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Cincinnati Community KOLLEL

Cincinnati Torah תורה מסינסי

Vol. XIV, No. XII

Shemos

A PARASHA THOUGHT



Shovavim!

I remember in my first year in Yeshivas Bais Yisroel, approaching *parshas Shemos* and hearing whispers of the *Shovavim* talk. For those of you who are unaware, *Shovavim* is a period of six weeks each year, in which some Kabbalists teach one should focus on repenting for one's sins specifically in the areas of *Kedushah*. As someone who comes from a more chilled out high school, I had never heard of this idea before. I soon discovered that *Shovavim* is essentially Elul 2.0.

Shemos. Va'eira. Bo. Beshalach. Yisro. Mishpatim. These are the weeks that we as a nation moved from being a group of enslaved nobodies to becoming the chosen people of Hashem.

Shovavim often brings with it a familiar wave of inspiration and proposed areas for self-improvement. I am sure you may hear many *vorts* about how technology is our current slavery and you need to get a filter. (In my mind, the problem of technology is way beyond filters.) You may also hear calls about working on reviewing (or actually learning) the *halachos* of *taharat hamishpachah*, giving more tzedakah, starting to learn a *musar sefer*, coming on time to *davening*, being more careful with *shemiras halashon* – the list goes on and on. It is a great opportunity to restart our Elul *kabbalos* that we may have stopped doing (or never really started).



The Ramban, in the beginning of this week's *parasha*, explains that Pharaoh did not want to openly make a final solution to the Jewish question. Killing the Jews all at once would not have been the proper approach for three reasons. Firstly, the previous king had welcomed this nation in and to just outright wipe them out would not be proper. Secondly, the people of Egypt would not have followed along with such injustice, and, lastly, the Jews may have fought back.

Rather, Pharaoh adopted a slow cunning approach; he first made a tax that required people to do a certain amount of work for the state. After this he told the midwives to kill the male babies in a way that even the mothers who were giving birth would not realize that the midwives committed the murder. This went on and on until the people of Egypt

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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

Parshas Shemos opens with a listing of the names of the twelve sons of Yaakov who came down to Mitzrayim. In this listing Yissachar is named before Zevulun, as is their birth order. In contrast, in last week's *parasha*, Yaakov's *bracha* to Zevulun precedes his *bracha* to Yissacher. Interestingly, Moshe does the same in his *brachos* at the conclusion of the Torah. Rashi (*Devarim* 33:18) cites the *midrash* that the tribe of Zevulun supported the tribe of Yissachar in their Torah learning; therefore they were blessed first.

This concept may be like the idea we find often in the Gemara that at Torah gatherings they would begin by giving honor and recognition to the hosts. Some explain that because both Zevulun and Yissachar benefit from Zevulun's blessing it makes sense that Zevulun's blessing comes first. The Mizrachi explains Zevulun's precedence with another principle from the Gemara (*Baba Basra* 9a) that one who enables the performance of a *mitzvah* is greater than the one who performs it. As R. Yaakov Emden explains there, this is because it often requires more effort and sacrifice to enable.

There may be another reason Zevulun's blessing comes first. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah* 246:1) stresses the universal obligation upon everyone to study Torah regardless

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is distributed weekly to local shuls and the community e-mail list.

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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

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of his circumstances. He concludes that if one finds this impossible, he should at least support those who are studying Torah. The Ram"a cites the Tur that this will be considered as if he had studied himself. He continues and describes a Yissachar/Zevulun-type relationship where the reward will be shared between the Torah scholar and his supporter. However, the Ram"a is clear that this arrangement must be made prior to the study of the Torah; once the Torah has been learned the reward cannot be bought after the fact like some type of commodity. The mention of Zevulun's blessing of business success before Yissachar's blessing of Torah study may be a hint to this idea.

A PARASHA THOUGHT

CONTINUED

started to kill Jewish kids without even any command from Pharoah.

A similar pattern can be observed in modern history. When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, they did not immediately begin mass murder. Antisemitism was central to their ideology, but persecution unfolded gradually, enabling the system to evolve into what later became known as the "Final Solution," which only began in 1941.

I think the idea that Pharaoh had a very clear understanding of, is that slavery does not happen overnight. Becoming a slave is a slow meticulous process that can sometimes take years. In our lives, our *yetzer hara* has lines it likes to tell us: I can't, it's impossible, I won't, that's just who I am, I'm too tired – the list goes on and on. At first, these statements sound like self-awareness. They often become the bricks of our personal Mizrayim. These weeks of *Shovavim* provide an opportunity to begin the opposite processes, the slow, deliberate work of redemption.

PROMINENT TORAH PERSONALITIES

RABBI YAAKOV SAKLAD

Rav Chaim Volozhiner Part 1

Rav Chaim Volozhiner was born in 1749 in Volozhin, Russia (now in modern-day Belarus) to his father Rav Yitzchok and his mother Rivka. Rav Yitzchok was an influential Talmid Chacham (Torah scholar) in the town of Volozhin and was known to have superb Yiras Shamayim (fear of Heaven). His mother was a scion of the famed Rappaport family who were distinguished in their Torah knowledge and their ability to trace their Kohen status all the way back to the time when Kohanim would serve in the Beis Hamikdash. (Shmukler & Shmukler, 1909)

At age 12 Chaim went to learn under the tutelage of Rav Refoel Hamburger, who was considered one of the Gedolei Hador (Torah giants) of his day and also served as Rav in Minsk and the surrounding area. Not many were able to keep pace with Rav Refoel but Chaim showed tremendous intellectual prowess in his ability to retain Rav Refoel's teachings. After a little over two years, Chaim went on to learn under Rav Aryeh Leib ben Rav Asher, known more commonly by his monumental work, Sha'agas Aryeh, who was the Rav of Volozhin. (Shmukler & Shmukler, 1909).

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TRIVIA

RABBI GAVI KADISH

What are three things that people do three times that are fabricated?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach said that there are three threes that are fictitious. The first one is that people are under the impression that they must wash each hand three times prior to davening – this is false. This misconception may stem from the fact that some *Achronim* are of the opinion that if the reason you are washing for *tefila* is because you touched a sweaty part of your body, that touch engenders a *ruach raah* (evil spirit), which requires washing each hand three times. The second "three" is that a *Sefer Torah* must be read three times in the house of a mourner. In other words, in order to have the right to read from a *Sefer Torah* in any place which it is transported to, it must be read three times in that place. Therefore, for example, some people ensure that a *Sefer Torah* is read on Monday, Thursday, and Shabbos Mincha in the house of a mourner – this too is a misconception. The third "three" misimpression is something we previously discussed. Namely, that a Bar Mitzvah boy should fast the three fasts preceding his Bar Mitzvah – Rav Shlomo Zalman contends that this, too, is made up. Good Shabbos!