

# תורה מציון Torah MiTzion

RELIGIOUS ZIONIST KOLLELS כוללים ציוניים בתפוצות

**Shabbat Shalom from Torah MiTzion**

**Issue 125: Parshat Va'era**

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In this weeks issue:

- 1) **Shortness of Breath and Hard Work, Rav Dror Brama**
- 2) **Yom Tov Sheni, part 1, Rav Nehemya Taylor**
- 3) **Family Learning: Parshat va'era, Bluma Zalcman**
- 4) **Love of The Land: Latrun**

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**Shortness of Breath and Hard Work**  
**By Rav Dror Brama, former Rosh Kollel, London**

In a series of emotional verses at the beginning of this week's portion, Moshe brings news of the coming redemption to the downtrodden and oppressed Jewish nation. He promises an end to their sorrows and the fulfillment of the covenant with the patriarchs. This consolation ends with the following verses:

And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God. And you shall know that I, the Lord, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the Lord (*Exodus* 6:7-8).

This prophecy is given to the Jewish people after Moshe proves that God sent him with signs and wonders, i.e., the miracles with his staff and hand. Following these wonders the people believe in him and bow to God.

Imagine a nation of beleaguered and despised slaves. They are engaged in back-breaking labor, with the constant awareness of the crack of the whip. Their children are thrown into the Nile the moment they are born. Finally, the promised redemption arrives. They see the light at the end of the tunnel; God has answered their prayers.

We would expect expressions of happiness, sighs of relief, and maybe a few tears as they stand on the threshold of new lives. To our great surprise, their reaction is totally different:

But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, because of shortness of breath and hard labor (*Ibid.*, 6:9).

The words of Moshe pass right over the heads of the miserable slaves. There are neither celebrations nor tears. Moshe speaks, but no one hears. Shortness of breath (*kotzer ru'ach*) and hard labor (*avodah kashah*) lead to the daily struggle for survival, to the lowering of eyes to the next bale of hay and mud that needs to be gathered, to the attempt to avoid the whistle of the whip as it cracks over them. The ear is not open to hear grand designs and distant hopes.

Yet our minds are still not at ease. Even the most wretched prisoner, when informed of his release, will lift his head a bit and try to remember the forgotten taste of freedom; he will allow his new status to percolate into his consciousness. Why, then, don't they listen to Moshe? Is it possible that among all the Jews, no trace of the ancestral promise remains? Has the nation reached a stage of such absolute despair that even when the redemption arrives they ignore it?

Our Sages raise this question in the *Mechilta*, and in light of it they suggest a new interpretation of the phrase *kotzer ru'ach*.

Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira cites the verse, "They would not listen to Moses because of shortness of breath, etc."

Does it really happen that a person gets good news and is not happy?! You give birth to a son, or your master frees you from slavery, and you are not happy?!

So why does it say they did not listen to Moshe? Because they find it difficult to separate themselves from idol worship, as it is written (*Ezekiel 20:7*), "Cast away, every one of you, the detestable things that you are drawn to, and do not defile yourselves with the fetishes of Egypt," and it continues (*Ibid.*, v. 8), "But they defied Me and refused to listen to Me" (*Mechilta D'Rabbi Yishma'el, Bo, #5*).

*Kotzer ru'ach* does not mean shortness of breath, but rather deficiency of spirit. The Egyptians embitter the Jews' lives not only with mortar and bricks, but also with an extended exposure to Egyptian culture while in a position of inferiority and degradation. The Egyptians succeed in enslaving not only their bodies but their spirits as well. After this difficult exile, Moshe arrives with news of redemption, but this redemption includes a total abandonment of Egypt and its culture. It is emancipation from work (*avodah*), but also renunciation of idol worship (*avodah zarah*).

"They would not listen to Moshe," according to this approach, is to be understood not as a lack of concentration and attention, but rather as a lack of desire to listen and internalize the message. Our Sages use the verse in *Ezekiel* to prove that the process of separating the Jews from the Egyptian culture is difficult and they do not undertake it willingly. It is not just Pharaoh who needs plagues in order to recognize the superiority of God and the necessity of obeying Him. The Ten Commandments, which attest to our direct encounter with the word of God, also begin with the words, "I am the Lord your God who took you out of Egypt."

The Egyptian redemption is the model and pattern for all future redemptions. We learn an important lesson from it. We need to be aware that exile has a spiritual impact. This is particularly important when the redemption is approaching and the footsteps of freedom can already be heard, yet sorrows are also gathering force. This is when deficiency of spirit makes its presence known. The following factors -- the daily struggle for survival and for personal and national security, using mortar and bricks; the feeling of inferiority and self-abnegation towards the non-Jews among whom we are exiled; the fear of the transition to true independence; the small-mindedness and deficiency of spirit; the quest for instant peace and tranquility; the prevention of the next terror attack; the next election -- all combine to lead people to cling to a life of misery among the mud puddles of Egyptian culture instead of rising to independence and responsibility.

The generation which refuses redemption continues to be trapped by this pattern, as expressed in their desire to return to Egypt and in the sin of the spies. So they die on the way to the Land, in the desert.

May we merit to truly listen to this week's portion and take its lesson to heart.

**Yom Tov Sheni, part 1**  
**Rav Nehemya Taylor, Torani Advisor to Torah MiTzion**

After careful consideration, we have decided to take a break from the subject of *bishul akum* and its ramifications, and to focus on a different problem which *shlichim* (emissaries) from Israel often face -- the issue of Yom Tov Sheni (the second day of Yom Tov in the Diaspora). In this article, the first of a series, we will trace the development of Yom Tov Sheni.

The first commandment that the Jews receive as a nation is sanctifying the month (*kiddush hachodesh*). According to the Rambam, one component of this commandment is the requirement to let everyone know that the month had been sanctified:

It is a positive Torah commandment for the Beit Din to calculate and evaluate whether the moon has been seen, by examining the witnesses. When the Beit Din is satisfied, it sanctifies the month. Then it must notify the rest of the nation when Rosh Chodesh is, so that they will know when the holidays are. This is in accordance with the verse (*Vayikra* 23:2), "which you shall proclaim as sacred occasions," and the verse (*Shemot* 13:10), "You shall keep this institution at its set time" (Rambam, *Hilkhos Kiddush HaChodesh* 1:7).

The *Lechem Mishneh* supplies the source of this ruling:

At the end of the first chapter of Rosh HaShanah (22a), it is taught: "We desecrate the

Sabbath to testify about the month, as it says (*Vayikra* 23:4), 'These are the set times of the Lord, the sacred occasions, which you shall proclaim, each at its appointed time.'" The Rambam derives from here that it is a *mitzvah* to notify the nation, for the Talmud implies that "proclaim" includes sending the messengers (Rabbi Avraham di Boton, *Lechem Mishneh, Kiddush HaChodesh* 1:7, s.v. *vayishalchu*).

We see from here that the Beit Din which sanctifies the month is obligated to inform the entire nation when each month begins, in order to enable them to sanctify the holidays at the proper time.

At first, the notification was made by lighting torches, as it says in the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 22b) and in the Rambam:

In earlier times, when the Beit Din sanctified the month they would light torches on the mountaintops so those living at a distance would know. When the Kutim (Samaritans) sabotaged this by lighting torches themselves (at the wrong time) in order to mislead the people, the Beit Din instituted the messenger system (Rambam, 3:8).

It seems that until the Kutim began their sabotage, the people relied on the torches. Anyone who knew they had sanctified the month via the torches also knew exactly when the holidays would be. However, anyone who, for whatever reason, and in whatever place, did not know about the sanctification of the month, would observe Yom Tov Sheni. We can conclude this from the Responsa of the Geonim:

Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon z"l said in his commentary that there is no doubt that God originally commanded His servant Moshe (who then told Israel) that in the Land they would have one day of Yom Tov and outside of the Land they would have two days, and thus it has always been. (*Teshuvot HaGeonim*, Mussafia edition (Lyck, 1864), #1).

Later on, the responsum adds:

Since Israel behaved thus in accordance with the instructions of the prophets, it has become obligatory on all living outside the Land to continue, as if it were a Divine commandment. And perhaps this behavior was already instituted in the days of Joshua son of Nun.

We can conclude from the words of Rabbeinu Sa'adiah Gaon, Rav Hai Gaon, and other Geonim that there was a very early ordinance mandating two days of Yom Tov for people who lived outside of Israel in places where they did not know when the month had been sanctified.

This was the first historical stage, and it ended in the time of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi as a result of the sabotage of the Kutim. According to the Jerusalem Talmud (*Rosh HaShanah*, beginning of Chapter Two), "Who abolished the torches? Rebbi (i.e., Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi) abolished the torches." Instead of torches, he established that the way to notify those outside the land would be with messengers. As the Rambam states,

Wherever the messengers reached, people would celebrate the holiday for one day, as it says in the Torah. Places that were too far for the messengers to reach observed two days because of the uncertainty, since they did not know which day the Beit Din sanctified as the beginning of the month (Rambam, 3:11).

During this second stage, before there was a general directive about observing Yom Tov

Sheni outside the Land, Rashi (*Beitzah* 4b) suggests that if an individual knew the procedure of intercalating and the exact ways to calculate when the month should be sanctified, he would not have to observe Yom Tov Sheni. This question first comes up in *Pesachim* 51b-52a. Rashi there understands the Gemara as saying that in an inhabited area, such a person would still be required to observe Yom Tov Sheni, since that is the custom of the people there, and it is forbidden to deviate from local custom. In the desert, though, where there are no people, he would not be required to observe it. However, Rabbeinu Tam disagrees with this understanding (*Tosafot* there) and maintains that this Gemara is speaking of a place where the messengers did reach, and the discussion is about something entirely different. In any case, we see that, according to Rashi, during the second stage a sage who knew the procedure of intercalating was permitted to keep only one day of Yom Tov even outside the Land.

The third stage was the generation of Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat, i.e., the second generation of Amoraim. Even though they still established the months according to calculations and sanctification by the Beit Din, there was already an absolute rule. The Talmud states (*Beitzah* 4b), "Be careful to keep the custom of your ancestors because a time may come when there are anti-religious persecutions, and all will be confused." (In other words, they sent an admonition from the Land of Israel saying to keep Yom Tov Sheni, because the authorities may forbid sanctifying the month, and this could lead to *chametz* being eaten on Passover, and the like.) From then on, they did not keep Yom Tov Sheni because of uncertainty, but rather because they were afraid lest, as a result of anti-religious decrees, they would forget the procedures of sanctification, and would make a mistake when calculating the start of the new month.

The fourth period started with Hillel the Second, who established the calendar which became the official calendar for all of Israel. As the Rambam explains:

When did all of Israel begin following this calculation? From the end of the time of the Talmudic Sages, when the land was destroyed and there was no regular Beit Din. However, in the days of the Mishnaic Sages and the early Amoraic Sages until the time of Abaye and Rava, everyone had relied on what was done in the Land of Israel (Rambam, 5:3).

From then on, the nation decided that it would follow the custom of its ancestors even though it was originally based upon an uncertainty which no longer existed.

We have given an overview of the halakhic and historic development of Yom Tov Sheni. God willing, in upcoming articles we will deal with the practical side of this topic, specifically with relation to Israelis who are living abroad.

**Family Learning: Parshat Va'era**  
**Bluma Zalcman**

- 1) How many plagues appear in this week's parsha?
- 2) Which ones were preformed by Aharon, and which were preformed by Moshe?
- 3) Which two plagues were the Egyptian sorcerers able to do and what did they say when they couldn't perform a plague?
- 4) What were the plagues preformed in this week's parsha?

*Answers follow below*

## Love of The Land: Latrun

The area of Latrun is located in Emek Ayalon (the Ayalon Valley), which is approx. 15 kilometers from Yerushalayim. It is one of the first of the many hills a person will see on his way up to Yerushalayim, therefore it has a significant strategic value, and has been the site of many battles.

Emek Ayalon was first mentioned in the Tanach in Sefer Yehoshua. When the Amorites heard that Bnei Yisrael made a peace treaty with the Givonin, they set out to attack them. It was here, that Hashem made the sun stand still so that Bnei Yisrael could defeat them.

During the Crusades, there was a fortress there and it was the scene of many battles. Le Toron Des Cheveliers (The Tower of Knights), which was the name given to the castle which had been built, may have been the origin of the name Latrun. There is little left of the castle now, which was held by the Templars in 1187.

In 1861, a monastery was built in the area by French monks of the Trappist order. The monks made a living producing alcohol, even though their religion calls for abstinence.

After the Arab riots of 1936-1939, the British built several police forts around the country, all which had the same structure design, made by a man named Taggart. These forts were built at strategic sites, Latrun being one of them. Occupation of that fort had a big effect on the War of Independence, with the Jordanian Arabs occupying it during the war.

The fort was used to shell Israeli traffic on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway, thus causing Yerushalayim to fall under siege. An alternative route was developed, called "Burma Road", after the American route in Japanese controlled China, during World War II.

10 days after the War was over, Israel attacked the fort with the new 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade and a battalion from the Alexandroni Brigade. Most of the soldiers, including a platoon commander, Ariel Sharon, were wounded. The attack, codenamed Bin Nun A' completely failed, and there were many casualties. A subsequent attack, which took place a week later (Bin Nun B') also failed, even though the outer defenses were penetrated.

While the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem highway was not secured, the attacks had a limited degree of success since they opened the bypass road and thus lifted the siege from Yerushalayim. The total number of casualties from the battle is 139.

In the ceasefire agreement of 1949, Latrun was put under Jordanian control; a bypass road was built. In the Six Day War, Latrun was recaptured by Israeli forces. The road was reopened and the fort was turned into a museum and memorial for Israel's Armored Corps with over 110 tanks and fighting vehicles, an indoor museum, an auditorium, an amphitheater, and a synagogue. The monastery is now a tourist site.

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**Family Learning, Answers:**

- 1) Seven.
- 2) The first three were by Aharon. The other four by Moshe.
- 3) Frogs and Blood. "Etzbah Elokim Hee"
- 4) blood, frogs, lice, wild animals, death of the animals, boils, hail