

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE**BO****Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 46:13-28****FEBRUARY 4, 2017 8 SHEBAT 5777****DEDICATION: By Robert Marcus in memory of his mother, Malka Bet Geraz 7th Shevat****By Benai Asher Synagogue in memory of our Rabbi Asher Abittan 8th Shevat****By the Gindi family in memory of Haim ben Victoria 8th Shevat****By the Bibi family in memory of David Mizrahi – 8th Shevat****And in memory of my Dad, Joseph R. Bibi – Yosef ben Esther 14th Shebat**

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Editors Notes**Messages in the first Misvah – Parshat Bo 5777**

We are told that without Rav Shelomo Yitzhaki better known as Rashi, the outstanding Biblical commentator of the Middle Ages, it would be almost impossible for us to understand the written Torah. Rashi's commentary on the Torah was unique. He was concerned with every word in the text which needed elaboration or explanation and he was concise to the point of using the fewest words possible in his commentaries.

Rashi begins his commentary on the Torah with the following: Said Rabbi Isaac: It was not necessary to begin the Torah (with creation, the flood, the story of the forefathers, slavery in Egypt), rather (the Torah should have begun in this week's portion of Bo, in chapter 12 with the words) "This month is to you," which is the first commandment that the Israelites (as a unified nation) were commanded, (for the main purpose of the Torah is its commandments, and although several commandments are found in Genesis, e.g., circumcision and the prohibition of eating the thigh sinew, they could have been included together with the other commandments).

What is the first commandment? This first mitzvah is establishing the months of the year based on the determination of the Bet Din [The Rabbinical Court]. A witness who sees the new moon is commanded to come to the court and testify. At least two must come, but anyone who comes is heard. On the basis of this corroborated testimony, the court proclaims a new month. This in turn determines the dates of the Jewish holidays.

Rabbi Frand quotes the Vilna Gaon who suggests that the introductory verse of a sefer (book) encompasses in microcosm the entire contents of that sefer. Suggesting we take this an additional step, Rabbi Frand asks, given the fact that per Rashi, the Torah should have begun with the pasuk "This month is for you the start of all months", what is the common denominator found in this verse that sets the stage for the entire set of 613 mitzvot?

I would like to suggest a few answers which I invite you to discuss at your Shabbat table and send me feedback.

Lets begin with Rabbi Frand's suggestion which this morning we deemed the Yeshivaish answer. He writes, "There is nothing more predictable in this world than the astronomical calculations of the cycles of the sun and the moon. We know that sunrise will be exactly the same time it was today on this date 5 years from now and 10 years from now and 100 years from now. Likewise we know that a Jewish month is comprised of 29 days, 12 hours, and 793 parts of an hour. Therefore, what is the point of having witnesses coming to testify that they saw a new moon? Why is this a Biblical mitzvah? It is science! It is clockwork! What does this have to do with religion?"

He answers: "Clearly, the purpose of this mitzvah is not for its informative value. Rather, its purpose is to do it for the sake of doing it. This means that we should not perform mitzvot for utilitarian purposes. We are not "accomplishing" anything in terms of concrete physical accomplishments of a utilitarian value. The major reason of doing any mitzvah is because first and foremost this is the Will of the Creator. The mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon, as

is the case with all mitzvot, is primarily done because Hashem told us to do it. By doing it, we are obeying the Almighty and subjugating our minds and our bodies to His Will. As the first mitzvah in the Torah, this mitzvah is instructive regarding all mitzvot. We should not assume that there is necessarily a "practical application" to what we are doing other than to train us to fulfill the Will of the Creator."

Rabbi Abittan z'sl, whose Yahrzeit is this Shabbat, suggested another answer. As the Rabbi was a student of Rav Desler, let's call this, the mussar view. The Gemara tells us that Rabbi Shim'on ben Pazi noted a contradiction in the verses describing the creation of the sun and the moon in the first chapter of Genesis. We first see that, "G-d made the two big luminaries" and then the verse describes, "the big luminary... and the small luminary". What happened? The midrash explains that the moon said to Hashem: "Master of the world, is it possible for two kings to use one crown?" So Hashem responded to the moon: "Go diminish yourself."

The rabbi explained that it was the moon that broke unity of the world. The first to complain was the moon. He told us that the secret of birkat halevanah, the blessing of the moon was a blessing of protection. The lesson of the Torah's first command which sets the stage for all the other misvot is that we must realize that we cannot be protected on our own; we must be with others. This comes before anything else. In unity there is strength and power. The rabbi often repeated, VeAhavata LeReacha Kamoch – You should love your friend as yourself. Rabbi Akiba stated this was the major directive in the Torah. Why, the answer could be found in the next words of the verse, Ani Hashem – I am Hashem. G-d is telling us that before you can have a relationship with Me, Hashem, you must learn to love each other in unity. This command comes before all.

And finally let me offer one more answer I recalled after listening to a class with my dad, whose Yahrzeit is also this week. We'll call this the kabbalistic answer. We asked a question. Rashi in explaining this verse where we are commanded to sanctify the new moon writes: "Moses found difficulty [determining] the renewal of the moon, in what size it should appear before it is fit for sanctification. So He (Hashem) showed him ..."

What was so difficult for Moses to understand?

Rabbi Frand suggests that the date really is a given, but we see that even the rabbis, in the epoch following the Roman Empire's destruction of the Jerusalem, disputed dates (and on quite a few other

occasions). The Gemara tells us that over a dispute in determining rosh hodesh, Rabban Gamaliel II, publicly disgraced Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananiah over a calendar dispute. Each rabbi had a different date for Yom Kippur. Rabban Gamaliel ordered Rabbi Yehoshua to "appear before me with your staff and your money on the day which according to your reckoning should be the Day of Atonement."

Rabbi Yehoshua did so. The rabbinic colleagues of the humiliated Rabbi were so angry over Rabban Gamaliel's unjust exertion of his authority that they removed him temporarily from his leadership position. We see that the setting of the calendar was not just an issue of mathematical calculation.

In fact Hashem gave the keys to calendar to the Rabbis. We hear in Heaven the angels asking when is Rosh Hashana? Hashem says go down and see man. Regardless of what should and could, the Sanhedrin determine the month and they have power to change it. We see that the Hachamim can move all holidays, even Yom Kippur. Hashem told angels that the key lies with the Rabbis. So many of our laws can change from that including whether we eat today, fast today, take the Lulav today, eat matzah today, work today or serve. My dad was fond of explaining our prayer, mekadesh hashabbat, yisrael vehazemanim. Although G-d set Shabbat as the seventh day, the holidays all depend on Israel.

We say En Mazal LeYisrael which we typically translate as meaning that the Jewish people are not governed by the stars and astrological forces. We have the gift of rising above them and not only not being subject to them, but that they in fact, the zemanim – the times, the dates and the related forces are governed by us.

Rabbi Aderet once explained that the key to Mordechai overcoming Haman and his lottery of dates during the Purim story was that Mordechai made the year a leap year completing messing up Haman's calculations.

Perhaps this is what Moshe found so difficult to understand. Hashem set the physical and spiritual systems in motion, could the Jewish people really exert an influence to change them? And Hashem showed Moses that the answer was, yes.

What better way to begin the laws of the Torah? My father who truly served the community every day of his life, who was both an architect and a builder of all we have, would remind us that we are not here just to be here. We are here to fulfill our role as partners of Hashem. Every misvah that we do, every action is in

fact a part of our role in fulfilling the demands of that partnership. Thus it is this misvah and every misvah!

May we live up to his example and expectations!

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Bo - Plagues 8, 9 and 10, Korban Pesach

- 1- The warning for macat Arbeh
- 2- Macat Arbeh and Hoshech
- 3- Hashem tells Moshe to tell Benei Israel to ask the Mitsrim for their gold and silver
- 4- Hashem tells Moshe to tell Benei Israel to bring Korban Pesach and put the blood on the doorposts. Hashem tells Moshe the mitzvah to celebrate Pesach for generations along with some of the rules.
- 5- Moshe relays to the zekenim to bring korban Pesach, to put the blood on the doorposts and that Hashem will pass over the Jewish homes during Macat bechorot.
- 6- Makat bechorot begins. Paroah runs to send out Benei Israel. Benei Israel head out of Mitsrayim! Laws regarding korban Pesach.
- 7- The parasha of kadash liy & ve'hayah kiy yebiecha (mitsvot commemorating makat bechorot and yesiat Mitsrayim).

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

**“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Come to Pharaoh.’”
(Shemot 10:1)**

In Egypt, we became a great nation, united to receive the Torah. At the time, it only looked bad. We need to know how to think more deeply and see the wisdom and hesed of Hashem. The following story, told by Rabbi Yitzchok Hisiger, teaches us how to think.

The Skulener Rebbe's oldest son, Rav Yeshaya Yaakov Portugal, Rav of Khal Meor Hagolah in Montreal, told the following story about an acquaintance of his, R' Boruch. A large crystal chandelier in R' Boruch's home became dislodged and crashed onto the dining room table. Hearing a loud bang, R' Boruch's parents, who were in an adjacent room, ran to see what had happened. They were shocked to discover that the chandelier had landed on their infant grandchild, who was lying in an infant seat on the table. With great trepidation, they

moved aside the fallen debris in a bid to get to the baby.

They discovered that miraculously, despite the force of the fall and the shards of glass strewn all around, the baby was unharmed, without a scratch.

The joy of the elated grandparents knew no bounds. They hugged and kissed the baby and ran to inform R' Boruch of the miracle. The family later made a seudat hoda'ah (a meal of thanks) to express their gratitude to Hashem for what occurred.

In commenting on this incident, Rav Portugal remarked, “Look at the kindness of Hashem. For whatever reason, Heaven had decreed that R' Boruch's expensive crystal chandelier had to break, but this monetary loss would have caused great heartache to R' Boruch and his family. Thus, it was orchestrated for their infant baby to be on the table underneath the chandelier at that very moment and for the baby to emerge untouched, safe and sound. In this fashion, not only would R' Boruch and his family not be distressed over their loss, but they would be full of happiness and would actually make a seudah in celebration.”

It's how we interpret the things that happen to us that makes all the difference Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And the blood shall serve as a sign on the houses in which you are." (Shemot 12:13)

This verse refers to the smearing of the blood from the Korban Pesach on the doorway of each Jewish home. Rashi explains that this sign shall be for you and not for others. Hence we may derive that the blood was smeared on the inside of the doorway. An important lesson may be learned here. Often we attempt to help others in the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot, even at great sacrifice to ourselves. This may sometimes be at the expense of our own families. We are ready to sacrifice our time and energy for others, but are we finding time for our own personal study and self-development? The Torah enjoins us to establish in our homes Torah sessions for ourselves. We must be aware of our responsibilities to our own children, to guide and encourage them ourselves, not by proxy through tutors. We are obliged to do for ourselves and for our families that which we so readily do for others.
Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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The Smokescreen

Parashat Bo tells the story of Yesi'at Misrayim – Beneh Yisrael's Exodus from Egypt after over two centuries of exile and bondage. We read that when Beneh Yisrael left, they took with them the utensils and clothing of their Egyptian neighbors, as God had commanded them (12:35). The Ba'al Ha'turim (Rabbenu Yaakov Ben Asher, Germany-Spain, 1269-1343) comments that each member of Beneh Yisrael took two garments from the Egyptians. One was used to wrap the Masot which they took with them, and the other was worn throughout the forty years of travel in the wilderness. Miraculously, these garments remained intact and fresh for the entire forty-year period.

We might wonder why it was deemed appropriate for Beneh Yisrael to wear these garments. Intuitively, we would have expected God to not want them to have anything to do with the belongings of the debased, idolatrous Egyptian society. Why did He want Beneh Yisrael to stand at Mount Sinai and behold His revelation while wearing Egyptian clothing? Is this appropriate attire for such a sacred event? Why did God insist that Beneh Yisrael wear the Egyptians' clothing while they traveled in the wilderness?

The Hatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg, 1762-1839) explained that something very significant happened to these garments on the night of the Exodus. That night, besides killing the firstborns of Egypt, God also destroyed the country's idols. Moshe predicted before Yesi'at Misrayim that God would "make judgment" upon all the pagan gods of Egypt ("U'v'chol Eloheh Misrayim E'eseh Shefatim" – 12:12). All the statues were shattered, and all the idolatrous images were miraculously removed from the objects upon which they were engraved. Likewise, the Egyptians would embroider idolatrous images onto their clothing, and these images were miraculously torn off the clothing on the night of the Exodus. Thus, by the time Beneh Yisrael took these garments, they had undergone a change, and no longer bore images of pagan gods.

God specifically wanted Beneh Yisrael to wear these garments in the years following Yesi'at Misrayim in order to teach them – and us – a vital lesson. These pagan gods were looked upon as powerful deities, but in an instant, they were exposed as mere smokescreens. They appeared significant, until they were shown to have no power and no significance

whatsoever. The same is true of the Yeser Ha'ra (evil inclination). Our Yeser Ha'ra convinces us that sinful behavior is gratifying and will bring us contentment and happiness. To take an extreme example, alcoholics crave intoxicating drinks because they are convinced that drinking will make them happy and bring them a feeling of gratification. But after the intoxication wears off, the addict feels worse and emptier than he did before he drank. Sins, too, appear tempting and gratifying, but then leave us feeling empty and unfulfilled. The Yeser Ha'ra sets up for us a smokescreen, portraying the sin as something we need in order to attain happiness. But like the gods of Egypt, it is only an illusion, appearing as something valuable when in truth it is sheer vanity and nothing of significance.

The Gemara teaches that in the times of Mashiah, the Yeser Ha'ra will be destroyed. We will look back at the vanities and lures of this world and realize that they were all just a hoax, an illusion, that we were deceived into affording importance to something meaningless. We must at all times remember the message of the Egyptians' clothing, the illusionary nature of sin. It appears to have significance and value, but in truth is worth nothing. This perspective will help us avoid the traps set for us by the Yeser Ha'ra, and ensure that we invest all our time and energies into worthwhile and valuable pursuits.

VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

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TO PROTECT THE LIGHT OF THE EXODUS

At the precipice of the final plague in Egypt, Moshe preempts and shares with Par'o the upcoming events. Namely, that around midnight of the 15th of Nisan - every first born of Egypt will die. While there will be a great cry of anguish amongst the Egyptians - there will be no such thing amongst Israel. As the verse reads "but among Israel a dog will not even bark" - later on when Moshe describes the exodus to Israel he explains why the dog will not bark - 12:7 "for it is a night of watching שמרים that God is and will be responsible for; now as well in all future generations "The Talmud (Rosh Hashana 11) cites R. Eliezer who explains that on this night for all generations Israel was and will be protected from all harmful spirits. R. Yehoshua adds that the protection or watching is imbedded or has its origins in the six days of creation. It appears as if Israel is required to contribute to this שמירה protection. This is to insure that no access to the powerful light of the exodus is given over to the harmful spirits. The initial protection לה שמירת - comes via Israel holding onto

the lamb. The Torah obligates us to ושמרתם את המצות - or to protect the masot. Later on ושמרתם את הדבר - to protect the matter; and finally to protect access to the service ושמרתם את - while each year to remain on guard as the light of the exodus is revealed annually - למועדה מימים ימימה -
 - All of this has its source in the divine command at וכן -
 And 2:15 "Hashem took man and placed him in Gan Eden
 ושמרתם את - to work or draw down the light of Hashem and to watch and protect it."

THE ORIGINS - TO PROTECT THE LIGHT IN GAN EDEN

The main service of Israel on Pesah is to insure that no harmful spirits gain access to the Divine Light of the exodus. Hence the continuous reminders that the light needs protection and we are to deter the negative powers from accessing this Holy force. The job description of Adam which includes the need to protect the garden serves as the prototype of what is required by Israel to each year exit from the national or personal Egypt. Adam was advised that ושמרתם את - that the drawing down of the Light or watering of the Garden must be accompanied by ושמרתם את - to protect it from the harmful forces. The Ohr Hahayyim writes that just as the physical environment requires protection against harmful substances that damage the plants so does the spiritual environment of Gan Eden and the abode of Israel demand protection. Armed with the idea that the service of Israel in this world is to mimic to some extent that of Adam in Gan Eden it behooves us to learn more about the required protective activity. Non-observance of the instruction to "protect and watch" is apt to destroy the fabric of our spiritual environment. The Sages of the Talmud (Sotah 2) teach that a transgression removes the protection - giving access to the power of misvot by the harmful forces. Adam was clairvoyant in Gan Eden in that he was able to detect how the harmful forces can gain access to God's light of the garden was not watched. Once he had been expelled from the Garden - he and all future generations lost the ability to perceive the results of not watching it or the Misvot.

ISRAEL MUST TAKE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT THE LIGHT

God agrees to participate with Israel in offering protection from the harmful spirits from gaining access to the tremendous light of the exodus. Israel will first offer its own protection by holding onto and controlling the lamb from the 10th of Nissan until the 14th - This of course to suffocate the deity of Egypt. We are to also - offer protection of the Masot - The wheat thru which the light of the exodus will be revealed must be protected to close off access by the harmful forces. As Rava (Pesachim 40) instructs those engaged in harvesting wheat - "when you tie the bundles of wheat make sure they remain suitable for use for the misva of masot. The other rituals are likewise

put into place to offer protection; finally the Torah reminds us that each year ושמרתם את -renews and brings forth the Holy powerful light force of the exodus - hence Israel is bound to renew its watching each year.

GOD'S PROTECTION - THE DOGS REFRAIN FROM BARKING

Moshe summons the elders of Israel to gather the people. Moses details the preparations required to facilitate God's protection on the night known as ליל שמירתם - They are to place the blood on the door as prescribed, and not a single Jew should leave the house until morning. God will pass over the door and not let the ושמרתם את force of destruction to enter the homes. We are taught that on that night לא יחרץ - that the dogs did not bark. The Talmud (BK 60) teaches that usually when destructive forces abound on earth - dogs can be heard barking seeing that they are sensitive to such activity. From Yishaya 56:11 we are taught that dogs are greedy. Similarly greedy writes Rabbenu Bahya is the Satan or ושמרתם את according to Mishle chants הבה הבה - not ruff ruff but "give give".

OTHER APPLICATIONS TO PROTECT

We must recall that our obligation to protect the light from access of harmful forces extends beyond the rituals of Passover. We know of obligation to ושמרתם את - to watch and protect the awesome light of ושמרתם את - furthermore R. Yashia teaches (Mekhilta) on the verse ושמרתם את המצות - that it should not only be read as regards to masot but also we are equally obligated to watch the misvot. Just as the masot are not permitted to become ושמרתם את (given access to harmful forces) - so to Misvot which activate the light from above -, should not be given access to negativity - Hence we learn - that if the opportunity of a misva presents itself perform it immediately!

Shabbat Shalom

Victor Bibi

Rabbi Wein THE REAL TEST

Jewish history has a relatively simple test to determine the survival of movements, ideas and agendas that constantly crop up in Jewish society. That test is one of generational implications. Will those movements, ideas and agendas produce grandchildren and great-grandchildren that will be loyal to those movements and perpetuate them in the future?

Because the results of this test cannot be known when these movements are first formed and attain degrees of popularity, it becomes very difficult to

judge the veracity, importance and value of the movement itself. One must wait for the verdict of history to be recorded and sometimes that takes centuries before that is clear.

Hellenism was very popular in the Jewish world for many centuries during Second Temple times. Yet eventually the Hellenists had no Jewish grandchildren who wanted to be Hellenists and they eventually disappeared completely from Jewish society. The early Jewish socialist pioneers here in Israel, a century later, have proven to have been unable to replicate themselves in later generations.

Their descendants are capitalist entrepreneurs and the old time kibbutz is rapidly disappearing from the Israeli scene. The great social and diplomatic ideas and programs of the nineteenth century – imperialism, Marxism, racial superiority, social Darwinism, etc. – have all been swept aside as meaningless in our time. The heirs of Stalin and Gorbachev no longer belong to the legions of Lenin and Bolshevism. The test of history has proven their original doctrines to have been false.

Social agendas and religious eternity do not mix well. What looks like a good, necessary and progressive idea in one age turns out to be unappealing and unnecessary at a later time. Climate change, income inequality, health plans, political considerations and gender engineering overall, are important social and political issues in our time. Nevertheless, none of them bear the fragrance of eternity or of true faith.

They are all driven by current social and political agendas that may and probably will look foolish in later times. One of the greatest problems facing the Jewish world is that it is often too current and modern for its own good. History has shown us that there is nothing as irrelevant in human affairs as being completely relevant and ahead of the curve in one's own generation.

Current attempts to make Judaism and even Orthodoxy more open and progressive, to fix the world according to our very limited understanding of it, to re-engineer human nature and to ignore the realities of desire and greed, are all eventually doomed simply because the next generation will not have grandchildren who will subscribe to such a definition of Judaism... if they are even Jewish at all!

Today's Jewish world is the graveyard of all of the grandiose and progressive ideas that permeated our world a century ago. The grandchildren of Reform rarely find themselves in Reform congregations today. Many of the grandchildren of the Zionist

founders of Israel find themselves living in the Diaspora, and for the majority of the Conservative movement in the United States, their numbers are shrinking. The inexorable lesson and test of history and of Jewish survival is taking its toll.

Jewish life resembles the general commercial world. Good ideas abound and there are many divisions that appear on the scene. But unless they can be translated into reality – and that can only be done through hard work, human effort and great persistence – ultimately they are of little value. They will not pass the test of history and of generations.

Unfortunately history has shown, with abundant clarity, that Jewish life and survival is a winnowing process. By now there should be hundreds of millions of Jews in the world. There are many reasons why our numbers continue to be small, certainly relative to other faiths, countries and cultures. One of the reasons certainly is that over the ages not every Jewish generation has been able to produce grandchildren that identified and practiced the faith and beliefs of their grandparents and their way of life.

This has been especially true of the last few generations of Jewish life preceding and succeeding the Holocaust. While the school systems of many of the more progressive elements in Jewish society are shrinking, there are Jewish communities in Lakewood and other places that have to build new schools every year to accommodate a growing and burgeoning young population. There is a lesson in that if we are wise enough to learn it.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Necessity of Asking Questions

It is no accident that parshat Bo, the section that deals with the culminating plagues and the exodus, should turn three times to the subject of children and the duty of parents to educate them. As Jews we believe that to defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilisation you need education. Freedom is lost when it is taken for granted. Unless parents hand on their memories and ideals to the next generation – the story of how they won their freedom and the battles they had to fight along the way – the long journey falters and we lose our way.

What is fascinating, though, is the way the Torah emphasises the fact that children must ask questions. Two of the three passages in our parsha speak of this:

And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the

Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians.' (Ex. 12:26-27)

In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Ex. 13:14)

There is another passage later in the Torah that also speaks of question asked by a child: In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. (Deut. 6:20-21)

The other passage in today's parsha, the only one that does not mention a question, is: On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' (Ex. 13:8)

These four passages have become famous because of their appearance in the Haggadah on Pesach. They are the four children: one wise, one wicked or rebellious, one simple and "one who does not know how to ask." Reading them together the sages came to the conclusion that [1] children should ask questions, [2] the Pesach narrative must be constructed in response to, and begin with, questions asked by a child, [3] it is the duty of a parent to encourage his or her children to ask questions, and the child who does not yet know how to ask should be taught to ask.

There is nothing natural about this at all. To the contrary, it goes dramatically against the grain of history. Most traditional cultures see it as the task of a parent or teacher to instruct, guide or command. The task of the child is to obey. "Children should be seen, not heard," goes the old English proverb. "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord," says a famous Christian text. Socrates, who spent his life teaching people to ask questions, was condemned by the citizens of Athens for corrupting the young. In Judaism the opposite is the case. It is a religious duty to teach our children to ask questions. That is how they grow.

Judaism is the rarest of phenomena: a faith based on asking questions, sometimes deep and difficult ones that seem to shake the very foundations of faith itself. "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" asked Abraham. "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people?" asked Moses. "Why does the

way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" asked Jeremiah. The book of Job is largely constructed out of questions, and God's answer consists of four chapters of yet deeper questions: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? ... Can you catch Leviathan with a hook? ... Will it make an agreement with you and let you take it as your slave for life?"

In yeshiva the highest accolade is to ask a good question: Du fregst a gutte kashe. Rabbi Abraham Twersky, a deeply religious psychiatrist, tells of how when he was young, his teacher would relish challenges to his arguments. In his broken English, he would say, "You right! You 100 procent right! Now I show you where you wrong."

Isadore Rabi, winner of a Nobel Prize in physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied, "My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, 'What did you learn today?' But my mother used to ask: 'Izzy, did you ask a good question today?' That made the difference. Asking good questions made me a scientist."

Judaism is not a religion of blind obedience. Indeed, astonishingly in a religion of 613 commandments, there is no Hebrew word that means "to obey". When Hebrew was revived as a living language in the nineteenth century, and there was need for a verb meaning "to obey," it had to be borrowed from the Aramaic: le-tsayet. Instead of a word meaning "to obey," the Torah uses the verb shema, untranslatable into English because it means [1] to listen, [2] to hear, [3] to understand, [4] to internalise, and [5] to respond. Written into the very structure of Hebraic consciousness is the idea that our highest duty is to seek to understand the will of God, not just to obey blindly. Tennyson's verse, "Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do or die," is as far from a Jewish mindset as it is possible to be.

Why? Because we believe that intelligence is God's greatest gift to humanity. Rashi understands the phrase that God made man "in His image, after His likeness," to mean that God gave us the ability "to understand and discern." The very first of our requests in the weekday Amidah is for "knowledge, understanding and discernment." One of the most breathtakingly bold of the rabbis' institutions was to coin a blessing to be said on seeing a great non-Jewish scholar. Not only did they see wisdom in cultures other than their own, they thanked God for it. How far this is from the narrow-mindedness than has so often demeaned and diminished religions, past and present.

The historian Paul Johnson once wrote that rabbinic Judaism was “an ancient and highly efficient social machine for the production of intellectuals.” Much of that had, and still has, to do with the absolute priority Jews have always placed on education, schools, the beit midrash, religious study as an act even higher than prayer, learning as a life-long engagement, and teaching as the highest vocation of the religious life.

But much too has to do with how one studies and how we teach our children. The Torah indicates this at the most powerful and poignant juncture in Jewish history – just as the Israelites are about to leave Egypt and begin their life as a free people under the sovereignty of God. Hand on the memory of this moment to your children, says Moses. But do not do so in an authoritarian way. Encourage your children to ask, question, probe, investigate, analyse, explore. Liberty means freedom of the mind, not just of the body. Those who are confident of their faith need fear no question. It is only those who lack confidence, who have secret and suppressed doubts, who are afraid.

The one essential, though, is to know and to teach this to our children, that not every question has an answer we can immediately understand. There are ideas we will only fully comprehend through age and experience, others that take great intellectual preparation, yet others that may be beyond our collective comprehension at this stage of the human quest. Darwin never knew what a gene was. Even the great Newton, founder of modern science, understood how little he understood, and put it beautifully: “I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”

In teaching its children to ask and keep asking, Judaism honoured what Maimonides called the “active intellect” and saw it as the gift of God. No faith has honoured human intelligence more

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL
Quoted from "A NATION IS BORN" by Rabbi Miller Z'TL

“And it shall be to you a sign upon your arm and a remembrance between your eyes, in order that Hashem’s Torah be in your mouth, for with a strong arm Hashem brought you out from Egypt” (13:9)

The deliverance from Egypt was done in order to give Israel the Torah, and it is the cause which obligates Israel to accept the Torah. This obligation is frequently mentioned together with the Misvot. But the acceptance of the Torah is expressed here by learning and repeating: “that Hashem’s Torah be in your mouth.” This is indeed necessary and important in order to fulfill the Torah laws.

We must understand that the learning and the repeating of the Torah is an end in itself, and from elsewhere in the Torah we can see that it is the most important of all the Torah functions. “And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them diligently to your sons and you shall speak in them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you arise.” (Debarim 6:6-7, Perashat Shema).

Indeed it is written “In your mouth and in your heart to do it” (ibid. 30:14). But the doing is a condition: the learning must be with the resolve to do. But the learning in itself is the major function, and therefore the Tefilin on the arm and between the eyes are indeed to remind us that Hashem’s Torah should be in our mouths, and here no doing is mentioned.

Thus the redemption from Egypt is intended primarily for the purpose that Israel devote itself to Torah-study. This is clearly indicated: “Because of this that Hashem did for me when I went forth from Egypt. And it shall be to you as a sign upon your arm and as a reminder between your eyes in order that the Torah of Hashem be in your mouth.”
The Exodus from Egypt was in order that the Torah should be in the mouths of Israel.

Some important thoughts on Tefillin heard from Rabbi Miller ZT'L

Before putting on your Tefillin think of the following:

1. "Beezrat Hashem, I am going to do a Positive Commandment of Hashem, to put on Tefillin.
2. "In remembrance of Hashem taking Us out of Egypt"
3. "In order that Your Torah should be on my mouth"
4. "I thank You Hashem for giving me this arm & head on which I can put on these Tefillin"
5. Look at the straps around your middle finger & think/say "I am engaged to The Creator of the World!"
6. I will serve Hashem with my arm/body & head/mind.