

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VA'ERA

JANUARY 20-21, 2012 26 TEBET 5772

Rosh Hodesh Shebat will be celebrated on Wednesday, January 25.

DEDICATIONS : By Jack Bitton for a Refuah Shelema for Mesoda Bat Hana
And in memory of Sarah Bat Esther whose Yahrzeit is today 25 TEBET

Mabrook and Mazal Tov to Rachel and Abe Abittan on
the birth of a new grandson, to their children, Shani and Baruch Abittan.

The brit milah will take place iyh Sunday, January 22 at the Riverdale Jewish Center.
3700 Independence Avenue Riverdale, NY. Shaharit at 9 am May we continue to share semachot together!

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION SCHEDULE AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

FRIDAY NIGHT

Mincha at 4:40 – Followed by Kabbalat Shabbat and Arbit (Candle Lighting: 4:39)

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

- Shaharith: 9:00 Kiddush this week is sponsored by
- Benai Asher Youth Program 10:45 – 11:45
- Mincha following Kiddush – We need sponsors
- Women's Learning Group 4:15 Alternating speakers, seudat shlishit served, at the Lemberger's 1 East Olive. Class is always cancelled if there is inclement weather.
- Arbit at 6:00pm followed by Havdalah – Shabbat ends at 5:40pm
- Class and Movie Night Continue in February

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

- Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)
- Many of our regulars are away this week. Please make every effort to come to our minyan. Your presence is greatly appreciated!

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

- Introduction to Prayer 9:00 – 9:30 Sunday Mornings
- "Wisdom from the Wisest of Men" Mon-Fri 6:30 AM – based upon King Solomon's Proverbs
- Resumes Tuesday 1/31 Men's Halacha Class 8:30-10:30: Basar BeChalav
- "Sephardic Women's Prayer" Tuesday night 8PM @ the shul with Rabbi Colish. - deep insights, simple translations and a how to guide.
- Kosher Kitchen – we are in the midst of setting a time for the class, choices are Sundays mornings, Sunday evenings, Tuesday at 8 or 8:30 or Wednesday at 8 or 8:30. If you have a preference, now's the time to mention it to Hindy or Rabbi Colish. Begins February.

SPECIAL EVENTS

- January 28 - Rabbi's Yehrtzeit. The entire Abittan family will be with us for Shabbat
- February 3 - Friday night dinner at the shul to commemorate the Rabbi's yehrtzeit. \$18 for those 12 and up, \$10 for children ages 5-12 and under 5 free. Additional donations and sponsorships will be graciously accepted. To RSVP call Patti Azizo at 516 680-6023 or Lisa Gaon at (516) 431-0243•

Join us for the first of many movie nights sponsored by the Sephardic and Lido Synagogues on Moztei Shabbat, February 4th at 7:30. We will be watching the 2007 Israeli thriller Ha Hov (The Debt) at the Lido Synagogue while our children will be watching a movie at our synagogue. Refreshments will be served. Cost: \$5 per person. Checks can be made out to our synagogue.

February 7 – Tu Be'Shevat Seder and Dinner – Thanks to Penny Waldman and Rabbi Colish for arranging. If you can volunteer, please speak with Penny

please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com

**Daily Minyan on the East Side
 59th and Third Ave
 Monday through Thursday at
 NEW TIME: 4:30 PM Sharp –
 Join us
 Mincha followed by Arbit –Take
 20 Minutes out of your day
 Artistic Frame – 979 Third
 Avenue – 1705
 For more information please
 speak with
 Rabbi Danny Greenwald
 212-289-2100 or e-mail
 Danny@artisticframe.com**

EDITORS NOTES

This week's portion when translated into English, begins with the words: "And G-d said to Moses, and said to him, I am G-d". If G-d said to Moses, why does He need to say again? And if G-d is speaking to Moses, and Moses knows that, why does G-d seem to reintroduce himself?

Rabbi Abittan would often say, it's impossible to understand the Torah from the translation. The Hebrew is crucial. When we go to the Hebrew, we see the first part of the verse uses the term, Vaydaber (said) and Elokim (G-d), while the second part of the same verse uses Vayomer (said) and Hashem or Havayah (G-d). What's the difference and what does it mean to us? And in light that many of us are traveling this week with our children who are off from school, what's the special message to those reading this on an airplane, on a beach in the Caribbean, at the ski lodge, by the pool in Miami, on a safari in South Africa, surfing in Australia or just staying home with the kids?

Christian lore often depicts a god who is angry and ready to strike out and punish, who is quick to pronounce eternal damnation and

who judges one guilty until proven otherwise. That's a tough god to relate to.

As Jews we teach our children about a loving and merciful creator who is with us always, who protects us always, who provides for us always, who forgives our sins and who loves us more than we could ever imagine. That's a much easier G-d to relate to.

And although its much greater to love someone that to fear them, Rabbi Abittan would remind me that some fear is good. One sometimes needs a bit more motivation than simply knowing and wanting to do the right thing.

We have noted that when we mention Elokim, we are noting G-d's aspect of strict justice, while Hashem denotes the aspect of mercy and kindness. With justice, you get what you deserve. You work, you get paid. You study, you pass the test. And when you cheat you get punished. With kindness, we get what we don't deserve and as we mentioned growth generally comes when we earn something not when we are given it free.

In the same vein, the terms Vaydaber and Vayomer both meaning "and He said", denote a harsh tongue vs. a soft tongue.

The nature of this world reflects both justice and mercy. Justice requires our action. Too many of us think that mercy is free. But the message of this week's portion is that it too requires something of us. We are learning this week how to earn the mercy ring, how to earn the get out of jail free pass or the free parking card.

This week Hashem tells Moses that only to you and generations forward will I reveal my name. Does that mean Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not know Hashem?

Rabbi Aderet explains and I heard this when learning the Gemarah Makot 23B in the name of the Zohar ... The Talmud notes, Rebbi Simla'i teaches that there are 613 Mitzvot: 365 Mitzvos Lo Ta'aseh – we call these negative commandments where we are forbidden to do some action, and 248 Mitzvot Aseh – we call these positive commandments where we are required to do some action..

The Zohar explains that these Mitzvot are alluded to in the verse, "Zeh Shemi leOlam, veZeh Zichri leDor vaDor" -- "This is My name forever, and this is My remembrance for all generations". We read this verse last week in the third perek of Shemot.

As the Zohar explains, there are two parts to the four-letter Name of Hash-m. The first half is the first two letters, "Yud" and "Heh," with which Hashem reveals Himself in this world (see Eruvin 18b, and Rashi to Tehilim 115:17). The second half is the last two letters of the Name, "Vav" and "Heh." The numerical value or gematriya of the word "Shemi" (350) combined with that of the first two letters of the Name of Hash-m is 365, which alludes to the number of positive commandments. The numerical value of the word "Zichri" (237) combined with the last two letters of the Name of Hash-m is 248, which alludes to the number of positive commandments.

Our forefathers did not receive the revealed Torah. That event will only take place seven weeks after the Exodus. The connection for us, to the name of Hashem, to the name of mercy, to the lottery ticket of blessings in life is through those 613 commandments, through doing them and studying them. That's the price of the ticket. Is there a

better gift to pass on to our children?

When vacation comes too many people remember the poem we heard as kids, no more teachers, no more books ... and it becomes a week without either. The Rabbi would teach every day you miss costs you two. The fact is that this the week where you become the teacher, you bring the book, you fulfill "And you should teach your children".

Zeh Shemi leOlam, veZeh Zichri leDor vaDor" -- "This is My name forever, and this is My remembrance from generation to generation". What better time than a week's vacation to set aside time every day on that beach, by the pool, after you've skied the slope, when you're on the plane, train or bus, to pick up a book with your child and study? You've taken a few days; they've been given a few days. This is your chance to perhaps listen to a class together, read a Torah article together, study a passage together and talk about it. Pass your connection, your parent's connection, your grandparents connect from one generation to the next.

This is your obligation. This is your gift. Have a great time doing it!

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: The year is 2448 and Moshe had unsuccessfully confronted Pharaoh. The situation had gotten worse, not better, and Hashem (G-d) reassured Moshe that in fact the redemption was about to begin. The 4 statements of redemption are stated for which

we have the 4 cups of wine at the Passover Seder.

2nd & 3rd Aliyot: Moshe's Yichus (lineage) is established. He is 80 years old and Aharon is 83.

4th Aliya: Moshe performed the miracle of the "staff turning to a serpent" and performed the first and second plagues.

5th Aliya: Moshe performed the third plague and forewarned Pharaoh about the fourth.

6th Aliya: The fourth, fifth, and sixth plagues were performed, and Moshe forewarned Pharaoh regarding the seventh.

7th Aliya: The seventh plague was performed and Pharaoh "hardens his heart" and refused to let the Jews go.

Yechezkel 28:25 - The theme of the Exodus is the Jew and the Egyptian recognizing G-d's absolute mastery over all things. The nature of a slave / master relationship is for the slave to be dependent on the master and the master to feel a proprietorship over the slave. At the time of the Exodus, Pharaoh had to be humbled, the Jews had to be freed of their dependency upon Egypt, and the Jews would have to direct their fealty to G-d, and G-d alone.

Egypt retained her position as a major world power into the era of the first Bais Hamikdash (Temple). It would be Babylon that would humble Egypt and strip her of her position as a major international power.

Yechezkel, the Navi, prophesied the downfall of Egypt around the year 3332 - 429 b.c.e. He compared Egypt to a great sea monster that dominated the sea. The fisherman caught the sea monster along with all the other

fish that clung to the defeated monster, and dragged them into the wilderness to rot and become food for the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky. So too, the same would happen to Egypt and the Bnai Yisroel who had formed an unholy alliance with Egypt against the might of Babylon. Nevuchadnetzar would eventually destroy Egypt along with Israel who had clung to Egypt for protection. In order for the Jew to be truly free of all-foreign domination and oppression he would have to accept his dependency upon G-d, and G-d alone

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"Hashem said to Moshe, 'Say to Aharon, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt.'" (Beresheet 7:19)

Our perashah contains a most important message. This message teaches us about the most important character trait that one must have to be able to dedicate oneself to serving Hashem. Rashi explains in his commentary on the above verse that Aharon, not Moshe, will hit the Nile because the Nile protected Moshe when he was cast into it as a baby. Similarly, later in the perashah, the sand was given the same treatment since the sand helped Moshe. One must show gratitude even to inanimate objects, because if one damages something he benefited from, it will have a detrimental effect on his trait of gratitude.

Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon said that it is not coincidental that this lesson is derived from the parashiyot dealing with the exodus from Egypt. The miracles of the exodus demonstrated beyond any doubt that Hashem created the

universe, that He is all-powerful, and that He is intimately involved in the happenings of man. However, for this awareness to translate into dedicated service of Hashem, a person must possess the trait of gratitude. Only by recognizing the endless goodness that Hashem constantly bestows upon us can a person experience a true love of Hashem and be inspired to dedicate himself to serve Hashem. It is for this reason that great Torah personalities have always excelled in their trait of gratitude (hakarot hatob) towards those from whom they benefited.

This point is pivotal in understanding the inner workings of the story of the exodus. When Hashem told Moshe that he is the one and only redeemer, Moshe responded that he must ask his father-in-law, Yitro, if he could go. After all, Yitro opened his home to Moshe. How could Moshe contemplate not going to Egypt just because he owes Yitro a debt of gratitude? The answer is that the redemption is not only physical, it is also spiritual. The Jews were held sway under the tremendous trait of ingratitude of Pharaoh towards Yosef who saved Egypt. As a result of this, the Jews were influenced by Pharaoh and Egypt. Therefore, Moshe argued, how will the Jews be able to be freed from this terrible trait, which blocks one from serving Hashem? If his mission is to be a success, it must be with the exercise of gratitude to counteract the evil trait of Egypt. The goal is to create a nation that will serve Hashem, whose foundation must be with gratitude.

A day must not pass without sincerely saying thank you to Hashem. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

The second plague to befall Egypt was the plague of frogs.

As the children's song goes, "Frogs here, frogs there, frogs were truly everywhere." The amazing thing about this plague was that at the outset, Hashem brought upon the Egyptians one huge frog. When they began hitting the frog in anger and frustration, it multiplied again and again, until they were everywhere. The Steipler Rebbe Z"l asks the obvious question; Why didn't they stop hitting it when they saw the results of their actions?

He answers with a very profound truth about human nature. When a person is angry and does something in his anger, although he sees that no good will come out of it, he can't help himself. His anger carries him further to do what he knows intellectually he will regret later on. How often do we get into an argument and begin saying things we know we will have to take back. At the time, we feel that we just "have to" do this regardless of the consequences. Later on we realize how foolish we were and wish it never happened.

We should realize that the majority of the time getting angry does more harm than good. Although the Rabbis tell us that there are certain times we are allowed to act angry if we are truly calm inside and there is good reason for it, nevertheless, experience has shown that this is difficult to rely upon. Next time we think about losing our temper, let's remember the big Egyptian Frog, and think about the consequences. This will help us find alternatives to solve our problems without losing our temper. Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

URGENT REPLY

Impatience is a personality trait of the young. True even in simpler, slower times, this fact definitely cannot be denied in our high-speed, fiber-optic, DSL world of e-mail, electronic transfer of funds, and wireless communication. Indeed, today the inability to wait has spread to the older, usually more patient age groups as well.

Some things are, in fact, so time-sensitive that we could legitimately label them "urgent," but most issues are just not that important. The fact that an instant answer is possible does not mean that a quick response is necessary, or even beneficial. Often people answer unimportant e-mails as if they were high priority, just because they have gotten used to the concept of instant response.

Admittedly, getting everything off the desk and back in the other party's domain has its benefits, despite the pressure it creates. However, an answer given on the fly lacks consideration and evaluation. Recognizing this can make you decide to delay your electronic response and answer a question only after thinking it through carefully.

You might even have the chance to get another's opinions and insights on the matter, and may ultimately come to see the issue from a totally different perspective.

Immediacy is the enemy of reflection, and reflection is the mother of success. Before you rush to reply, think about that for a minute. Then decide whether your need to reply is really urgent. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
 Visit DailyHalacha.com,
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MishnaBerura.com,
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Anger and Idolatry

In describing the onset of the plague of frogs – the second of the ten plagues that God brought upon Egypt – the Torah writes, “Va’ta’al Ha’sfarde’a” – “the frog ascended [from the river]” (8:2). Curiously, the Torah here speaks of the frogs in the singular form, as though there was only one frog. The Sages of the Midrash explain that in fact, the plague began with only a single large frog. The Egyptians starting beating the frog in an attempt to kill it, but it reacted to the beating by reproducing. Now confronted by a group of irritating frogs, the Egyptians proceeded to beat them, too, but once again, their beatings just caused the frogs to reproduce further. This process continued until there were so many frogs that the country was overrun by them and faced a severe national crisis.

The obvious question arises as to why the Egyptians did not stop beating the frogs once they took note of this pattern. It quickly became clear that their beatings only exacerbated the problem. So why did they continue? Didn’t they realize they were only making matters worse?

The Steipler Gaon (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, 1899-1985) answered that anger, quite simply, leads to irrational behavior. When people become enraged, they act without thinking. Indeed, it made no sense to continue hitting the frogs when this only aggravated the problem. But this is what angry people do – they act insensibly, without thinking.

I once saw with my own eyes a person in a fit of rage throw a violent punch against a concrete wall. He suffered several fractures in his hand and went to the hospital. We can only imagine his embarrassment when he had to tell the doctor in the emergency room what happened. Similarly, there is lots of talk nowadays about “road rage,” the dangers of angry feelings that erupt while driving. A person could be rolling along peacefully down the highway enjoying some good music, until somebody cuts him off. He gets angry, and then goes into a frantic rage that endangers his life as well as the lives of everyone else on the road.

This kind of senseless behavior is typical of people overcome by anger. The rational faculties shut off, and they act without thinking.

This might explain the Talmud’s astounding comment that a person who becomes angry is considered as though he worshipped idols. At first glance, it seems difficult to understand why anger would be compared to pagan worship. One answer, perhaps, is that our Sages refer here to this aspect of irrationality. Idolatry is totally irrational. It makes no sense at all to worship a statue made by a human being, and which one can destroy or throw in the trash at whim. Nor is it logical to worship a tree that a person can just chop down and then use for a barbeque. And yet, for many centuries, people around the world believed in the power of this worship. The Rabbis in the Talmud thus teach us that anger is akin to idolatry. It causes one to act insensibly like idol worshippers. When a person becomes angry, he loses the ability to think rationally, and herein lies the point of connection to idol worship.

For good reason, our Rabbis warned of the evils of anger. Of course, we cannot reasonably expect never to become angry. The Talmud tells of the great Sage Hillel that he never became angry, but most of us cannot reach that standard. Still, we must make every effort to retrain this emotion and keep it in check. Once a person isn’t thinking rationally, there’s no limit to what kind of damage he can cause to himself and others. It behooves us to make every effort to control our anger, to be forgiving, sensitive and understanding, rather than run the risk of losing our cool – and our senses.

Rabbi Wein

The Lord, so to speak, apparently is disturbed by Moshe’s complaint against the treatment and continued oppression of Israel by the Egyptians. Moshe’s complaint, voiced at the conclusion of last week’s parsha, that no salvation has come to Israel as of yet does not receive a sympathetic hearing in the Heavenly court.

The Lord, so to speak, according to Rashi and the Talmud, longs for the previous generations of the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel who seemingly bore their trials and difficulties without complaint even though God’s revelation to them was in a lesser level than was the case with Moshe. Yet we do find that the patriarchs, Avraham and Yaakov did challenge God at moments of crisis.

Avraham says to God; “What can you grant me as I go childless?” And Yaakov says to God: “And You promised me that You would be good to me [and now Eisav threatens to destroy me.]” So why

is the Lord disturbed by Moshe's statement that the lot of the Jewish people in Egypt has not yet been improved? Where do Moshe's words differ radically from those of Avraham and Yaakov?

And why does God, so to speak, long for the previous generations over the behavior of the current generation? And according to the aggadic interpretation of the verses in the parsha, Moshe is punished for asking that obvious question as to why the Jewish situation has shown no improvement even though Moshe is apparently fulfilling God's mission accurately and punctually. Where is the shortcoming that provokes such a critical response from Heaven?

I think that the answer perhaps lies in recognizing the difference between the individual Jew as an individual and the belief in the fate of the Jewish people as a nation and community. The individual Jew, Avraham, Yaakov, you and me, regularly face crises and difficulties in our lives as individuals. We have no guarantee that the Lord will extricate us from our difficulties.

As Yaakov put it; "Perhaps my sins will have cancelled out any Heavenly promises of success and aid." Avraham realizes that perhaps God's promises to him can also possibly be fulfilled through his faithful disciple and servant Eliezer. The doubts of the patriarchs are personal, not national. They never for a moment waver in their belief in the ultimate survival and triumph of the Jewish people, of the truth and justice of their cause and code, and of the validity of the mission of the Jewish people.

Moshe's moment of complaint is not only personal but it is national. Maybe this people will

never leave Egyptian bondage. Maybe the Jewish people as a nation will not be able to come to Sinai and accept the Torah and become a kingdom of priests and a holy people. Maybe they are not worthy of the grandiose promises made to them.

Moshe is forced to account for doubting the people and implying that God has not chosen well, for the troubles of that people have not subsided. One can doubt one's own place in the story of Israel. One can never doubt the validity of Israel and the Heavenly promises made to it itself.

Ricky Cohen

Remember when first you fell in love...

THE LIST

You will love certain things about him,
you will like certain things about him,
and you will dislike certain things about him.

Think about each of those.

Make sure your thoughts are grounded in the long term reality of who he is and what you have between you, not what you may be feeling at the moment.

Have the humility to look at all the beautiful elements of him - the things you love in him - and assess whether you value them enough.

Know that they will become more pronounced in him through your love.

Objectively consider the things you simply like in him and move them to the forefront of your thoughts.

By noticing them, you will naturally care more for him, and your attention will strengthen those things

in him as well...

(Excerpt from: Attracting Your Extraordinary Love e-book by Ricky Cohen)

What's your plan for this winter vacation?

How will you be spending your days away with your family or friends?

My Suggestion: Fall in Love!

You may be wondering: How can someone plan to fall in love? Isn't "falling in love" a spontaneous experience? Doesn't the term "falling" clearly suggest something that could never be orchestrated?

Even more to the point, for those who have a wife and children - haven't they "fallen in love" already?

I assume that most of you, who are reading this article, have a spouse and children - that's why you may be traveling on the upcoming school break.

It is to you that I'm suggesting: This Winter Vacation Fall in Love!

I'm not suggesting that you seek out someone new. In fact, I'm suggesting the opposite: As your itinerary is finalized, as you make sure the flights are correct, and the neck warmers or bathing suits - or both - are packed, put together a plan to use the time you're away to fall more deeply in love with those you already love.

In other words, have a restful and relaxing time (except for those of you who are doing Disneyworld who should plan a vacation when you get back) and infuse your time away with private moments, reflective opportunities, laughter and joyfulness that will allow you to fall more deeply in love with those you cherish.

So as you visit new islands, cities or countries, you should try to develop new levels of appreciation and love for the people who grace your life every day - your family members.

As you embark on journeys to previously unknown wonders of nature, you should embark on a journey to discover previously unrecognized virtues in your children.

As you are amazed by the outstanding quality of the hotel staff or the cruise ship crew, feel a sense of amazement and awe at the fineness of your spouse - her inner beauty or his natural thoughtfulness.

... have the humility to look at all the beautiful elements of him - the things you love in him - and assess whether you value them enough.

Know that they will become more pronounced in him through your love.

Objectively consider the things you simply like in him and move them to the forefront of your thoughts.

By noticing them, you will naturally care more for him, and your attention will strengthen those things in him as well...

Let this winter vacation be a "10." Come away from each of the 10 days of intercession with one new thing to love about each of your family members. Keep a journal of your experience of "falling deeper in love" with your wife and children, and record something newly discovered about each of them every day.

For great vacation reading, go to RickyandMe.org and review some of the "LearnLiveExcel" articles published over the past several months. They will inspire you, and give you

the insights to make your life emotionally, spiritually and intellectually richer and happier. All vacations are memorable. Let this be the most memorable ever, as a result of the new love shared.

This Winter Vacation: Fall in Love! And don't forget to pray for the Giants!

**Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United
Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth**

Why did Moses tell Pharaoh, if not a lie, then less than the full truth? Here is the conversation between him and Pharaoh after the fourth plague, arov, "swarms of insects" (some say "wild animals")

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land." But Moses said, "That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the Lord our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? We must take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, as he commands us." (Ex. 8: 21-23)

Not just here but throughout, Moses makes it seem as if all he is asking is for permission for the people to undertake a three day journey, to offer sacrifices to God and (by implication) then to return. So, in their first appearance before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron say:

"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'"

Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let

Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go."

Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword." (Ex. 5: 1-3)

God even specifies this before the mission has begun, saying to Moses at the burning bush: "You and the elders of Israel will then go to the king of Egypt. You must tell him, 'The Lord, God of the Hebrews, revealed Himself to us. Now we request that you allow us to take a three day journey into the desert, to sacrifice to the Lord our God'" (3: 18).

The impression remains to the very end. After the Israelites have left, we read: The king of Egypt received news that the people were escaping. Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds regarding the people, and said, "What have we done? How could we have released Israel from doing our work?" (14: 5)

At no stage does Moses say explicitly that he is proposing that the people should be allowed to leave permanently, never to return. He talks of a three day journey. There is an argument between him and Pharaoh as to who is to go. Only the adult males? Only the people, not the cattle? Moses consistently asks for permission to worship God, at some place that is not Egypt. But he does not speak about freedom or the promised land. Why not? Why does he create, and not correct, a false impression? Why can he not say openly what he means?

The commentators offer various explanations. R. Shmuel David Luzzatto (Italy, 1800-1865) says that it was impossible for

Moses to tell the truth to a tyrant like Pharaoh. R. Yaakov Mecklenburg (Germany, 1785-1865, Ha-Ktav veHa-Kabbalah) says that technically Moses did not tell a lie. He did indeed mean that he wanted the people to be free to make a journey to worship God, and he never said explicitly that they would return.

Abrabanel (Lisbon 1437 – Venice 1508) says that God told Moses deliberately to make a small request, to demonstrate Pharaoh's cruelty and indifference to his slaves. All they were asking was for a brief respite from their labours to offer sacrifices to God. If he refused this, he was indeed a tyrant. Rav Elhanan Samet (Iyyunim be-Parshot Ha-Shevua, Exodus, 189) cites an unnamed commentator who says simply that this was war between Pharaoh and the Jewish people, and it war it is permitted, indeed sometimes necessary, to deceive.

Actually, however, the terms of the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh are part of a wider pattern that we have already observed in the Torah. When Jacob leaves Laban we read: "Jacob decided to go behind the back of Laban the Aramean, and did not tell him that he was leaving" (Gen. 31: 20). Laban protests this behaviour: "How could you do this? You went behind my back and led my daughters away like prisoners of war! Why did you have to leave so secretly? You went behind my back and told me nothing!" (31: 26-27).

Jacob again has to tell at best a half-truth when Esau suggests that they travel together: "You know that the children are weak, and I have responsibility for the nursing sheep and cattle. If they are driven hard for even one day, all the sheep will die. Please go

ahead of me, my lord" (33: 13-14). This, though not strictly a lie, is a diplomatic excuse.

When Jacob's sons are trying to rescue their sister Dina who has been raped and abducted by Shechem the Hivite, they "replied deceitfully" (34: 13) when Shechem and his father proposed that the entire family should come and settle with them, telling them that they could only do so if all the males of the town underwent circumcision.

Earlier still we find that three times Abraham and Isaac, forced to leave home because of famine, have to pretend that they are their wives' brothers not their husbands because they fear that otherwise they will be killed so that Sarah or Rebecca could be taken into the king's harem (Gen. 12, 20, 26).

These six episodes cannot be entirely accidental or coincidental to the biblical narrative as a whole. The implication seems to be this. Outside the promised land Jews in the biblical age are in danger if they tell the truth. They are at constant risk of being killed or at best enslaved.

Why? Because they are powerless in an age of power. They are a small family, at best a small nation, in an age of empires. They have to use their wits to survive. By and large they do not tell lies but they can create a false impression. This is not how things should be. But it is how they were before Jews had their own land, their one and only defensible space. It is how people in impossible situations are forced to be if they are to exist at all.

No one should be forced to live a lie. In Judaism truth is the seal of God and the essential precondition of trust between human beings. But when your

people is being enslaved, its male children murdered, you have to liberate them by whatever means are possible. Moses, who had already seen that his first encounter with Pharaoh made things worse for his people – they still had to make the same quota of bricks but now also had to gather their own straw (5: 6-8) – did not want to risk making them worse still.

The Torah here is not justifying deceit. To the contrary, it is condemning a system in which telling the truth may put your life at risk, as it still does in many tyrannical or totalitarian societies today. Judaism – a religion of dissent, questioning and "argument for the sake of heaven" – is a faith that values intellectual honesty and moral truthfulness above all things. The Psalmist says: "Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord and who shall stand in His holy place? One who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not taken My name in vain nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps. 24: 3-4). Malachi says of one who speaks in God's name: "The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips" (Mal. 2: 6). Every Amidah ends with the prayer, "My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from deceitful speech."

What the Torah is telling us in these six narratives in Genesis and the seventh in Exodus is the connection between freedom and truth. Where there is freedom there can be truth. Otherwise there cannot. A society where people are forced to be less than fully honest merely to survive and not provoke further oppression is not the kind of society God wants us to make.