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IT'S ALL IN THE TIMING

by Rabbi Steven Finkelstein

In the middle of this week's Parashah, Hashem presents Bnei Yisrael with their first Mitzvah, Kiddush HaChodesh, sanctifying the new month, "*HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem Rosh Chodashim Rishon Hu Lachem LeChodshei HaShanah*," "This month shall be for you the beginning of months, the first shall it be to you of the months of the year" (12:2). Essentially, Hashem is commanding the Jewish people to establish a proper calendar starting with the month of Nissan. Imagine for a moment that you were God. You are about to redeem a nation of slaves and provide them with a system of laws that will transform them into a holy nation. The time has come to give them their first commandment. Certainly it should be something fundamental, a commandment that can serve as the foundation or basis for the entire Torah way of life. Which commandment would you choose? Perhaps to believe that there is only one God. Maybe to observe Shabbat or to keep the dietary laws. Maybe the importance of loving your neighbor as you love yourself.

Hashem, however, chose a commandment that did not make our list. The first commandment He gives is to establish a calendar. What makes this Mitzvah so important? How does a calendar serve as a foundation for the rest of Torah way of life?

I believe the answer to this question can be found in the commentary of Rav Ovadia Seforno. Seforno explains the words "it shall be for you the beginning of months": henceforth, months of the year shall be yours, to do with them as you will. During the period of the bondage, your time did not belong to you it was used to work for others and to fulfill their will. Therefore, "this shall be the first month of the year to you," for in this month your existence as a people of free choice began. In other words, a slave's time is not his own. He is always on call awaiting the master's next command. In this setting it is impossible for a slave to decide for himself how he will spend his time. The decision is not his own.

As the Jewish People prepare for redemption, freedom, and ultimately receiving the Torah, they must first internalize the message of Rosh Chodesh, the idea that along with their freedom comes responsibility. As free people they will be held accountable for how they spend their time. Indeed, as free people they will have the wonderful opportunity to fill their time with positive and productive activities. Alternatively, they can choose to sit back and squander away their time or to spend it inappropriately. The decision will be theirs.

This Shabbat, as we study this Mitzvah, we can each take advantage of the opportunity to reflect on our own use of time, to make sure that with the arrival of each new month on the calendar we can look back with pride and say we have used our time well, that we are

one step ahead of where we had been the month before. We are one step purer. We are one step holier. We are one step closer to achieving our utmost potential.

THE HUMBLING LOCUST

by Eitan Leff '18

The eighth plague, Arbeh, locusts, is presented in the beginning of Parashat Bo, but its presentation differs from that of previous plagues. Hashem tells Moshe Rabbeinu, "*Bo El Par'oh, Ki Ani Hichbadti Et Libo VeEt Leiv Avadav Lema'an Shiti Ototai Eileh BeKirbo*," "Come to Par'oh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, in order that I may place these signs of Mine in his midst" (Shemot 10:1). Interestingly, Hashem commands Moshe to go to Par'oh, but the Torah does not say anything about what Moshe is supposed to tell Par'oh. The Torah does not reveal the nature of the eighth plague until a few Pesukim later, when Moshe and Aharon go to Par'oh and warn him that "*Im Ma' ein Atah LeShalei'ach Et Ami, Hineni Meivi Machar Arbeh BeGevulecha*," "If [Par'oh] refuses to let [B'nei Yisrael] go, behold, tomorrow [Moshe] will bring locusts into [Par'oh's] borders" (Shemot 10:4). If the Jews are not let out to worship Hashem, Hashem will send locusts. The Torah's record of the Plague of Arbeh appears strange: why does it omit Hashem telling Moshe Rabbeinu what Moshe is supposed to tell Par'oh but record Moshe telling Par'oh?

The Ramban believes that there is no question; the Torah is just more succinct by Arbeh than by other plagues. The Ramban compares this brevity to the plague of hail, when the Torah records Hashem's words to Moshe but does not record Moshe's warning to Par'oh. Furthermore, claims Ramban, Hashem's words to Moshe do hint to locusts. In the second Pasuk of the Parasha, Hashem explains the reason for the upcoming plague, "*Lema'an Tesapeir BeOznei Vincha UVen Bincha Eit Asher Hit'alalti BeMitzrayim*," "in order that you tell into the ears of your son and your son's son how I made a mockery of the Egyptians" (Shemot 10:2). The Ramban believes that the Pasuk hints to locusts because of a parallel Pasuk in the book of Yoel. Hashem tells Yoel, "*Aleha LiVneichem Sapeiru, UVneichem LiVneihem, UVneihem LeDor Acheir, Yeter HaGazam Achal HaArbeh*," "Tell your children about it, and your children to their children, and their children to another generation, 'what the cutter left over, and the locust devoured'" (Yoel 1:3-4). Both Shemot 10:2 and Yoel 1:3 talk about that the Jews telling their children and grandchildren about an event, and in both places, the event concerns Arbeh, locusts. Ramban associates "telling children and grandchildren" with locusts, so when Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to tell their children about the plague, He was hinting to locusts.

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Many authorities do not accept Ramban's dismissal of the question. Why is the plague of locusts written in the Torah in a different way than all the other plagues, going more in depth than usual into Moshe and Par'oh's encounter? Rav Hirsch gives an answer: he reasons that the Torah focuses on Moshe and Par'oh's meeting because there is something special about that interaction. This special quality is what Moshe and Aharon say to Par'oh "*Ad Matai Mei'anta Lei'anut MiPanai*," How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?" (Shemot 10:3). The locust is special because it teaches Par'oh to be humble.

How does the plague of locusts teach humility to Par'oh? Before we can answer this, we have to understand the difference between the plagues of hail and locusts and between all the other plagues. The Kli Yakar (9:30) explains that the Pesukim between the plagues of hail and locusts not only say that Hashem hardened Par'oh's heart--they also say, uniquely from the other plagues, that Hashem hardened the hearts of the common Egyptians. The Kli Yakar states that the reason the Pasuk mentions both is because the commoners were affected by both of those plagues more than Par'oh. Par'oh had storehouses for extra crops but the commoners did not, so when the hail and locusts came, they had no food, while Par'oh still had some.

Using the idea that the plagues of hail and the locusts affected the commoners more than Par'oh, we can now answer the question of how the plague of locusts teaches Par'oh humility. The Midrash (Shemot Rabba 8:2) informs us that Par'oh made himself like a god. The plague of locusts taught Par'oh humility because the whole country came to him asking for help, but he could not help them because he had little food. These plagues humbled him because he was rendered helpless, a very un-godly feeling.

Why did the plague of hail not do the job of the locusts (teaching Par'oh humility)? The answer is that the hail did not destroy all the crops (Shemot 9:32), so when the people came to Par'oh for food, he could tell them to eat their remaining crops. However, when the locusts came, they finished off the crops, so Par'oh could not help his people.

RESPECTING POWER

by Mendy Garb (17')

By the time the narrative of the Torah reaches Parashat Bo, Moshe Rabbeinu has already repeatedly warned Par'oh that failure to free the Jewish people would result in Hashem unleashing His wrath upon the people of Mitzrayim. In Parashat Bo, after refusals by Par'oh to free the Jewish people after the plagues of Arbeh and Choshech, Moshe delivers Hashem's warning for the tenth and final plague: that all of the first born sons of Egypt will die should Par'oh not free the Jewish people. Moshe Rabbeinu adds that when the first born sons die, "*VeYardu Kol Avadecha Eileh Eilai, VeHishtachavou Li Leimor 'Tzei Atah VeChol HaAm Asher BeRaglecha, VeAcharei Chein Eitzei'*" "And all of your servants will come to me, bow and say 'Leave, you together with your nation that is with you', and then we will leave" (Shemot 11:8). Rashi on the Pasuk (s.v. VeYardu Kol Avadecha) asks: why did Moshe say "Avadecha", "Your

servants", will run to beg Moshe to leave, when later in the Parashah (12:31) that Par'oh himself brought Moshe to him and begged for the Jews to leave. Rashi answers that Hashem said that Par'oh would run down to Moshe to beg the Jews to leave Egypt, but Moshe switched the wording to say that Par'oh's servants would run to Moshe and beg him to leave, because *Moshe* thought it would be disrespectful to Par'oh to say that Par'oh himself would run to Moshe. In explaining why Moshe Rabbeinu changed the order of the words, Rashi teaches us important lessons.

Rashi first answers that Moshe respected Par'oh as a king in a position of power, even though Par'oh was a terrible ruler. Moshe understood how important it is to respect the government itself as an institution, and indeed, Pirkei Avot adjures us "Hevei Mitpallel BeShlomah Shel Malchut, She'ilmalei Mora'ah, Ish Et Rei'eihu Chayim Bela'o", "Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of the government, man would swallow his fellow alive" (3:2). " Moshe certainly did not respect Par'oh as a decent, but Moshe knew that in any event, Par'oh was still king and deserved the respect due to someone in power.

A second answer given by Rashi takes a related approach. After being sent through the Nile in a Teivah (raft), Moshe was taken in by Par'oh's daughter and was raised by her in Par'oh's house. Moshe therefore respected his adoptive grandfather, Par'oh, and for that reason, Moshe switched around the wording in order to not embarrass Par'oh.

Two important lessons can be learned from the two different answers. Firstly, while one can certainly criticize the government and object to the policies of the ruling party, government officials demand the utmost respect, for they are ultimately keepers of the peace. Secondly, when an authority figure, such as a grandfather, acts out of line, it does not mean that respect is not due to them.

Kol Torah is proud to include this article from Rabbi Yaakov Blau, one of our respected Rabbei'im, originally published in his book, 'Medieval Commentary in the Modern Era: The Enduring Value of Classical Parshanut'. The conclusion of this article will appear in next week's issue, G-d willing.

RECONSIDERING PEDAGOGIC USE OF THE RAMBAN AL-HATORAH

by Rabbi Ya'akov Blau

The importance of the Ramban *al haTorah* cannot be overstated. Whatever approach one takes to Tanakh, be it *peshat*, *midrash*, *kabbalah*, philosophy or halakhic analysis, the Ramban's commentary is an indispensable aid. The Rav, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, went so far as to suggest that studying Ramban *al haTorah* ought to be an integral part of the curriculum of the Yeshiva University *smikha* program.ⁱ While this did not happen, it indicates the degree of significance that the Rav felt that Ramban served in the understanding of Humash.

I would like to examine three pedagogical uses of the Ramban *al haTorah* which I believe are not currently being maximized.ⁱⁱ Those uses are a) a *sugya* approach b) a halakhic approach and c) studying Ramban's understanding of certain passages of Navi.

actually ensured that a parallel action would occur to their children. He sees this as being a similar phenomenon to when *nevi'im* do symbolic acts.^{xv} This creates a broader discussion of the purpose of symbolic acts throughout Tanakh and whether or not they somehow cause the resulting action.^{xvi} Second of all, while Ramban refers to this notion often, one must be careful in evaluating how similar all the cases are. One can argue that this *hidush* does not apply to places where things are clearly meant to be symbolic. For example, all the odd details of *Brit Ben Habetarim* do not make much sense unless they are symbolic for the future, so many *mefarshim* explain them that way.^{xvii} The *hidush* is that even stories that make sense internally and can be understood in the context of the Humash, are symbolic of the future. So Avraham

ⁱ *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, 104-105.

ⁱⁱ I will not be discussing uses of Ramban which I think, and hope, are standard—for example, Ramban's attempts to understand the structure of Chumash, which are found both in his introductions to each *sefer* and throughout his commentary. Similarly, Ramban's *taamei hamitzvot*, while not as systematic as the Chinuch, are a well-known tool.

ⁱⁱⁱ As discussed in chapter 2.

^{iv} *Moreh Nevukhim* (2:42).

^v *Sefer Zikharon*.

^{vi} Which Ramban understood as just a *Bat Kol*, a position which Ramban strongly disagrees with.

An additional position that ought to be considered is that of Ralbag, who believes (most likely based on the *Moreh Nevukhim* 2:34 and 42) that the term *malakh* often refers to a *navi* (see his commentary on *Bereshit* 18:2, 21:17, 32:2, *Shemot* 14:19 and 23:20, *Shoftim* 2:1,6:11, 13:16 and *Shmuel Bet* 24:16).

^{vii} Another example would be Ramban's idea (*Devarim* 21:18) that several punishments are meant as a warning to society, rather than being justified by the gravity of the sin. These sins are identified as ones in which the Torah says that the people should "hear and be afraid."

^{viii} *Pessachim* 6b.

^{ix} Rashi clearly feels that the second story (Moshe judging the people) happened after *matan* Torah, but he is neutral about the first story (Yitro coming) about which he quotes both opinions in the gemara (although it is not clear if that is part of the text of Rashi).

^x Ramban is not clear if he thinks that the story of Moshe sitting to judge the people also happened before *matan* Torah. In 18:13 he first says that this story happened the day after the previous story of Yitro coming and then he discusses what the *Mekhilta* meant when it said that the story happened after Yom Kippur. One could assume that Ramban is accepting the *Mekhilta* or it could be that he first states what he actually thinks the *passuk* means and then tries to explain what the *Mekhlita* must have meant. See Rabbenu

going to Egypt pre-figures the whole nation going. That is something that only Ramban says, because the story can certainly stand alone. An example such as Yitzchak with the three wells (ibid. 26:20 and 32) can be seen as in between; the story makes sense by itself, but one could ask why the Torah needed to record it, if not for its symbolism.^{xviii}

One need not only look for large overarching principles, such as the aforementioned. The Ramban has several "smaller" concepts that are worth examining in several places. An example would be Yosef not being excessively materialistic. The Ramban uses this idea both in describing Potiphar's assessment of Yosef (*Bereshit* 39:6) and Pharaoh's (Ibid 45:19).^{xix}

Bachya on 18:1 who explains how the entire Yitro story, including Moshe judging the people, all happened before *matan* Torah.

^{xi} *Zevachim* 116a and the *Mekhilta*.

^{xii} Ramban uses this example in *Shemot* 12:43 and *Bamidbar* 21:1 (while he rejects the application to *Pessach* in the former, he does not question that it was true about the *man*). Interestingly, Bekhor Shor disagrees with all the other *Rishinom* and feels that the *man* was initially placed in front of a *bama* at the time of the initial *man* story.

^{xiii} Like Terach (*Bereshit* 11:32) and Yitzchak (ibid 35:28-29). Rashi makes a point of explaining why the former is out of order and uses the *Ein Mukdam U'Meuchar* for the latter. Ramban (ad loc) feels that both are the normal style of the Torah.

^{xiv} This principle is discussed many, many times by Ramban (not always by name), so the following list is unlikely to be exhaustive: *Bereshit* 32:23,35:28, *Shemot* 2:1, 4:19,12:40, 15:9, 18:1, 24:1, 32:11,33:7,40:2, *Vayikra* 8:1, 9:22, 16:1, 25:1, *Bamidbar* 9:1 and 16:1, *Devarim* 31:24.

^{xv} He quotes examples from Yirmiyahu and Elisha, but there are many, many other examples of this occurring.

^{xvi} See Drashot Haran *drash bet* who takes issue with Ramban's approach.

^{xvii} See Rashi and Radak ad loc.

^{xviii} Places where Ramban mentions this principle include *Bereshit* 12:6, and 10,14:1,26:1,20 and 32, 29:2, *Hakdamah* to *Vayishlach*, 32:9,17 and 26, 36:43, 43:14, 47:28, *Hakdamah* to *Shemot* and possibly *Shemot* 17:9). One could debate whether or not *Bereshit* 16:9 is an example of the principle (I thank my colleague Mrs. Yael Goldfischer for bringing that Ramban to my attention).

^{xix} Similarly, Ramban's famous opinion that the *mishkan* was commanded before the sin of the *egel*, only allows him to explain *karbanot* that were commanded afterwards as being an atonement for the sin. This comes up in *Shemot* 35:1 and *Vayikra* 9:2, but makes his comments on *Shemot* 29:14 hard to explain, unless he's explaining what Rashi would say.

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