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OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAERA • 26 TEVET 5778 - JAN. 13, 2018 • VOL. 25 NO. 14

PARSHA INSIGHT

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

Nature and Nurture

“Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh — it will become a snake.” (7:9)

One of the hottest debates within psychology is *nature vs. nurture*: To what extent are the various aspects of our behavior a product of *inherited* (i.e. genetic) or *acquired* (i.e. learned) characteristics?

It has long been known that certain physical characteristics are biologically determined by genetic inheritance. Color of eyes, straight or curly hair, pigmentation of the skin and certain diseases (such as Huntington’s chorea, G-d forbid) are all a function of the genes we inherit. Other physical characteristics, if not exactly totally determined, appear to be at least strongly influenced by the genetic make-up of our biological parents.

These facts have led many to speculate as to whether psychological characteristics such as behavioral tendencies, personality attributes, and mental abilities are also “wired in” before we are even born.

Those who adopt an extreme hereditary position are known as *nativists*. Their basic assumption is that the characteristics of the human species as a whole are a product of evolution, and that individual differences are due to each person’s unique genetic code.

At the other end of the spectrum are the *environmentalists* — also known as *empiricists* (not to be confused with the other empirical/scientific approach). Their basic assumption is that at birth the human mind is a *tabula rasa* (a blank slate), and that this is gradually “filled” as a result of experience (e.g., behaviorism). From this point of view, psychological characteristics and behavioral differences that emerge through infancy and childhood are the results of learning. It is how you are brought up (nurture) that governs the psychologically significant aspects of child development, and the concept of maturation

applies only to the biological aspects.

It is widely accepted now that heredity and the environment do not act independently. Both nature *and* nurture are essential for any behavior, and it cannot be said that a particular behavior is genetic and another is environmental. It is impossible to separate the two influences, as well as illogical, as nature and nurture do not operate in a separate way, but interact in a complex manner.

Judaism’s view has always been that the human being is a complex mix of both forces.

Our Sages teach that a Jew possesses the hereditary characteristics of modesty, mercy and kindness. So much so that a Jew who does not exhibit these qualities is of questionable lineage.

In this week’s Torah portion we see an allusion to the influence of *nurture*. Engraved on the staff that Aharon cast in front of Pharaoh was the Ineffable Divine Name of YKVK. It was this same “staff of G-d” that was used to perform the signs and wonders in the deliverance from Egypt. Nevertheless, when it came “in front of Pharaoh” it turned into a poisonous snake — the embodiment of evil. The lowly spiritual level of the Jewish People was only a result of their environment, and when removed from the miasma of Egypt they would return to their lofty stature, just as when the snake was returned to Moshe’s hand it became once again “the staff of G-d”.

The Jewish People would revert to their original *nurture*.

• Sources: Rabbi Meir Shapiro in *Mayana Shel Torah*; McLeod, S. A. (2015). *Nature vs nurture in psychology*.

Retrieved from

www.simplypsychology.org/naturevsnurture.html

Shavuot 37 - 43

Shaking the World's Foundation

“Know that the entire world trembled when the Holy One, blessed is He, said at Mount Sinai: Do not take the Name of the L-rd, your G-d, in vain (Shemot 20:7)...”

The *beraita* on our *daf* teaches that this is the beginning of the warning that the Beit Din gives a person prior to his taking an oath stating that he is exempt from further payment. The court wants the defendant to be aware of the serious repercussions of making a false oath, and hopefully he will decide to confess to his monetary obligation — if in fact he is liable — rather than swear falsely that he has no obligation.

The *beraita* continues with the wording of this warning as follows: “Regarding all other transgressions of Torah law, the Torah states that G-d will ‘cleanse’ (the person who transgresses and atones — Shemot 34:7), but here (for a vain or false oath) the Torah states that G-d will ‘not cleanse’ the person.” (Shemot 20:7) In addition, there are other severe consequences regarding the unique nature of the punishment for a false oath that are explained to the person prior to his making the oath, as taught in the continuation of the *beraita*.

The Maharsha explains that G-d created all of existence with the Name of G-d and with the letters of the Name of G-d, and therefore the existence of the world and its foundation depend on His Name being spoken only in truth. But if one who speaks G-d’s Name in a manner of falsehood — i.e., “non-existence” — he weakens and “shakes” the very existence of the world, causing the world to tremble, as it were, and brings down upon himself unusually severe retribution.

• *Shavuot 38b-39a*

When a Denial is an Admission

Rava said, “One who claims that he did not borrow is, in essence, claiming that he did not pay back the loan.”

This is the ruling of Rava, who disputes the ruling of Abaye in the following case presented in our *sugya*:

A person — let’s call him Reuven — claims that another person — let’s call him Shimon — borrowed a hundred from him and did not pay it back. Shimon’s counterclaim is that, “Nothing ever happened (meaning, I never borrowed that money from you.)”

Then Reuven brings two witnesses to the court who testify that Shimon did indeed borrow a hundred, but they also say that they saw Reuven *repay* that loan.

What should be the ruling of the court? Abaye contends that since the witnesses testify that the loan was paid back, Shimon is exempt from needing to pay. Rava disagrees and states that Shimon is obligated to pay for the loan that Reuven claims was made, as proven by Reuven’s witnesses, *despite* the fact that these same witnesses say that Shimon already repaid this loan. Why? Rava’s explanation: “*One who claims that he did not borrow is, in essence, claiming that he did not pay back the loan.*”

But how is a person believed to obligate himself in the face of witnesses who say he is exempt, having repaid the loan? Testimony of witnesses has the power of credibility in court even to convict a defendant in a capital case!

One approach is that the defendant is not actually believed more than the witnesses, but since he has the ability to create a new obligation on himself, we say that this is what he is doing, and is therefore obligated to pay. Another approach is that although normally a person is not believed in matters that relate to himself (i.e., he cannot testify about himself since he is a *relative* of himself), here, where we are dealing with an admission of financial obligation, he *is* believed, due to a special Torah decree. The verse (Shemot 22:8) states: “When a person (defendant) claims (admits) that *this* amount is it (what I am obligated)...” — which teaches that he is *believed* to assume *this* financial obligation. (See *Ketzot Hachoshen*, Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 34:4, for further discussion of these approaches.)

• *Shavuot 39a*

PARSHA Q&A?

1. Did G-d ever appear to Avraham and say “I am G-d”?
 2. What cause did the forefathers have to question G-d?
 3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
 4. How long did Levi live?
 5. Who was Aharon’s wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
 6. Why are Yitro and Yosef both referred to as “Putiel”?
 7. After which plague did G-d begin to “harden Pharaoh’s heart”?
 8. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
 9. Give two reasons why the blood was chosen as the first plague.
 10. How long did the plague of blood last?
 11. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh’s house first?
 12. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be “in you and in your nation”?
 13. What are “*chamarim*”?
 14. Why didn’t Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
 15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring lice?
 16. What were the Egyptians likely to do if they saw the Jews slaughtering lambs?
 17. Why didn’t the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
 18. The *dever* killed “all the cattle of Egypt.” Later, boils afflicted their cattle. How can this be?
 19. Why did Moshe pray only after leaving the city?
 20. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?
-

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week’s questions! - All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 6:9 - Yes.
 2. 6:9 - Although G-d swore to give them the Land, they never actually had control over it.
 3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
 4. 6:16 - 137 years.
 5. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
 6. 6:25 - Yitro fattened (*pittem*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
 7. 7:3 - After the sixth plague — *shechin*.
 8. 7:15 - To relieve himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god who did not need to attend to his bodily functions. Therefore, he secretly used the Nile for this purpose.
 9. a. 7:17 - Because the Nile was an Egyptian god.
b. 8:17 - Because an invading army first attacks the enemy’s water supply, and G-d did the same.
 10. 7:25 - Seven days.
 11. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
 12. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
 13. 8:10 - Piles.
 14. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed.
 15. 8:14 - The Egyptian sorcerers’ magic had no power over anything smaller than a barley kernel.
 16. 8:22 - Stone the Jews.
 17. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
 18. 9:10 - In the plague of *dever* only the cattle *in the fields* died. The plague of *shechin* affected the surviving cattle.
 19. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
 20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air and didn’t fall to the ground.
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Love of the Land, written by RAV MENDEL WEINBACH, zt”l • General Editor: RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN • Design: RABBI ELIEZER SHAPIRO

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LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

Amuka — Search for a Soul-mate

Single people from all over Israel and the world come to pray at the tomb of Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel in Amuka, a relatively unpopulated area north of Tzefat. Tradition has it that those without spouses or children have found their salvation as a result of heartfelt prayers said at the tomb of this great Talmudic Sage.

Although there is no clear connection between



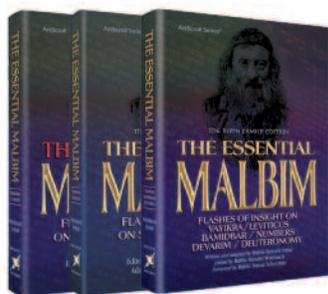
this Sage and the power of these particular prayers, the Talmud tells us a few things about this extraordinary Torah achievement. When this outstanding disciple of Hillel studied Torah, the fiery energy of his Torah singing the wings of a bird flying overhead.

He is possibly best known, however, for his translation of the Torah and Prophets into Aramaic.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt. However, the Jewish People do not listen. G-d commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. G-d punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these miracles on a smaller scale,

again encouraging Pharaoh to be obstinate. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.



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BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

Why Get Married?

From: Anonymous

*Dear Rabbi,
Why should a person get married?*

Dear Anonymous,

I'll first explain some ideas behind the Jewish notion of marriage and why it's essential, and then refute some common arguments against getting married.

One of the main reasons for getting married is to help each other grow through a life-long process of emotional, intellectual and spiritual sharing and challenge. This is the meaning of the verse, "It is not good, this state of man's being alone; I will make a helpmate opposite to him" (Gen. 2:18). As long as a person is single, it is "not good," meaning not only is the person incomplete, but that the entire Creation is also lacking in perfection (Rabbi S.R. Hirsch). The purpose of this union, then, is that each should help the other reach perfection. Sometimes this is achieved by sharing; sometimes by opposing, questioning and challenging. This ideal dynamic of "opposing-helpmate" is best achieved between a man and woman who are both committed to a love for growth together for life.

Marriage as context for growth is also intimated by the verse, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24, and see Rashi there). As father or mother, a person's main responsibility is to ensure that the child grows to be the best person possible. Marriage, then, takes a person to the next, natural and higher plane of potential perfection. Becoming "one flesh" is an allusion to this fusion of two perfect halves into a unified whole. In fact, the Zohar (Lech Lecha 91b) teaches that every soul is divided into male and female components before being sent into the world. Ideally, every match is the "re-fusion" of the halves into one.

But this becoming "one flesh" is not only figurative. Contrary to popular misconception, Eve was not created from Adam's rib. Rather, Adam was split in two. The Talmud (Eruvin 11) explains the verse, "And G-d took one of his sides", to mean that Adam was originally a composite of both male and female aspects, side by side, which G-d separated in order to create the longing for, and fulfillment in, the male/female union. Therefore, marriage is the venue through which one attains spiritual, emotional and physical unity and perfection.

Of course, the true pinnacle of male/female physical

unity comes to fruition in the birth of their children — another reason to marry. Thus, G-d simultaneously commands and confers blessing upon the union of man and woman, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). However, the point is not just to have children. Being "fruitful" means realizing one's potential through sharing and challenge in marriage, in order that one's productive traits and talents ripen, and his branches become laden with sweet and pleasant fruits. Only then can one truly "multiply", as his perfection through marriage is conferred to and perpetuated by their children, the fruits of their labor. In this way, a married couple's figurative unity as "one flesh" becomes manifested literally in one flesh, many times over.

Some people object to getting married because, as they claim, since the divorce rate gets higher and higher, why marry just to get divorced? In truth, if people really knew themselves and truly understood the purpose of marriage — in short, if each person strove to become as perfect a half as possible before "tying the knot", marriage would strengthen the knot, not undo it.

Some consider marriage restrictive. Is permissiveness truly desirable? In any case, one who only desires to receive might find marriage restrictive, whereas one who desires to give will find marriage limitless.

Others claim marriage limits one's horizons experientially, career-wise, etc. However, the commitment and obligation to spouse and children provide an opportunity to attain true greatness precisely because of the need to succeed as both a person and professional.

Finally, some resist marriage for global considerations — to alleviate mother earth's over-burdened resources or reduce world hunger and the like. While these are noble concerns, they don't preclude family life. First, a lot can be done to improve personal and global consumption besides being barren. One could consume less and have more children — a creatively modest lifestyle could "permit" having children without adding significant demand on resources. In addition, there is really no direct correlation between one person's ability to feed his children and another person's not. One could give more to hungry children while still providing for his own.

Last, a Jew in particular should avoid this "solution" of celibacy or sterility. Relatively speaking, the Jews are but a tiny fraction of the world population. A Jew's self-imposed sterility abrogates the Divine command/blessing to be fruitful and multiply, making him a willing accomplice to those who have sought, and seek our extermination.

WHAT'S IN A WORD? Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

Plague of Plagues

The fifth plague that G-d had wrought upon the Egyptians is known as *dever*. In English this word is commonly translated as “pestilence”, which is a fatal epidemic disease. In the context of the fifth plague this meant the sudden death of all Egyptian horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, and sheep. The word *dever* also appears twice in Moshe’s warnings about the tenth plague, which entailed the sudden deaths of all Egyptian firstborns at exactly midnight on the day of the Exodus. In his first encounter with the Pharaoh, Moshe demands that he release the Jews “lest He (G-d) smite you with a *dever* or by the sword.” (Exodus 5:3) Before the seventh plague Moshe repeats his warning of an impending *dever* by saying that G-d could have done so earlier, but chose not to yet. He says, “This time (i.e. when the Plague of the Firstborn will finally come), I will send all of My plagues (*mageifotay*) against your heart... for now I could have sent My hand and stricken you and your people with *dever* and you would have been obliterated.” (Exodus 9:14) In this last passage we find two words which refer to plagues: *dever* and *mageifah*. What is the difference between these two seemingly synonymous words?

When G-d tells Moshe about the second plague (known as *tzfardea*), He says that He will “smite” (*nogef*) Egyptian territory. Rashi (to Exodus 7:27) explains that the noun *mageifah* does not denote death, but rather denotes some form of striking or smiting. The root of *mageifah* are the letters GIMMEL-PEH(-HAY). Verbs that use this root also denote striking, hitting, or pushing — but not death. Rashi repeats this understanding in multiple places (see his commentaries to Exodus 21:22, 21:35, and *Bava Kama* 2b). With this, Rashi answered his unspoken question about why the plague of *tzfardea* (commonly translated as “frogs”) is called a “plague” if frogs do not kill. To answer this question, Rashi explained that the word *mageifah* does not inherently refer to a plague which brings death, so the entire quandary is moot. (Abarbanel disagrees with Rashi’s assertion that *mageifah* does not inherently refer to a lethal plague. To answer the aforementioned difficulty,

Abarbanel is forced to adopt Rabbeinu Chananel’s view that *tzfardea* are “crocodiles”, not “frogs”.)

According to Rashi we can explain that the word *mageifah* is a general term that refers to any way of smiting or striking an opponent. Accordingly, while *mageifah* does not, perforce, refer to a deathly plague, the word *dever* does denote a plague which brings death. Indeed, in other Semitic languages, words spelled *DBR* mean “death”. (There is one notable exception to Rashi’s rule about words with the GIMMEL-PEH root: Malbim explains that the word *negef* (which is *mageifah*’s “first cousin”) denotes a plague which brings certain death. Indeed, Rashi (to Ex. 30:12) defines *negef* as *dever*, which we have explained also denotes death. Conversely, Rabbi Menachem ibn Saruk (920-970) defines *dever* as *negef*.)

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) explains that the word *dever* is related to the word *devorah* (“bee”) because *dever* is a disease that brings lesions upon a person’s body before killing him, and those lesions somewhat resemble the inflammation resulting from an allergic reaction to a bee sting. Rabbi Pappenheim’s understanding of *dever* seems to be consistent with descriptions of the dreaded bubonic plague — known simply as “The Plague”. The bubonic plague is understood to be responsible for the deaths of about half of Europe’s population in the fourteenth century outbreak known as “The Black Death”. Amongst other chilling symptoms, the bubonic plague causes one’s infected lymph nodes to become inflamed and turn into black blister-like buboes. With this in mind we can explain that *mageifah* is just a plague, but *dever* is an especially deadly plague.

Rabbi Yair Chaim Bachrach (1639-1702), the author of the famous Halachic responsa *Chavot Yair*, offers an enlightening discussion of the difference between the words *dever* and *mageifah*. He writes that *dever* refers to any deadly sickness that is contagious and can easily be transmitted, either from one person to another, or from one family to another. This idea is found in the *Mishna* (*Ta’anit* 3:4) which

Continued on page ten

PRAYER Essentials

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

The Traveler's Prayer — Part 1

When one travels, the “Traveling Prayer” is recited (the text of this prayer is printed in the Siddur). This prayer is to be recited in the plural form, i.e. “That You lead us.... guide us....” If possible, one should stand still rather than recite it while walking. However, one riding (on an animal) need not stop and descend from it.

• Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 110:1

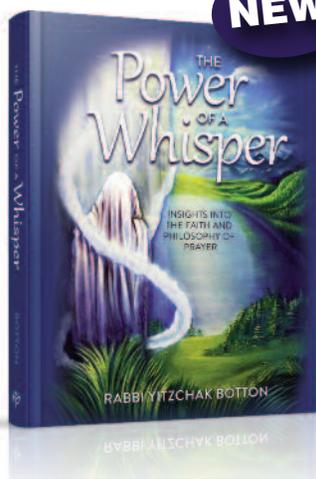
The above ruling is found in the Talmud (Berachot 29b): Eliyahu HaNavi said to Rav Yehudah, the brother of Rav Salla the Pious, “When you set out on the way, beg leave of your Creator, and then set out....” The Traveler’s prayer includes two main ideas: Requesting permission from G-d to travel, and requesting mercy for a safe and peaceful trip.

Though one should ideally recite this blessing in the plural form (us), if one said the entire blessing in the singular form he nevertheless fulfilled his obligation. (Mishneh Berurah) He writes, commenting on standing still for the blessing: One’s prayer is more likely to be accepted when saying the entire prayer while standing still.

While one is not allowed to change the text that the

Rabbis instituted, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach wrote that one can *add* to the official text of the prayer. For example, one can add a request to be saved from an accident or from terrorists and the like. Rav Chaim Kanievski maintains that one should not add personal requests since everything is already included in the request to be saved “from all manner of punishments”. (Dirshu)

Does one fulfill his obligation by hearing this blessing on a loud speaker (such as when on a tour bus)? Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach maintains that one does not since the voice heard from the amplifier is not the actual voice of the person. However, the Chazon Ish and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (in Igrot Moshe) were not decisive about this ruling. (Dirshu)



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BY RABBI YOSEF HERSHMAN

From Nadir to Nation

The beginning of our *parasha* marks a critical turning point in the history of the Jewish people. At the end of last week's *parasha*, Moshe complains to the Almighty: *Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he has abused the people even more, and You have not rescued Your people.* G-d responds, telling Moshe to brace himself for the events that will unfold: *Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh.* Before this new order comes to be, G-d speaks to Moshe: *I am HASHEM. I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov as EL SHADAI, but did not become known to them by my name HASHEM.*

From the time of Avraham until now there had been a steady descent: Avraham was regarded as a prince of G-d in the Land, whereas Yaakov was an unfortunate servant of Lavan, whose life was punctuated by colossal challenges. Ultimately, the sale of Yosef and unrelenting famine forced the House of Yaakov to move to Egypt, where they multiplied under the frightening grip of Egyptian slavery.

It could have been otherwise. Avraham could have had a child in his prime years, and could have overseen the flourishing of his progeny in happy, favorable circumstances on its native soil. But if the Jewish nation had emerged in this way, the people would not have become G-d's people. Instead, like all peoples, they would have been rooted in physical foundations. They would have sought material power and

material greatness, aspiring to the spiritual and moral only to the extent that these were compatible with, and beneficial to, its material aims.

The birth of the nation of G-d had to be founded solely on G-d and His law, and not on any other earthly hold. To fulfill its mandate of reawakening mankind and releasing it from the bonds of materialism, Israel had to be poor in everything upon which the rest of mankind builds its greatness. Israel had to begin at the climax of despair. Moshe is baffled by the downward spiral, and G-d reassures him that this was all deliberate: *I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov as EL SHADAI, the All-Sufficing One, with Whose help one can endure all the vicissitudes of life. I had not revealed Myself to them, as I do now, as HASHEM, the Sole Creator, Judge and Master of history and nature.* The curtain is about to be drawn, and as this defenseless and pitiful nation emerges as directly sustained and redeemed by G-d, it stands center stage in the play of history.

Indeed, this act will repeat itself time and again, to a different audience in each generation. The protagonist, the people of HASHEM, small and downtrodden, will beat the odds, manifestly overcoming all opposing forces, revealing the Master of history and nature to all of mankind.

Sources: *Commentary, Shemot 6:3; Nineteen Letters, #7*

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NEW
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MEZUZAH maven

BY RABBI ZE'EV KRAINES

Constant and Universal Maven

Perching silently and unobtrusively on our doorposts, the mezuzah is far from a passive adornment or a talisman. Rather, we are challenged to engage with its message with our minds, and even with our emotions. Our encounter with the mezuzah is meant to ignite a spark of love deep within our hearts. The Rambam, accordingly, chose to incorporate the laws of mezuzah in *The Book of Love*, the second book of his monumental *Mishneh Torah*. As he explains in his introduction: “I will include within it [the book] all the mitzvot... which were commanded to us, so that we will love G-d and constantly remember Him.”

This “constant remembrance” is a defining feature of the mezuzah. Once one affixes a mezuzah to his doorway, the mitzvah, its effect, and its reward keep pumping, while he goes about his daily life, and even while he sleeps. This quality, together with the fact that the mezuzah is incumbent on all Jews, indicates to us that G-d considers this mitzvah to be essential and indispensable to our lives. Women, as well as men, are obligated in the mitzvah, as it is not time-bound. Even children must be trained in its observance.

The classic work *Chovos Halevavos* illustrates this concept with a fascinating observation. It notes that in the Creator’s wisdom He has provided us with resources in proportion to their necessity. Because a

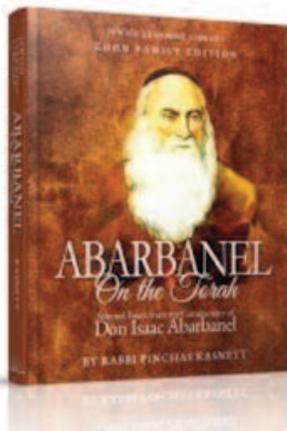
constant supply of oxygen is an absolute prerequisite for survival, He has surrounded us with a vast atmosphere and arranged for its replenishment. Similarly, life-sustaining water is abundantly distributed around the globe and renewed through the rain cycle. In the same way, the constancy and the universality of the mezuzah indicate that its observance is crucial for our spiritual nourishment. *Sefer HaChinuch* asserts that with time the mezuzah’s very presence will inevitably have an effect on our character and inner awareness.

For this reason the Sages prescribe that we should place the mezuzah at the outermost handbreadth of the doorpost so that we will encounter it immediately upon entering. As the Rambam explains: “Whenever a person enters or leaves [the house], he will encounter the unity of the name of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, and remember his love for Him.”

- Sources: Rambam, Introduction to Mishneh Torah and Hilchot Sefer Torah 5:10, 6:13; Chovos HaLevavos, Sha’ar HaBechinah; Sefer HaChinuch, Positive Mitzvah 16; Menachot 33b

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What's In a Word...continued from page six

teaches that if there is a *dever* in a given city, then its population should declare special fasts in order to facilitate repentance. The Mishna continues by defining *dever* as the death of three individuals within three days in a city whose population is five-hundred male adults. The Mishna thus assumes that the death of so many people within such a short span of time must be due to the spread of a deadly, infectious disease. (Contrast this with the world death rate per day given by the *Ecology Global Network*, which stands at 8 deaths per 1,000 people.) Similarly, the Talmud (*Bava Kama* 60b) advises that when there is a *dever* in a city, one should stay at home (thereby avoiding contact with infected people).

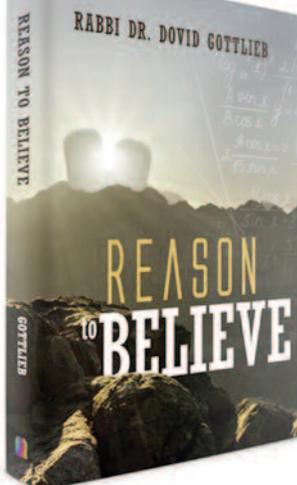
On the other hand, Rabbi Bachrach explains, the word *mageifah* denotes an infected wound which can wind up spreading like venom and affecting all of one's limbs and even one's bloodstream. As we have already explained, the word *mageifah* is related to other words which use the GIMMEL-PEH root. All of those words are related to hitting or pushing one specific part of the body, and sometimes allowing the malady to spread from there. For this reason the word *dever* is used to denote the sudden death by pestilence that transpires without the appearance of any

visible wounds on a specific part of their body. By contrast, the word *mageifah* denotes the act that the attacker (in the case of the Ten Plagues, G-d) "does" in bringing such a plague to his victim.

Rabbi Bachrach then cites the opinion of an anonymous sage who argued that *dever* and *mageifah* both refer to the same type of fatal plague, but that the word *mageifah* connotes a deadlier plague than does *dever*. Said sage adduces this view from the Torah's report that after the Jews sinned at Baal Peor they were punished with a plague "and the deaths in the plague numbered twenty-four thousand." (Num. 25:9) However, Rabbi Bachrach writes that he disproved this sage's theory from a different passage in the Bible. When King David conducted an illegal and unnecessary census of the Jewish People, the nation was punished with a plague whose death-toll amounted to seventy-thousand casualties. That plague is described as a *dever* (II Sam. 24:15), which shows that *dever* can yield even more deaths than *mageifah*, so the difference between the two words cannot be in the extent of their impact.

Ellyu Nishmat my mother Bracha bat R' Dovid and
my grandmother Shprintza bat R' Meir

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