

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

PARSHAT BO

JANUARY 16, 2016 6 SHEVAT 5776

**DEDICATIONS: By Robert Marcus in memory of his mom, Mildred "Millie" Marcus AH
Thanks Robert for being a good friend.**

**Also in memory of my Rabbi and Teacher, Rabbi Asher Abittan, z'sl
My uncle Haim Ben Victoria Gindi HaKohen and my great uncle David Mizrahi – all on 8 Shevat**

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Editors Notes

The first commandment in the Torah given to the
Nation as a whole is given in this week's portion of
Bo. It is the misvah to sanctify the new moon and to
pronounce Rosh Hodesh. As I write this, we are
celebrating Rosh Hodesh or the new moon of the
month of Shevat. Shevat takes us from the darkness
and cold of Tevet to the month where we celebrate
the new year of the trees and the potential plant life
sprouting from within the earth. We celebrate Rosh
Hodesh by saying Hallel and many people add a
somewhat festive meal to the day.

The new month always represents the potential to
start over and start fresh. We always look forward to
the new moon with a special prayer on the Shabbat
prior where we announce the new moon and include
our hopes for the coming month. And beginning a few
days after the appearance of that first sliver, we hope
for a clear night when we can see a quarter of the
moon and say birkat halevana, the blessing on the
moon. For Sephardim, we have about a week from
that quarter to the full moon when we are permitted to
say the blessing. The rabbis tell us that one who says
birkat halevana is guaranteed to be protected from a
strange death the rest of that month.

I heard this many years ago during a class and the
idea of being protected from a strange death was
reinforced by many stories particular among them
were some about Rav Shimon Schwab who held

strongly to this notion. From that point forward, I
made it a point to never miss saying this blessing
each month by the light of the moon. It's not always
easy. Some months we get a few days straight of
cloudiness, so it's not unusual to find me pulling my
car over on the road or standing on my balcony in the
middle of the night or stopping on a street corner to
say the blessing.

Last month though was different. Although I did get a
text reminding me that the moon was clear and I
should say the blessing on the first night possible,
feeling under the weather, I simply made it up to my
bed and passed out. And then each night and each
predawn morning I looked up and the moon was
nowhere to be found. Only clouds filled the sky. And
then the 15th came and I missed my chance. I was
haunted by that reminder text and lamented over my
laziness in not saying the blessing when I had a
chance. I certainly felt depressed because I missed
the opportunity and my imagination conjectured the
ramifications. Was it a sign that I was unprotected?
Did a strange death await me? Should I get on the
plane? Should I get into that taxi? For someone who
is totally not superstitious, I strangely enough
remained and continue to be very nervous.

I am reminded of a custom the holy books speak of
for Hoshana Rabah. Hoshana Rabah is in essence
the last day of the holiday of sukkot. It falls 21 days
after Rosh Hashana and 11 days after Yom Kippur.
Where Rosh Hashana is the day of judgement and
Yom Kippur is the day that judgement is sealed,
Hoshana Rabah represents the day that the
judgement is delivered. Until and even through that
day, we can potentially change the verdict. Given the
life and death ramifications of Hoshana Rabah where
we stay up all night learning and extend our early
morning in solemn prayer, the custom mentioned is
to go out after midnight and stand within the shade of
the moon. If one can see a shadow of his head
complete and full, he is assured a verdict of life has
been delivered, but if that shadow is incomplete, he
had better make plans with the funeral home.

One year when Rabbi Abittan's son Shaya and I were
learning together with the rabbi on the night of

Hoshana Rabah, we wanted to try it. The rabbi strongly forbid us explaining that we would have no idea what we were looking for or looking at with regard to this shadow. We would possibly and probably misinterpret, making ourselves sick with worry. The talmud lists a number of signs people can use to determine if they will live long, be successful in business, or be successful on a trip. We are told not to do any of those for the same reasons. Perhaps we misinterpret, leading to a worry caused heart attack and that ends up killing us.

These past couple of weeks I can certainly relate to what the rabbi taught us. The nervousness makes itself known mostly in my dreams. Now I understand that the majority of our dreams are a manifestation of our thoughts and worries. But understanding that doesn't help much while we are in the dream itself.

In one repeating dream, I find myself visiting heaven. I see my dad and he is so much taller than me. He looks much younger, vigorous and he is filled with joy. We spend some time speaking and when he is done, he gives me a hug and my face only comes up to his chest. When he tells me that it's time for me to go back, I leave him and start to return but my path is blocked again and again as in some video game style obstacle course. I have no idea how to make my way home and begin to panic. It's then that a friend appears and tells me what to do. Two lefts, a right and then continue even when the door looks closed and tell them your going back when they block you. It works but as soon as I return, I wake up and let me tell you, my heart is beating fast.

In my dreams in the past, I have often met Rabbi Abittan in a study hall somewhere between heaven and earth, but the past couple of weeks we met only once and we are somewhere different, a room way up in heaven where I met my dad. And when I am ready to leave the rabbi, I have that same nightmarish return.

I can fully understand how right Rabbi Abittan was in admonishing Shaya and me many years ago from stepping into a world we shouldn't be stepping into. The potential for mistakes along with ramifications in misunderstanding are huge. I also understand we must be careful with what we teach others. Superstitions are dangerous.

But in an equally strange way, because of these dreams and worried, I am cognizant and appreciative of every day I get through almost like a soldier at the front (which may be a good thing). And if I've been somewhat aloof, self-absorbed or disconnected these past few weeks, now you know why.

Presently, I'm counting the moments until I can again say Birkat HaLevana this month so the dreams will stop and I won't have to fight my way back each night from heaven.

All this is very confusing. What does my experience tell you? I can't wait to hear.

Hodesh Tov and Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Two Dollars for the License to Dream
Rabbi Efreim Goldberg
January 11, 2016

I have a confession to make – I bought a lottery ticket for the Power Ball. After all, you've got to be in it to win it and this Wednesday night, winning it means winning \$1.3 billion. True, the lump sum payout comes to only \$806,000,000 but I think we can find a way to make do with that amount.

Now, I am not foolish, I know that I am unlikely to win. After all, the odds of winning the lottery is 1 in 292,200,000. There is a greater likelihood of being hit by lightning twice in the same day as there is of winning the lottery. So why play it at all? Moreover, is it halachicly appropriate to play or is it tantamount to throwing out money?

Interestingly, some Rabbis have suggested that there is nothing wrong with playing the lottery, but one should not buy more than one ticket. You see, buying one ticket represents human initiative to have a chance at scoring millions. However, the likelihood of winning only grows at a negligible, statistically insignificant rate when buying more tickets. Therefore, say some Rabbis, if you buy more than one ticket you lack emunah, faith, for if God wants you to win, you can win with the one ticket.

I agree that only one ticket should be purchased, but for an altogether different reason. The hope of winning is only a small fraction of why I bought a ticket. The real reason to play, is because that ticket gives me license to dream, to ask myself important questions and to reflect in a meaningful way. If you are playing the lottery, you cannot avoid asking yourself what you would do if you won. Would you continue to work? Would you move to Israel? Would you give a meaningful amount to charity and if so where would you direct your philanthropic dollars? How would you spend your newfound time? What

luxuries, if any, would you indulge in? What would you change about your life?

These questions are not easy to answer and require some serious soul searching. If you won the lottery and you stopped working immediately, what does that say about what you do? Is it a profession or a calling, just for the money or also for the contribution to society? If you won the lottery and remain living outside of Israel, is money the real reason you aren't making aliyah right now? If winning the lottery meant quitting your job and having more time, how would you spend it – with your family, exercising, learning Torah, volunteering? What really matters to you and if it is truly important, why not find the time to do it now?

Without that ticket in your hand, these questions remain only theoretical and hypothetical. The way I see it, two dollars is a small amount to pay for the license to dream. However, since the likelihood is that the license to dream is all the dollars will get you, buying more tickets won't expand your license and won't meaningfully increase your chances and therefore, would be a waste of money.

So go buy a ticket and spend this Shabbos discussing with your family and friends how you would spend the rest of your life and the difference you would make if you won.

Two dollars is an absolute bargain for what you will learn.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading 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 mitsvah 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'ayah kiy yebiecha (mitsvot commemorating makat bechorot and yesiat Mitsrayim).

Daniella Moffson z"l:

We join the Ramaz and KJ Families in mourning the passing of Daniella yesterday while on a "chesed" mission with Columbia to Honduras.

Rabbi Lookstein writes: The Ramaz and KJ communities are heartbroken over the tragic death of Daniella Moffson z"l, a 2012 graduate of Ramaz. Daniella will forever be remembered as a young woman whose smile brought joy to everyone, whose prayers inspired those around her, and whose idealism touched the lives of so many. We mourn the passing of such a talented, bright, and compassionate young woman.

We offer our condolences to her parents Sheera and Michael, her sister Raquel '10, her brother Alex '16, and the entire Moffson family. As a community, we come together to offer Daniella's family our comfort and support, and pray that God should comfort them amongst the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Daniella devoted her life, including her very last days, to improving the world through acts of *chesed*, *tzedakah*, and kindness. In the summer after ninth grade she served at an AIDS clinic in South Africa, and throughout high school she volunteered for Friendship Circle. Daniella was a counselor at Camp Simcha, a camp for children with cancer. She was, fittingly, the chair of the Ramaz *Chesed* Committee.

We will perpetuate Daniella's legacy by continuing to do acts of *chesed* and kindness in her memory.

Tehi nishmata tzrurah b'tzror hachayim.

May her soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life.

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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With Our Youth and With Our Elderly We Shall Go

Upon hearing Moshe's warning of the eighth plague, the plague of locusts, which would destroy all the crops in Egypt that survived the plague of hail, Pharaoh expresses a willingness to let Beneh Yisrael leave Egypt. A curious dialogue then ensues between Pharaoh and Moshe.

Pharaoh tells the leader of the Israelites, "Go worship Hashem your God," but he then immediately asks, "Who are the ones who are going?" (10:8).

Moshe replies, "With our youth and with our elderly we shall go – with our sons and with our daughters, with our sheep and with our cattle we shall go, for we have a festival to Hashem!" (10:9). Pharaoh then rejects Moshe's demand that both young and old be allowed into the wilderness to serve God.

How are we to understand this exchange?

The Malbim (Rabbi Meir Lebusch Ben Yehiel Michel, 1809-1879) offered an insightful explanation of these verses. Pharaoh, like many ancient pagans, believed that there was a god of good and a god of evil. Unable to accept the fact that a single divine power brings both goodness and evil upon people, the pagans concluded that there must be two separate, competing gods, one of which brings goodness, and the other brings evil. According to this belief, we need to bring sacrifices to only the god of evil, in order to placate him and win his favor so he does not cause us harm.

This explains Pharaoh's question. He assumed that if Beneh Yisrael were going to worship the god of evil, thus requiring them to bring their sheep and cattle, then they should not bring their youngsters, who would be frightened by the service of an evil, threatening divine power. If, however, the nation was going to worship the god of good, then it is understood that they would bring their children, but there was no reason to bring sheep and cattle, because sacrifices are not necessary when serving the god of good.

Moshe therefore responded to Pharaoh, "With all youths and with our elderly we shall go" – we will take their youth with us, but, nevertheless, "with our sheep and with our cattle we shall go" – we are ALSO bringing our animals as sacrifices. The reason, Moshe explained, is that "we have a festival to Hashem." Our God, he told Pharaoh, is the God of "Havaya," the one God who governs all of existence. We believe that there is but one God who is responsible for everything that takes place on earth, and that there is no difference between what we perceive as "good" and what we perceive as "evil" – it is all "good," brought about by the one, true God.

When we worship God, we acknowledge that He is the one who brings prosperity and good fortune, and also the one who brings illness and poverty. And there is no contradiction whatsoever between the two, because we firmly believe that whether or not we understand it, all that the Almighty does is, ultimately, pure goodness. This is the belief we take with us when we go to serve Hashem, and the belief which we seek to impart to our children whom we happily

and joyously include in this national spiritual endeavor of Abodat Hashem (serving God)!

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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Rabbi Wein

As the drama of the Exodus from Egypt draws nearer its climax in this week's Torah reading, one cannot help but be struck by the stubbornness of Pharaoh in the face of all of the plagues visited upon him and his nation. His advisers had long before told him that all was lost and that he should cut his losses quickly by freeing the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. This seemingly wise and rational counsel was rejected by Pharaoh out of hand.

Pharaoh sees himself as a godlike figure, omniscient, supremely brilliant and all knowing. He is trapped in a propaganda web of his own making – he can never admit to being wrong or to having made an error of judgment or policy. In the course of human history this has often been the fatal error made by dictators who were always supremely confident in their arrogance and who never acknowledged their mistakes.

Just recall the mass murderers and dictators of our past century – Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Arafat, etc. None of them ever admitted to error and all of them led their people to disaster and untold suffering. This was the arrogance of power overwhelming rational thought and nullifying good strategic planning. There is also an arrogance of intellect. The intellectuals amongst us, who always know what is best for everyone else, are never reticent about rendering opinions on all issues and policies. Again, the fact that they have been wrong – dead wrong – so many times in the past causes them no inhibition in advancing their current viewpoints.

The Torah seems to attribute Pharaoh's continuing folly of unreasonable stubbornness, to God, so to speak, 'hardening his heart.' This implies that somehow Pharaoh's freedom of choice was diminished and he could not have capitulated to the demands of Moshe even if he had wished to do so. This philosophic and theological difficulty has been dealt with by the great commentators of Israel over the ages, with varying theories offered and advanced.

It seems from many of their opinions that at a certain point in human decision-making, a tipping point is achieved when the leader can no longer admit to error and remain the leader. 'Hardening' the leader's heart means there is an unwillingness to give up one's position of power. Very few leaders in the history of humanity have willingly surrendered power.

Simply rising to a position of leadership, let alone absolute and dictatorial power, almost automatically 'hardens one's heart' and limits one's choices and policy options. The Torah blesses a generation that is privileged to have a leader that is capable of admitting sin and error and can offer a public sacrifice in the Temple in atonement.

The greatness of King David lies not only in his heroic spiritual and physical accomplishments as king of Israel but in his ability to admit to personal failings and errors of judgment. Pharaoh is incapable of such self-scrutiny and realistic humility. His lust for power has 'hardened his heart' beyond the power of recall. He has doomed himself as have so many of his ilk over the centuries.

DENIERS AND IGNORERS

I wrote an article last week about the strange Holocaust deniers who exist in the world, inside and outside of our Jewish camp and even in our religious world. The motives that drive such people are diverse and often perverse. They range from the smugness of knowing what God's plans are and the assurance that those plans must somehow conform to one's own preconceived assessment as to how things should be, to the self-hatred of those who suffer from the "misfortune" of being born Jewish.

And then there are the anti-Semites who continually abound and whose hatred of Jews is not limited to the living but also encompasses those already physically murdered in the past. I really do not think that there is much hope for the redemption of these deniers. It is part of their warped faith and twisted worldview.

If after all of the films, books, interviews, PhD theses, Holocaust Studies chairs and departments that exist everywhere, that there are still those who deny, distort or diminish the Holocaust, then battling against them, even though necessary, is pretty much futile. The rabbis of the Talmud long ago pointed out that hatred distorts all logical thinking and factual realities.

And so it does in the area of Holocaust related history and proven facts. Hatred just rules the day, especially when combined with other seemingly more altruistic

ideas and educational tactics. But perhaps even more dangerous and insidious to the future success of the Jewish people are the ignorers of the Holocaust. It simply is not a topic of conversation or study in many fastidiously intensive Jewish schools. Large sections of Orthodox Jewish schools, both in Israel and USA, have no room for the Holocaust in their curriculums. No truly ritualistic memorial to the Holocaust has appeared on our calendar or in our prayer books. Two kinnot at the end of hours of prayer just does not carry any emotional or historical gravitas. And even these kinnot on Tisha b'Av are certainly not universally recited.

Much of Orthodoxy became embroiled in a useless dispute with a then very secular Israeli Knesset, sixty-five years ago, about a date for commemorating the Holocaust, a dispute that still reverberates today, every year when springtime arrives. Since "they" chose the wrong date, we have no date whatsoever.

The Chief Rabbinate in Israel designated the fast day of the tenth of Tevet as a Holocaust remembrance day with the recitation of kaddish. However, any proposals advanced by the Chief Rabbinate are so fraught with historical baggage and political machinations that it has almost no chance of wide acceptance in the Jewish world, secular or religious. And since the Holocaust is certainly an issue that raises theological problems and doubts about the alleged infallibility of great Torah scholars, the entire subject is left untaught, undiscussed and pretty much ignored. What a tragic state of being!

It is ironic in the extreme that the two most momentous events probably in millennia of Jewish history – the willful destruction of one third of world Jewry in World War II and the establishment of a sovereign, independent Jewish state in the Land of Israel – are subjects that are ignored and not taught in large sections of the Jewish educational world.

Both of these events were essentially unanticipated occurrences. The coming and the establishment of the State of Israel and the manner in which it happened do not conform to any preconceived notion in the Jewish world as to how the return to Zion, promised to us by the prophets of Israel, would take place. And this caused great discomfort in the religious Jewish world. It was the wrong people creating the wrong state in the wrong manner. And these strains are still significant and felt throughout the religious world.

There are synagogues that will not allow a prayer for the welfare of the State of Israel. How do they feel that Jewish history after thousands of years of exile

and persecution would view and somehow justify such an attitude? This has nothing to do with Zionism. That battle is long over. These are issues that affect the Jewish future and that future is what we should concentrate our efforts and attitudes on and adjust our behavior accordingly.

Learning to Appreciate the Value Of a “Simple” Mincha Minyan

Rav Yechiel Spero once related an inspiring story that took place in the Otis Federal Penitentiary in upstate New York.

For years, Sholom Rubashkin, who was convicted in a controversial trial, was serving his sentence in the prison. A special Sefer Torah had been written in honor of Mr. Rubashkin and permission was obtained for a group of slightly more than 10 Yidden to come into the federal prison with the Sefer Torah, and hold a Hachnosas Sefer Torah celebration for a few hours with Sholom Rubashkin. The group was told that the affair had to end exactly at 3:30 P.M., and all those visiting the prisoner had to leave at that time with their Sefer Torah.

For a couple of hours, everyone, including Sholom Rubashkin, were dancing ecstatically, rejoicing over the new Sefer Torah, as if they were in Shul on Simchas Torah, and not in a prison. The guest of honor occasionally looked at his watch as he continued to dance, as though he was a Chossan at his own wedding.

All of a sudden at 3:15 P.M., he called out for everyone to please stop dancing. The group called back that they had permission to dance until 3:30, and that was in another 15 minutes!

R' Sholom Rubashkin answered, “This is the first time in all of the years I have been incarcerated at the Otis Prison, that I have a Minyan of Frum Jews who could daven Minchah!” It was such a precious opportunity that he didn’t want to lose it, and he begged them to stop the dancing, as at 3:30 P.M. the prison officials would force them out, and who knew when he would again have a chance to daven with a Minyan.

The dancing stopped and Sholom Rubashkin led the davening with tremendous Kavanah. As you can imagine, nobody talked during that special and unforgettable Minchah Minyan! Rabbi Spero said, “Perhaps the inspiration of that unique Minyan might inspire all of us not to take our Davening for granted, and to try and utilize the great potential it offers us to change our lives and those around us for the better!”

Reprinted from last week’s email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg via Daniel Keren’s Shabbos Stories

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Spiritual Child

The American writer Bruce Feiler recently published a best-selling book entitled *The Secrets of Happy Families*.^[1] It’s an engaging work that uses research largely drawn from fields like team building, problem solving and conflict resolution, showing how management techniques can be used at home also to help make families cohesive units that make space for personal growth.

At the end, however, he makes a very striking and unexpected point: “The single most important thing you can do for your family may be the simplest of all: develop a strong family narrative.” He quotes a study from Emory University that the more children know about their family’s story, “the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem, the more successfully they believe their family functions.”^[2]

A family narrative connects children to something larger than themselves. It helps them make sense of how they fit into the world that existed before they were born. It gives them the starting-point of an identity. That in turn becomes the basis of confidence. It enables children to say: This is who I am. This is the story of which I am a part. These are the people who came before me and whose descendant I am. These are the roots of which I am the stem reaching upward toward the sun.

Nowhere was this point made more dramatically than by Moses in this week’s parsha. The tenth plague is about to strike. Moses knows that this will be the last. Pharaoh will not merely let the people go. He will urge them to leave. So, on God’s command, he prepares the people for freedom. But he does so in a way that is unique. He does not talk about liberty. He does not speak about breaking the chains of bondage. He does not even mention the arduous journey that lies ahead. Nor does he enlist their enthusiasm by giving them a glimpse of the destination, the Promised Land that God swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the land of milk and honey.

He talks about children. Three times in the course of the parsha he turns to the theme:

And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this rite?’ you shall say . . . (Exodus 12:26-27)

And you shall explain to your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went

free from Egypt' (Exodus 13:8)

And when, in time to come, your child asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him . . . (Exodus 13:14)

This is wonderfully counterintuitive. He doesn't speak about tomorrow but about the distant future. He does not celebrate the moment of liberation. Instead he wants to ensure that it will form part of the people's memory until the end of time. He wants each generation to pass on the story to the next. He wants Jewish parents to become educators, and Jewish children to be guardians of the past for the sake of the future. Inspired by God, Moses taught the Israelites the lesson arrived at via a different route by the Chinese: If you plan for a year, plant rice. If you plan for a decade, plant a tree. If you plan for a century, educate a child.

Jews became famous throughout the ages for putting education first. Where others built castles and palaces, Jews built schools and houses of study. From this flowed all the familiar achievements in which we take collective pride: the fact that Jews knew their texts even in ages of mass illiteracy; the record of Jewish scholarship and intellect; the astonishing over-representation of Jews among the shapers of the modern mind; the Jewish reputation, sometimes admired, sometimes feared, sometimes caricatured, for mental agility, argument, debate, and the ability to see all sides of a disagreement.

But Moses' point wasn't simply this. God never commanded us: Thou shall win a Nobel Prize. What he wanted us to teach our children was a story. He wanted us to help our children understand who they are, where they came from, what happened to their ancestors to make them the distinctive people they became and what moments in their history shaped their lives and dreams. He wanted us to give our children an identity by turning history into memory, and memory itself into a sense of responsibility. Jews were not summoned to be a nation of intellectuals. They were called on to be actors in a drama of redemption, a people invited by God to bring blessings into the world by the way they lived and sanctified life.

For some time now, along with many others in the West, we have sometimes neglected this deeply spiritual element of education. That is what makes Lisa Miller's recent book *The Spiritual Child*,^[3] an important reminder of a forgotten truth. Professor Miller teaches psychology and education at Columbia University and co-edits the journal *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*. Her book is not about Judaism or

even religion as such, but specifically about the importance of parents encouraging the spirituality of the child.

Children are naturally spiritual. They are fascinated by the vastness of the universe and our place in it. They have the same sense of wonder that we find in some of the greatest of the psalms. They love stories, songs and rituals. They like the shape and structure they give to time, and relationships, and the moral life. To be sure, sceptics and atheists have often derided religion as a child's view of reality, but that only serves to strengthen the corollary, that a child's view of reality is instinctively, intuitively religious. Deprive a child of that by ridiculing faith, abandoning ritual, and focusing instead on academic achievement and other forms of success, and you starve him or her of some of the most important elements of emotional and psychological well-being.

As Professor Miller shows, the research evidence is compelling. Children who grow up in homes where spirituality is part of the atmosphere at home are less likely to succumb to depression, substance abuse, aggression and high-risk behaviours including physical risk-taking and "a sexuality devoid of emotional intimacy". Spirituality plays a part in a child's resilience, physical and mental health and healing. It is a key dimension of adolescence and its intense search for identity and purpose. The teenage years often take the form of a spiritual quest. And when there is a cross-generational bond through which children and parents come to share a sense of connection to something larger, an enormous inner strength is born. Indeed the parent-child relationship, especially in Judaism, mirrors the relationship between God and us.

That is why Moses so often emphasises the role of the question in the process of education: "When your child asks you, saying..." – a feature ritualised at the Seder table in the form of the *Mah nishtanah*. Judaism is a questioning and argumentative faith, in which even the greatest ask questions of God, and in which the rabbis of the Mishnah and Midrash constantly disagree. Rigid doctrinal faith that discourages questions, calling instead for blind obedience and submission, is psychologically damaging and fails to prepare a child for the complexity of real life. What is more, the Torah is careful, in the first paragraph of the *Shema*, to say, "You shall love the Lord your God ..." before saying, "You shall teach these things diligently to your children." Parenthood works when your children see that you love what you want them to learn.

The long walk to freedom, suggests this week's

parsha, is not just a matter of history and politics, let alone miracles. It has to do with the relationship between parents and children. It is about telling the story and passing it on across the generations. It is about a sense of God's presence in our lives. It is about making space for transcendence, wonder, gratitude, humility, empathy, love, forgiveness and compassion, ornamented by ritual, song and prayer. These help to give a child confidence, trust and hope, along with a sense of identity, belonging and at-home-ness in the universe.

You cannot build a healthy society out of emotionally unhealthy families and angry and conflicted children. Faith begins in families. Hope is born in the home.

[1] Bruce Feiler, *The Secrets of Happy Families*, New York, William Morrow, 2013.

[2] Ibid., 274. Feiler does not cite the source, but see: Bohanek, Jennifer G., Kelly A. Marin, Robyn Fivush, and Marshall P. Duke. "Family Narrative Interaction and Children's Sense of Self." *Family Process* 45.1 (2006): 39-54.

[3] Miller, Lisa. *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*, New York, St Martin's Press, 2015.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z"TL

"And I shall see the blood and I shall skip over you and there shall be no plague upon you" (12:13)

Why was anything necessary to protect the Israelites from a plague that was sent upon their oppressors?

But there is a rule: "When permission is given to the Destroyer, he no longer distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked" (Baba Kama 60A). Hashem's preference for the righteous is not permitted by Him to interfere with this principle of His. Unless the righteous take shelter in houses which are distinguished by a mark of Hashem's service. The Destroyer, then, 'passes over' the loyal.

The significance of this symbolism is one of the miracles of history: the eternity of Israel as a nation in this world.

The Destroyer eventually brings destruction to every nation, one after the other. No nation has survived this inexorable fate of eventual downfall. Egypt (today Egypt is merely a name, but the people and the culture of Egypt's original greatness have vanished entirely), Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome have disappeared from the face of the earth.

But Israel, that accepted G-d's service forever, is 'passed over' by the Destroyer and they shall continue as a nation forever. Those of Israel that are disloyal shall also go lost forever.

Not only in this life is Israel's existence forever, but also those that pass into the Afterlife are also forever.

"All Israel has a share in the World to Come".

Quoted from "A Nation is Born" by Rabbi Miller

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