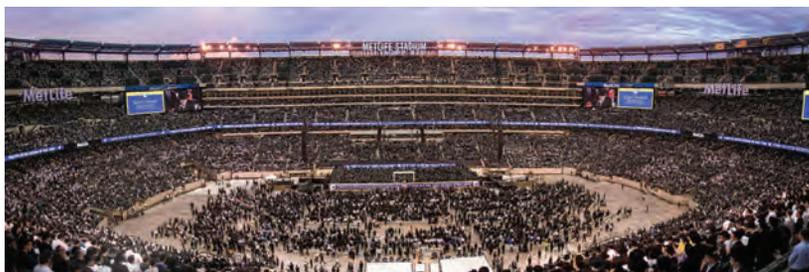
Although its intricacies are often difficult to understand and it contains extensive legal discussions on the finer points of Jewish law, studying the Talmud rewards one with

incomparable insights into the Jewish story and the richness of our collective Jewish heritage.

Most importantly of all, concentrated study of the Talmud is the quintessential fulfilment of the mitzvah of Talmud Torah, studying Torah. As believing Jews, the study of every line of the Talmud is itself a sacred endeavour.

As with all mitzvot, studying Torah requires a serious commitment and *Daf Yomi* is certainly a commitment. There are 2,711 pages of the Talmud. The programme requires study every single day of the year, whether at home or abroad, on Shabbat and even on Yom Kippur. Yet, in a sense, the daily *Daf Yomi* programme is actually more than a commitment. It is an opportunity to orientate one's entire daily schedule around our Jewish identity. Each day is shaped by the hour that must be carved out for study, come what may. Those who have undertaken this study programme have often found that they have come to cherish the stability and guidance that this hour provides. They have noticed that it provides a valuable routine and focus for the rest of the day, a reassuring constant in their daily lives. It also engenders a sense of camaraderie with their fellow '*Daf Yomiers*', especially for those fortunate enough to attend a shiur in person rather than studying by themselves or with an online shiur.

Rabbi Shapiro himself put it best when launching the programme in 1923: "The days of a person's life and specifically certain hours each day, will take on new importance that will greatly impact upon his entire life". Today, hundreds of thousands of *Daf Yomi* adherents will appreciate just how true this prediction was.



MetLife Stadium,
New Jersey

Dr Judith Grunfeld was the headmistress of the Jewish Secondary School in Stamford Hill in 1939, whose 450 children and staff were evacuated to Shefford and the neighbouring towns in Bedfordshire for the duration of World War Two. In this extract from her book, Dr Grunfeld continues to describe patterns of daily life.

Manifold were the activities which enriched our lives. Some of them were people who up till now had had their own comfortable homes, and the work which they were doing now had been done for them by their maids. They were all well-educated and cultured and there were one or two among them who had university degrees. Their talk over the scrubbing of the large pots and pans was very different from the chatter usually heard during such occupations. The girls and boys who were on kitchen duty benefited by their influence without even realising that they were receiving many a good lesson during their domestic duty hours.

The secretary, who came to us as a voluntary helper from the neighbouring town of Letchworth had chosen this work in our education centres as her part of the National Service which every British single young woman was obliged to give. She belonged to an old aristocratic family, and was the noblest of characters. I can recall many moments when her bearing and exemplary ways of patience were a great lesson to the children so entirely dependent on us for example and guidance during these years.

These helpers, although occupied in trivial occupations, nevertheless belonged to the elders of our centre, and exercised that subtle influence which comes from cultured people who have an established outlook on life.

And the golden years rolled on, golden for the children who found here friendship and guidance, who found sunshine in fields and meadows, who breathed the fresh country air and were accompanied on their summer walks

to school by the sweet musical and rustic sounds of birds and insects along country lanes. And when they went to sleep in their cottage bedrooms, the serenity of an undisturbed village life blinked at them through the window-panes and soothed them between the lavender-scented sheets.

It was a golden time for them, although for the world it was a time of steel and lead, of the roaring of cannon and the raining of fire from the sky. They at least were sheltered. And they had an anchorage. Their elders were their friends, and their friends were their comrades in a common destiny as well as in sports and school competitions. For those who had their parents abroad, father and mother seemed to retreat into a safe background. They became, as it were, shelved, stored and remembered like a treasure that is well wrapped up and put away while you use other less precious substitutes which are to hand and more practical for the immediate needs of the moment. These young people were unaware of everything that happened beyond our own realm. They did not know, neither did we, that we were like Noah's Ark, floating on the waves of a flood and that one day we would have to look around and discover that many treasures we had considered safe on their shelves, wrapped in the silken paper of fond remembrance, were shattered, charred and no more.

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Answer: Moshe was 80, Aharon was 83

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VA'ERA: LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL!

On 23rd June 2018, after football practice, the young members of the **Wild Boars** football team and their coach went exploring a favourite haunt - the **Tham Luang Cave** in Chiang Rai province, Thailand.

They weren't to know that rain had caused the caves to flood. Instead of returning in an hour, the 13 of them (aged 11-16 and their coach) remained stuck in the cave for 2 weeks!



The world watched the story unfold, hoping for a happy ending. But as days passed, it seemed less and less likely.

In a dramatic rescue, with experts from many countries, they were eventually found safe and sound.



TWO WEEKS! STUCK IN A CAVE IN THE DARK WITH NO FOOD! I WOULD HAVE BEEN PETRIFIED AND MISERABLE.



When the group were finally found.... instead of screaming or crying, the boys were sitting quietly in the dark, meditating.



THE BOYS SAID THAT IT WAS THEIR COACH, WHO TAUGHT THEM TO MEDITATE AND LIFT THEIR SPIRITS UP THAT KEPT THEM GOING DURING THEIR ORDEAL. ALTHOUGH IT SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE - THEY WERE ALL RESCUED SAFELY.



IN THIS WEEK'S **PARASHA**, GOD PROMISES TO TAKE THE **JEWISH SLAVES** OUT OF EGYPT. NOW, IF YOU WERE TO ASK ANY BYSTANDER AT THE TIME, WHETHER THERE WAS ANY CHANCE THAT THE **JEWISH SLAVES** WOULD GO FREE AND THE MIGHTY **EGYPTIAN SUPERPOWER** WOULD CRUMBLE, THE ANSWER WOULD BE - **ABSOLUTELY NOT!**



SOMETIMES IT FEELS LIKE A SITUATION IS HOPELESS - WE CANNOT IMAGINE THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL. BUT THIS WEEK'S **PARASHA** SHOWS US THAT GOD ALWAYS HAS A WAY TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN, EVEN WHEN THEY SEEM HOPELESS.



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Tribe is the Young People's Department of the United Synagogue: Creating a future for our community through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation.

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