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Parshat HaShavua sheet**

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Parshat Vaera

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HAIL TO THE CHIEF

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Some people just never learn. For almost a year Pharaoh was literally plagued by every conceivable misfortune, yet he refused to let the Jewish people leave his land. Of course, he pleaded with Moshe during every plague to stop the great inconvenience, pain, and disaster that were befalling his country. He would even promise to let the Jews go, yet he never admitted guilt. He would beseech Moshe to stop the various plagues. “Pray for me and remove the frogs! I will let you serve your G-d in the desert ([Exodus 8:4](#)).” Sometimes he would offer unrestricted freedom, only to renege when the plagues ceased. Never, except on one occasion, did Pharaoh admit that G-d was correct and he was corrupt.

That exception was the plague of hail. In fact, the plague of hail was so powerful that even Hashem Himself categorized it in a unique way. Moshe quoted Hashem to Pharaoh: “This time I shall send all my plagues against your heart, upon your servants, and your people so that you shall know that there is none like Me in the world” ([Exodus 9:14](#)). Why did Hashem consider the hail a more powerful act than His turning water into blood, or delivering pestilence, or wild animals or frogs? True, the hail did miraculously contain a fire ensconced in the ice, but all the plagues had miraculous attributes to them. Turning the Nile into blood is not an everyday occurrence either! What characteristic did the hail have to label it “all my plagues?”

Even more troubling is Pharaoh’s response. After the plague strikes Egypt he calls Moshe and Ahron and he tells them “this time I have sinned, Hashem is righteous and I and my people are the wicked ones” ([Exodus 9:27](#)) What caused Pharaoh to utter those submissive words at this particular time? Didn’t he already see blood, frogs, pestilence, boils, wild animals, and a host of different miraculous misfortunes that befell his people? What was so special about the fire and ice that fell from the heavens that charred even this man’s cruel temper?

William and his Aunt Caroline were constantly feuding. Actually, William was jealous of his aunt’s popularity and social status in the New York of the late 1890’s. Compared to her, he was considered a social outcast, and was never invited to any of her lavish parties. That would have been bad enough. Having to live next door to her was too much for William to bear. The sight of elegant carriages arriving and departing made him seethe. Yet he could do nothing. At least he did nothing until the family fortune was distributed and he received 100 million dollars. Then he knew what to do. He decided to rip down his mansion and build a monstrosity. It had 530 rooms, 350 baths, and a whopping 970 employees. It would be the grandest, most elegant guest house of its kind. More carriages would pull up to his home in a day than to his aunt’s mansion in a month! Her home would pale in comparison, and the tumult of it all would force her to move. William was right. Aunt Caroline moved way north of the shadow of her nephew’s hotel. And then she ripped down her old home. With the mere 50 million that she received, she too, decided to build a hotel on the site of her old mansion! It would be even more elegant, with nicer rooms and better service than her nephew’s. Two adjacent, competing hotels would have been built right next to each other if not for the wisdom of William’s own hotel manager. He got the two feuding relatives together and explained that hostility is not the way to success. “If you two could just work together and adjoin the two hotels as one, it would become the most outstanding and influential accommodation on earth,” he explained. They listened and followed his instructions. He even advised them to make sure that every opening between the structures could be sealed again in case of a renewed falling-out. But in the end, William Waldorf and his aunt, Caroline Astor decided to bury the hatchet and replace it with a hyphen. And the world’s most luxurious accommodation was built — The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

There are many opposing forces in the world. However, when they work in tandem, they are the most powerful force possible. During this plague, fire and ice, two opposing forces in the world of nature disregarded their differences all in the service of the Supreme Commander. When Hashem announced that He will send all of His plagues, he was referring to conflicting forces that work harmoniously. After that, even Pharaoh was sensible enough, albeit for a short moment, to see his frailty and delusions. When even the worst of men see fire and ice dance together on one mission, there is nothing he can do but watch in amazement and admit, “Hashem is the righteous one and I and my people are the wicked ones.” When opposing opinions gather for one objective – to do the will of Hashem – they are as unstoppable as the hail that brought Pharaoh to his knees.

Forever Relevant

By Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's Torah reading contains the four famous words of redemption that signal the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. Much has been made over the centuries as to the meaning and implication of each of these four Hebrew verbs. The fact that there are four such words used in the narrative of redemption fits the pattern that we find in the Hagaddah of Pesach – four sons, four questions, four cups of wine.

None of this is naturally random chance. That is not the way of the Torah or of the tradition of Rabbinic commentary and understanding of the words of the Torah. Since there are 70 facets to all Torah words and thoughts, the use of these four verbs contains different messages, all of them valid and important, that can be experienced and understood by different generations of the Jewish people.

Every era has its own circumstances and its own necessities. The eternity of Torah is that it is able to address each and every one of these differing times and circumstances in a meaningful fashion. The Torah speaks to our generation in a way that could not necessarily have been so clearly understood by a past generation which experienced different circumstances than the ones that we face today.

It is one of the extraordinary features of Torah study that it is applicable to so many different times and situations. The Rabbis of the Talmud implied this in their statement that the words of Torah sometimes seem to be poor and without meaning in one place and time while they are rich and of enormous value in another.

The use of different verbs to indicate the advent of the promised deliverance from Egyptian bondage indicates a process of redemption – a series of events and understandings and the development of a relationship between the Jewish people and the God of Israel that will fulfill the promise of redemption made to Abraham.

I have always felt in reviewing the events of the past century in Jewish life that we were in the midst of a process engineered by Heaven and accomplished by humans to restore us to our homeland and to our independence and greatness. Anything that is a process takes time and very rarely has immediate general impact. People view events and circumstances as they occur, one by one, and with the passage of time and constantly changing circumstances, rarely are able to discern the general process that is unfolding before their very eyes.

This process of redemption outlined for us in this week's Torah reading, a process which was not instantaneous in its result, but most gradual in its unfolding, is a harbinger of much of what is happening today in the Jewish world. The Jewish State in the Land of Israel is flourishing against all odds and Torah and Jewish life are strengthened daily within its borders. Even though the Jewish situation in the diaspora is of a very mixed quality, the strength of Torah and its resilient quality is being proven once more in front of our gaze. We are still in the middle of the process but I think there is little doubt regarding the actuality of the process itself.

Moses: A Very Human Leader

By Rabbi Ron Jawary

"Amram married Yocheved, and she bore him Moses and Aaron" (Ex. 6:20).

It is interesting that even though we all know who Moses and Aaron are, before the Torah begins to recount the 10 plagues in Egypt, we need to be told about their birth. Further, we are told that their father eventually dies and that Moses and Aaron both die a natural death.

One of the ideas behind this is that the Torah is concerned that people may start believing that Moses and Aaron are divine and that they were the source of the miracles. The Torah wants us to remember that, ultimately, God is the creator and source of life and all that's in it.

Furthermore, the Torah points out their shortcomings and mistakes, reinforcing the notion that no man is divine and infallible. Moses and Aaron were chosen as the medium through which God brought his blessings to the world; they were not the source. We should all remember that whatever blessings we have, we are just the conduit through which God has chosen to bring those blessings to the world. Just as Moses is described as the most humble man who ever lived, we shouldn't get carried away with our successes. We just need to remember and appreciate how lucky we really are.

The Nation Empowers Its Leaders

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Moshe complained to G-d that as a result of their oppression, the Jewish people did not pay attention to him. Moshe further argued that even if the Jews would not listen to him, certainly Pharaoh would not listen to him, particularly since he (Moshe) was 'uncircumcised of lips' [[Shemos 6:12](#)].

However, the logic of Moshe's argument — that Pharaoh would not listen to him — is flawed. The "kal v'chomer" ("all the more so") does not follow, and may be refuted as follows: As Moshe himself stated, the reason that the Jews did not listen was because they were too weary — from shortness of breath and from arduous labor. Pharaoh, on the other hand, did not have those distractions. So where is the proof that Pharaoh would not be prepared to listen?

The Sefas Emes (1847-1905) has an interesting approach to this question. The Sefas Emes explains that a Jewish leader is only as strong as the people who back him are. If the people do not want to be led, if a leader cannot even sway the people to his side, then he in fact loses his power of speech. This explains why Moshe added the fact that "I am uncircumcised of lips" (aral sefasayim). The reason why I am 'tongue-tied' is because my power of speech is only by virtue of the fact that I represent the people. If the people do not listen to me and do not rally around me as their leader, then I am in fact 'tongue-tied'. A leader is no greater than the people he leads are and if he does not lead them, he cannot begin to represent them to others.

Stop Hitting Those Stupid Frogs Already!

The pasuk says "And Aharon stretched his arm over the water of Egypt and the frog ascended and it covered the land of Egypt" [[Shemos 8:2](#)]. Rashi comments on the fact that the word frog is written in the singular (Tsefardeah). We know that the plague involved thousands if not millions of frogs, so why does the pasuk seem to indicate that only one frog initially ascended from the Egyptian waters?

Rashi explains in the name of the Medrash that in fact only one frog came out initially, but the Egyptians would beat it with swords and each time they would hit it, the frog would subdivide. As they kept hitting the frogs, they kept multiplying geometrically until there were hundreds of thousands and millions of frogs.

What lesson is this Medrash teaching us? The Steipler Gaon (1899-1985) explained as follows: Let us analyze the situation. The first time the Egyptians hit the frog, they certainly did not expect it to split into two. But then they hit it again, and again, and again. Each time they hit it, it divided again. So 'wake up and smell the coffee' already! Stop hitting the stupid frogs! Why did they keep hitting them? They saw that each time they hit a frog, they were only making matters worse. Why didn't they stop?

The Steipler explained that the Egyptians grew angrier and angrier each time they hit the frogs. Once a person becomes angry, he loses all sense of reason and rationality. Of course, the logical thing to do would have been to stop hitting the frogs, but when a person is very angry and frustrated, he loses control of his faculties. At that point, forget about logic. Logic is the language of the reasonable. An angry man is not reasonable.

Unfortunately, we can all relate to this concept. We can all relate to getting angry and to losing control. We know what a terrible state that is to be in. If we lose control, we say silly things. We do not hear that which people say to us in response. We are out of control.

That is true regarding a person who becomes angry occasionally. However, what if a person is always getting angry? That person is in very serious shape, because he is then always out of control. If he is always out of control, he is living a horrible life. The Talmud says "a person who constantly gets angry, all forms of Hell rule over him" [[Nedarim 22a](#)]. The simple reading of this Gemara is that an angry person will be judged harshly in the next world and all forms of Gehinnom will rule over him. Rav Yeruchum Levovitz (1874-1936) adds that the simple meaning is not the complete meaning of the Gemara. The Gemara is not only speaking about the price the person will have to pay in the next world. The Gemara is also saying that the person who constantly becomes angry lives a living Hell in THIS world! That is what it is like to always be angry and out of control. This explains why even though the most rational thing in the world would have been to stop hitting those stupid frogs, an angry person brings a living Hell upon himself by irrationally continuing to hit the frogs and further aggravating the matter.

“Moshe spoke thus to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe due to lack of patience and hard work” (6:9)

The terrible slavery in Egypt wore the people down and prevented them from hearing and digesting what Moshe had to say to them. It wasn't that they did not believe in Hashem's ability to save them. They did believe in Hashem and in Moshe's mission, but their circumstances did not allow them to take it in and think about it. This explains why later on (6:12) Hashem did not respond to Moshe's complaint that there was no way that Pharaoh would listen to him if his own nation would not pay any attention to him. Their inability to hear him out had nothing to do with disbelief, but with other interfering factors. Pharaoh, on the other hand, had no such situations that would get in the way of having an open mind, so it was still possible that Moshe would be able to convince him to listen. There are many people who are ready to improve and do better, but they cannot bring themselves to take the next step and make a move to grow in their observance. There is something in their lives, some personal situation, that is stopping them from making the leap. It's not that these people do not believe or do not understand what is right, but there are other circumstances that are causing them to hesitate about acting on those beliefs. We have to overcome these situations and not let them interfere with the steps that we need to take to improve ourselves.

“Moshe and Aharon did as Hashem commanded them; so they did” (7:6)

Why does the Torah say twice that Moshe and Aharon did what Hashem told them to do? There are a number of approaches in the commentators to explain this repetition. Chizkuni writes that the added phrase conveys the idea that they followed Hashem's instructions to go to Pharaoh even though they knew that they were risking their lives by doing so. They did what Hashem commanded them and they did it despite the dangers. Seforno writes that the Torah emphasizes that Moshe and Aharon did not add or subtract anything from what Hashem had told them to say. They had no illusion that they knew better than Hashem and could improve upon the message that was given to them. They did only what Hashem said without deviating at all. Or HaChaim writes that the Torah is describing how Moshe and Aharon would get to work immediately after receiving an assignment from Hashem without delay. When we have a mission and we know what we need to do, we have to get to it right away. As an example of this attitude, the first halacha in Shulchan Aruch teaches that a person should not linger in bed in the morning, but should instead strengthen himself like a lion to get up to serve his Creator.

“And Moshe was eighty years old, and Aharon was eighty three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh” (7:7)

Why is it important to note that Moshe was 80 and Aharon 83 when they left Mitzrayim? One idea is that the Torah emphasizes the kindness of Hashem in giving the Jewish people leaders with great life experience. Another thought is that it shows us the value of older age. As a person gets on in years, he is still expected to use his time productively because there is no retirement from a life of Torah and mitzvot. In fact, age brings a certain amount of wisdom that should be appreciated. Torah scholars continue to grow spiritually and become greater even as they get older because, though their physical abilities may wane, they remain focused on their spiritual pursuits. On the other hand, unlearned people who identify more with their physical abilities see their identity fall apart as they age and those abilities start to fade. Why does the Torah tell us how old Moshe and Aharon were? Seforno says that the Torah wants to show that despite their age, Moshe and Aharon acted swiftly and with great energy to carry out the instructions of Hashem. Even though they were both over 80, they did not let their age slow them down when Hashem had given them a job to do. As a person gets on in years, he is still expected to use his time productively because there is no retirement from a life of Torah and mitzvot. It is not a simple task to maintain the same level of serving Hashem as a person ages, but we can look to our nation's first leaders as role models and as an inspiration to not allow age to get in the way of continued spiritual growth.

“Moshe went out from Pharaoh, from the city, and he stretched out his hands to Hashem; the thunder and hail ceased and rain did not reach the ground” (9:33)

Why was it necessary for the hail to be miraculously suspended in midair at the end of the plague? R' Moshe Feinstein writes that we often take nature for granted. In order to impress upon the world that nature only runs its course because it is so decided by Hashem, it was important to show that the laws of nature can be overridden at His command. Gravity only operates as defined by Newton because Hashem decrees it to be so. This lesson is recorded in the Torah so that it is remembered for all eternity. This idea is similar to the story in the Gemara of R' Chanina ben Dosa who told his daughter to light vinegar for her Shabbos candles when she ran out of oil. He said that Hashem, who decreed that oil should burn, also has the power to make vinegar burn. The oil itself only lights because Hashem decided that it should. How could R' Chanina ben Dosa ask for vinegar to light? We generally do not pray for miracles?! The answer is that to him, burning vinegar was no more of a miracle than burning oil. It was all equally miraculous in his eyes. Vinegar burning was just one miracle instead of another. Although we have generally become accustomed to nature running its course because we see it all the time, we should try to take a step back every once in a while and appreciate even the small things that we have come to take for granted and be thankful that they operate in the way that they do.

The True Test of Greatness

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

[Shemot, 6:26-27](#) "This was Aaron and Moses to whom God said: 'Take the Children of Israel out of Egypt according to their legions. They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, King of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; this was Moses and Aaron.'"

[Rashi, Shemot, 6:27](#) sv. This was Moses and Aaron: "They were steadfast in their mission and in their righteousness from the beginning until the end."

Rashi quotes a Gemara in Megilla that enumerates verses demonstrating the consistency of great people. Only one other person is mentioned in a similar vein as being steadfast in his righteousness from the beginning until the end - Abraham. Why are these the only people about whom the Torah gives this particular form of praise?

It seems that these three people were more than anyone else, placed in situations that were so challenging that anyone not on the highest level would have succumbed to the difficulties and not maintained their incredibly high standards of conduct. Abraham, already at the age of three years old reached greatness in recognizing God - from that time on he faced incredible pressure to reject his newfound beliefs in favor of the predominant idolatry. Yet he remained steadfast, willing to give up his own life in the furnace in Ohr Kasdim. God continued to test him in areas that conflicted with his incredible sense of kindness, such as expelling his own son Ishmael, and of course the *Akeida* (Binding of Isaac) where he was instructed to kill his beloved son, Isaac. In all these tests he could have faltered slightly, wondering why God was telling him to perform a deed that contradicted the beliefs that he had sacrificed so much to uphold. Yet he stood firm, maintaining the incredible levels that he reached as a child.

Moses and Aaron, in their more than forty year long role as saviors of the Jewish people, also faced many challenges and tests that could easily have caused them to falter, beginning with their initial failed attempt to improve the lot of the Jews in their slavery. It continued with the numerous instances where the Jewish people turned against them, accusing them of bringing them to die in the desert, and even coming close to killing them on occasion. Moreover they endured extreme tragedies in the various episodes of the Exodus such as the consequences of the sin of the spies. Yet at no time did they weaken in their determination to fulfill the role that God had forced upon them at the very beginning. Thus, the Sages tell us that they remained as righteous at the end of the long and difficult saga of the Exodus as they were in the beginning. Of course we cannot aspire to the level of steadfastness that Abraham, Moses and Aaron attained in maintaining their spiritual level in the midst of all their challenges, however, their example teaches us a vital lesson. It is praiseworthy for a person to act with good character traits and Faith in God when his situation is stable, but the true test of his righteousness is when he is placed in difficult situations - is he then able to keep to his values or does his yetser hara take over. Two examples serve to illustrate this point:

The Chazon Ish in his work on *Bitachon* (trust of God), suggests a case of Reuben who is constantly expressing his Emuna and how everything that he has is from God; he proclaims his recognition that his livelihood emanates purely from God and that there is no need for anxiety. However, when Simon opens a business that rivals that of Reuben, suddenly, all his Emuna fades away and he worries constantly over the future, he even begins to complain about his new rival, and perhaps plots unethical ways to cause Shimon to close down. Reuben's Emuna seemed to be strong when everything was going smoothly, but when he was put to the test, he failed to show sufficient *Bitachon*.

A second example is offered by the saying of the Sages that the true measure of person is known by how he acts with regard to money, how he behaves when he is inebriated, and - most pertinent here - to how he acts on occasions that arouse anger. The fact that he acts calmly most of the time does not indicate that he is a true *baal middot*. His true level is only revealed when he can maintain his composure at times where he is put under great pressure. We have seen from the examples of Abraham, Moses and Aaron how true greatness is measured by one's behavior in difficult times - may we all aspire to emulate them on our own level.

"Talk" Like an Egyptian

By Sheldon Stern

In 1986, the Bangles scored with the quirky, "Walk Like an Egyptian." In this week's Parsha we're shown, not how to walk, but instead how to talk like an Egyptian. No, I'm not speaking about your garden-variety Mitzri, rather I'm referring to the man whom the daughters of Yisro referenced when they told their father, "An Egyptian man saved us."

In Parshas Shemos, Moshe's initial foray as Hashem's ambassador didn't go swimmingly. However, much to our leader's chagrin, Hashem wasn't dissuaded from his original decision, and in verse 6:11 He again dispatched him to speak to Paroah. In the next verse Moshe responded, "The Bnei Yisrael won't listen to me,(as we see from 5:21) so how will Paroah hear me, and I have uncircumcised lips?" There are a select few who have such mastery over its length and breadth that they're called, "Walking Sifrei Torah." I would suggest that this honorific should be reserved for a different group.

Every morning, in our prayers, we recite Rabbi Yishmael's Braisa which says that the Torah is expounded with thirteen Middos. It behooves us to gain a fuller appreciation of what the Tanna is saying. Since the Torah is the blueprint of Creation it follows that these expository laws not only clarify the Talmud but they hold the key to unlock all the secrets of the Universe. Yes there are other such codes, and they're equally valid, because Hashem created a world in which parallel expressions of truth can co-exist. So now let's take a closer look at what Moshe said. He began with Rabbi Yishmael's first rule, the ubiquitous Kal V'Chomer and argued, "If the Jewish people, who desperately seek salvation, aren't interested in what I'm saying, why would Paroah, for whom the thought of losing his slaves was anathema, pay attention?" Seems pretty solid so why did the greatest man who ever lived then add that he doesn't have the gift of gab. The Kal V'Chomer is considered the weakest form of proof and so it can be undermined by any logical counterpoint.

In a 1964 exhibition, the enigmatic chess genius Bobby Fischer, played fifty games simultaneously against fifty quality opponents (he went 47 wins, 2 draws and one loss.) How could he accomplish such a feat? The greats, when they make a move, are thinking 12 steps or more ahead. Moshe understood that if he simply presented that rationale, Hashem would've swatted it away, "There's a very good reason that you weren't able to reach your minions, they're totally demoralized, but there's no reason that you can't get through to Paroah." So Moshe found his opening, "I understood Your point. When Yosef interpreted Paroah's dream, the potentate was so impressed that he sought someone who had the spirit of G-d." Yes, and that's why I'm repeating that I'm not the right man for the job, because I lack all the skills that Yosef possessed. So here was Moshe's humility at work. But we can ask, "Hashem told Moshe that Paroah wouldn't listen at first, so why did he protest the assignment?" The Gemara tells us that Moshe was a glutton for performing Mitzvahs, and cites the example of the laws of Ir Miklat as proof text. The Halacha stated that there would be six such cities, three on each side of the Jordan, but those which were Eiver Liyarden wouldn't function until their counterparts in Israel proper were functional. Moshe knew this but he was undeterred, and so he set up the first three. Similarly, we should propose our own Kal V'Chomer, "If Moshe devoted himself to building the Ir Mklat, a Mitzvah he couldn't complete, then all the more so he should have been in on the opportunity to act as Hashem's "mouthpiece." In Genesis 27:46 Rivkah told Yitzchak, "I'm disgusted with my life, because of the Hittite women" (Eisav's two idolatrous wives.) That comment seems out of line with what we'd expect from one of the Matriarchs, women who were ever grateful to the Creator. So I would suggest that she was implying that it was her fault that Eisav had gone OTD and married those unworthy women. Perhaps she had favored Yaakov and now the chickens were coming home to roost. This is the attitude of a Tzaddik, to always turn introspective. Along the same lines Moshe likely blamed himself for the initial failure, positing that someone who was more eloquent would've succeeded. At the same time, the Tzaddik never takes credit for anything he accomplishes. In Parshas Vaeschanan, Moshe pleaded for Hashem to annul the decree preventing him from gaining entry into Eretz Yisrael. Rashi seized on the word Vaeschanan, whose root is Chinam, and said that a Tzaddik views the Chesed of Hashem as a gift. Moshe had every right to "demand" that his request be answered given all that he had done, but he framed his petition as if he was a worthless pauper soliciting alms.

So what's our takeaway? About a week ago I was in shul and two guys were comparing their conquests. No, I don't mean women, "I got Comcast at 23," said one. The other offered, "I got Tesla at ? ." You get the point. I thought to myself, "For all you "got" you just don't get it. Jackson Browne in his "The Pretender" spoke about the struggle for the legal tender. In the next world they'll tell these fellows, "your money's no good here." Let's present a Moshal. Someone reaches 120 and comes to the Olam Haemes. They tell him that there was a split decision in his case and so they gave him an offer too good to refuse, "We're sending you back down, but only for an hour. Your actions in that time will determine your ultimate fate." If the man thinks straight he'll immediately call his broker and tell him to sell off everything and give the proceeds, as Paul sang, "To a registered charity"(Torah based of course) Then he'll take in a good Daf Yomi shiur and for good measure visit a children's cancer ward. But we're not under such pressure so what should we be doing with our time in this mortal coil? We should be developing a Gemara kop. But why? Don't get me wrong giving Tzedaka and doing Chesed are also mandatory and terrific, but Torah study is the apex. Chazal teach that the way a person leaves this earth is fixed, meaning he can't change in the Next World. But that's not entirely true. If one learns with sincerity, the Gemara will get into his bloodstream and he'll incorporate Rabbi Yishmael's Braisa. With this, he has the potential to unlock the entire Universe and that will play out in Shamayim where he'll be able to hobnob with our icons.

Not long after I started studying with Rabbi Friedman I called up a former instructor from dental school. He had become a Baal Tshuvah and I wanted to share a piece of Gemara with him. After about ten minutes he said, "This has absolutely no relevance in my life, but I find it totally enthralling." I didn't really know what to tell him at the time, but I do now. Some years back I read an essay in the Jewish Press in which the author called for the abolition of Talmudic study, asserting that it served no purpose. Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz once clutched a Gemara and said, "Where can you find such a book, every word of which is truth?" The study of Gemara is aimed at making one a purveyor of truth. A sugya begins with an apparently insurmountable difficulty, but by navigating the subject one arrives at the truth and acquires a wealth of information along the way. To "Talk like an Egyptian" is to become fully conversant in the language of the Talmud. There's an important caveat, one must be searching for truth, which, unfortunately, isn't always the case. The Gemara in Bava Basra 23B related that Rabbi Yirmiyah was summarily dismissed from the Bes Medrash. What was his crime? No he wasn't guilty of, as Brownsville Station sang, "Smoking in the Boy's Room." The great Amora's offense was that he asked a question that was considered by his peers to be illogical. The Gemara is at a loss to find his actual flaw. (so impeccable was their grasp of logic) I once heard that Rav Moshe's Rebbetzin said, "No one can know as much Torah as my husband, but you can be a Mensch like him." Similarly, no one can attain the heights of Moshe Rabbeinu, who was able to intuit laws not even referenced in the Torah. We can, however, train ourselves to talk and think like that Egyptian. As Ringo sang, "It Don't Come Easy." but it's well worth the effort.