

MORASHAH
THE RABBINIC FELLOWSHIP OF THE UTJ
 668 American Legion Drive, Teaneck, NJ 07666
www.utj.org 201.801.0707

Rabbi Shlomo Marks

Parashat HaShavuah Series

Parashat Bo

This *parashah* includes one of the most interesting parts of the Torah's narrative, because it makes no real sense unless God is being spiteful, or has a long-term plan. Hashem delivers the final blow on Egypt, killing the first-born of everything Egyptian and finally freeing the slaves!

The question arises: why was the slaying of the first born the last of ten plagues and not the only plague? Realistically, Hashem could have just killed all first-born Egyptians, scared the living daylights out of Pharaoh and Egypt, and gotten it over and done with. Well, Hashem had a plan: He had to show not only Pharaoh who the real boss was, but also Israel and the world.

With the plagues, Hashem makes a mockery of Pharaoh and his pretensions of being a god. This of course takes time, hence all the occasions that Hashem hardens Pharaoh's heart. As for the people of Israel, they also need to be educated about who Hashem is and the scope of His power. Didn't they curse Moshe and deny his mission from Hashem?

Hashem had a monumental task, for Bnai Yisrael were not marionettes. People have free will and need to make educated choices! Hashem also knew that there was the all-important "now" and the more important future to be considered. Hashem had to teach the Egyptians and their Pharaoh and the world that kings are not gods, and teach *Am Yisrael* who Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had believed in. It is no wonder that of the four times in the *Chumash* when Hashem admonishes the people to teach their children the ways of Yiddishkeit, three of these warnings are in this *parashah*. Most people have doubts at times in their lives. Even Moshe had his doubts, even when Hashem spoke to him directly, so why not a people raised and trained as slaves for hundreds of years? Shouldn't they have doubts as well? Isn't skepticism normal?

The greatest occasion for teaching in the Jewish calendar is the Pesach Seder. Not just a jolly Jewish time, as it is for many today, but a serious time, with serious meaning and purpose – a time for teaching our children who we are and who our

Rabbi Shlomo Marks is rabbi of Congregation Mount Sinai, Jersey City, New Jersey.

The Union for Traditional Judaism is a trans-denominational organization dedicated to bringing the message of open-minded Halakhic Judaism to the widest possible audience.

All *Divrei Torah* can be found at <http://www.utj.org/Torah/HaShavuah>

God is and what He has done for us from generation to generation. It is no wonder that the admonishments that appear in this *parashah* are also in the Pesach Haggadah.

So when your children say to you "What does this service mean to you?" you shall say: "It is the sacrifice of the Passover to Hashem . . ."
(Exodus 12:26-27)

And you shall tell your son that on day saying, "It is because of what Hashem did for me when I came out of Egypt." (Exodus 13:8)

. . . when your son asks. . . "What is this?" you shall say to him, "By the strength of [His] hand Hashem brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Exodus 13:14)

The fourth admonishment appears in **Parashat Va'etchanan**:

When your son asks you . . . "What do these testimonies, statutes, and laws mean that Hashem our God has commanded you?" you shall say to your son, "We were slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt and Hashem brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand." (Deut. 6:20-21)

These are four different ways of asking the same question: "Why?" This becomes, in *Mishnah Pesachim*, teach each child in a way that will make sense to him or her. It is of course also the basis for the four sons in the Haggadah: the wise son, wicked son, simple son and the one too young to ask. Hashem of course being everywhere and in every time does not see eras but all is a unified one. Because our sages knew this, they teach us that we should speak as if we ourselves came out of Egypt. This is to make it real for us, for our children, and for future generations – and not just a quaint story.

The opening line of this *parashah* has always spoken to me, "come in unto Pharaoh." This is because I have always felt that there is a sub-text, which is Hashem also saying "for I am there," a comforting message to Moses our teacher, indicating that he was not alone. Hence, as much as Moses was not alone then, neither are we alone today and we should teach this to our children diligently so that there will be a Jewish future.

Shabbat Shalom!

The Union for Traditional Judaism is a trans-denominational organization dedicated to bringing the message of open-minded Halakhic Judaism to the widest possible audience.

All *Divrei Torah* can be found at <http://www.utj.org/Torah/HaShavuah>