

# Kehillah

#54



## THE PERTINENT PARASHA

### A Darkness of Compassion and Retribution

Rabbi Yeshoshua Pfeffer | Rav of Kehillat Ohr Chadash, Ramot, Jerusalem

"Where did the Egyptian darkness come from?" The Midrash (*Tanchuma, Bo 2*) asks this question and offers two answers. "Rabbi Yehuda says it derived from the Upper Darkness, as it says, 'He made darkness His concealment.' Rabbi Nechemya says it derived from the darkness of Gehinnom, as it says, 'The land whose darkness is like pitch-blackness.'"

What lies behind the dispute? What are our Sages teaching us here?

It seems *Chazal* are informing us about two different yet parallel sources that our redemption from Egypt derived from.

One source is divine compassion. In several verses, the Torah tells us that Hashem heard our cries and our pleas.

At the very first encounter with Moshe, Hashem tells him, "I have indeed seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt, and I have heard its outcry because of its taskmasters, for I have known of its sufferings" (*Shemos 3:7*). "We cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our forefathers, and Hashem heard our voice and saw our affliction" (*Devarim 26:7*).

Hashem's compassion for His people is reflected in the elevated source of darkness noted by Rabbi Yehuda. The plagues that afflicted Egypt derived from the most elevated form of divine revelation – a revelation of love, relationship, and covenant.

Even in places of love and closeness there is sometimes darkness. There are things we choose not to see or keep hidden.





## THE PERTINENT PARASHA



And there is even pain: “One who spares his rod hates his child, but he who loves him disciplines him in his youth” (*Mishlei* 13:24). Love can be tough.

The Egyptian darkness derived from this concealment. Yet, a second source for the Egyptian darkness is not love but the full severity of divine judgment. The very first declaration of our redemption, made centuries back to Avraham Avinu, noted that there would be full retribution for Egyptian persecution: “But also the nation that they will serve, I shall judge, and afterward they will leave with great wealth” (*Bereishis* 15:14).

In His statement to Moshe at the beginning of *Parashas Va'eira*, Hashem mentions that the redemption, which began by Hashem hearing “the groan of the children of Israel whom Egypt enslaves,” would come to pass “with an outstretched arm and with great judgments” (*Shemos* 6:6).

Egypt was punished for its heinous crimes against the Hebrews – for denying them the freedom to serve Hashem and for the persecution that went far beyond anything the institution of slavery could legitimize.

The murder of children, just one part of a package deal that surely included every form of oppression

and torture, could not go unpunished.

Rabbi Nechemya thus notes a second source of Egyptian darkness: the pitch-blackness of Gehinnom. Here, darkness derives not from love and compassion but from judgment and punishment. Those who choose a path of evil must receive their just deserts. They cannot escape the darkness that they themselves have wrought.

As we continue to fight a war against bitter enemies, our prayers include both elements. On the one hand, we entreat Hashem to have compassion for His people: “Behold, He neither slumbers nor sleeps, the Guardian of Israel” (*Tehillim* 121:4). On the other, we ask Him to eradicate evil: “O my G-d, make them like the whirling chaff, like stubble before the wind; like a fire burning the forest, and like a flame that sets mountains ablaze” (*Tehillim* 83:14–16).

Some communities juxtapose these two passages of *Tehillim* (121 and 83), echoing the two sources of our Egyptian salvation – divine compassion for His people and wrath against evildoers. May Hashem, indeed, keep us from all harm. “Then they will know that You – Whose name is Hashem – are alone Most High over all the earth” (*Tehillim* 83:19).



## Quiet Time

Rabbi Yaacov Haber – Rav of Kehillas Shivtei Yeshurun, Ramat Beit Shemesh

In this week's parasha Moshe argues with G-d about his competence to bring G-d's message to Pharaoh to release the Jews. "The children of Israel did not listen to me," he says, "Why should Pharaoh?" (Shemos 6:12). This is a form of argument, widely used by Chazal, known as a kal vachomer: If something is the case under certain circumstances, then even more is it so under other, stronger, circumstances. In this case it goes: If Bnei Yisrael, who have everything to gain from my mission, ignore me, then why shouldn't Pharaoh, who has everything to lose?

Halachos are often decided by an appeal to kal vachomer. But it must be watertight. The logic must be impeccable; otherwise the whole argument collapses. Now if we go back a couple of verses to see why the Israelites ignored Moshe, we read: "And Moshe spoke thus to the children of Israel, but they did not listen, from kotzer ruach and hard bondage" (Shemos 6:9). What is kotzer ruach? The term literally means "shortness of spirit (or wind)." It is also translated as

"broken spirit" or "failure of spirit," referring to the Israelites' degradation. It is then no wonder that they didn't want to listen to Moshe. Pharaoh, however, living in comfort in his palace, would not be in the same position, and might very well be receptive to Moshe's message. So the kal vachomer seems to fall flat. But why would

***We should all set aside a quiet time every day – just five minutes, or even one minute – when we can reflect calmly on our own situation.***

Moshe Rabbeinu use a weak rabbinic argument?

The answer to this may lie in an explanation of the phrase kotzer ruach by Sforno. He explains it as a lack of awareness of, or an inability to reflect on, one's circumstances. This afflicts a lot of people, whom I would like to call kotzer ruachniks. Many of us are incapable of appreciating what happens to us, of reflecting on it, and of judging intelligently how we should respond.





## Hashkafically Speaking



Let me mention just one instance of this – thoughtlessness in speaking to people. In my yeshiva, one of the rabbis had a reputation for waiting a long time before giving an answer to anyone’s question. The questioner would have to wait 20 or 30 minutes before getting a response. (When it came, it was always good.) This caused some comments, and, because I was very close to this rabbi, I thought I should discuss this with him. So I went to him and said: “Reb —, many people comment on the way you pause so long before answering someone.” His answer to me (after 20 minutes) was: “You know, I could speak as fast as anyone else here, if I wanted to. But I have a custom of thinking over, in my mind, exactly what I want to say. That way, I can be sure I’ll never hurt anyone thoughtlessly.” And I remember thinking: “You are right to pause like that!” For it seemed to work – this rabbi had a reputation for never offending anyone.

Back to Pharaoh and the Israelites: How does kotzer ruach apply here? We can see how it applies to the Israelites: from the depths of their servitude, they were not in a position to reflect intelligently on their situation.

However, Pharaoh was also a kotzer

ruachnik. We read that before some of the plagues (the first, fourth, and seventh) Moshe and Aharon met him in the morning on the banks of the Nile. What was he doing there? According to a midrash (quoted by Rashi), Pharaoh carefully studied the times of the Nile’s tides and entered the river at precisely the moment when the water began to rise, so that it would appear to be rising to honor him. Further, while bathing, he took the opportunity to relieve himself, so that he need never go to the bathroom the rest of the day, which he used as proof that he was a god. What is more, says the midrash, he himself believed this! The fact that he should fall for his own crude propaganda, which any child could see through, shows that Pharaoh himself suffered from kotzer ruach. Thus, Moshe’s kal vachomer was good.

What can we do about kotzer ruach? I would like to prescribe an exercise. We should all set aside a quiet time every day – just five minutes, or even one minute – when we can reflect calmly on our own situation. If we were to do this, one of the results would be to realize all our daily benefits from G-d, and we would respond by raising our level of observance and commitment to the Torah.





## Meshateh

Rabbi Asher Meir | Torah and Policy Researcher

Pharaoh is notorious for his hard heart, as Hashem warns Moshe in advance, as we see, for example, in *Shemos* 7:13 and a number of other verses. But another ignoble trait he displays is duplicity. Time and time again he promises that if Moshe will stop the plague, he will send the people to sacrifice to Hashem, but time and time again he goes back on his promise. He tells Moshe, "Request on my behalf and remove the frogs from me and my people, and I will send the people to sacrifice to Hashem" (8:4), but after

***In halacha, an act of sale including full payment is in general valid even if the agreement is obtained by force.***

Moshe agrees, we find that "Pharaoh saw that there was relief, and he hardened his heart" (8:11). Soon after this, Pharaoh promises that if Moshe will get rid of the *arov*, the wild beasts, "I will release you to sacrifice to Hashem in the desert"

(8:24); Moshe already knows that he warns him, "Don't continue to scoff." Yet once again, shortly after relief comes, Pharaoh ignores his promise (8:28). (Perhaps this was a common trait among pharaohs; later on Rashi tells us that the pharaoh of Yosef's time also made promises but did not keep them - *Bereishis* 44:18.)

But is Pharaoh's renegeing really so objectionable? After all, his promises are made under considerable duress. Hashem is subjecting the Egyptians to terrible plagues, and Pharaoh can avoid the threat only by agreeing to Moshe's demands. An individual in a comparable situation may be allowed to renege; if someone beats me until I promise to do him some service, I am not in general obligated to fulfill the promise.

It is true that the definition of duress in halacha is rather different from the definition in contemporary non-Jewish law. In halacha, an act of sale including full payment is valid in general even if the agreement is obtained by force (*Bava Basra* 48a-b; *Choshen Mishpat* 205:1).



But the situation is much different in the case of an obligation to make a payment or take an action in the future. In that case, if the demand is excessive (in legal parlance, unconscionable), there is an obligation to give only what is normally considered a reasonable, conscionable recompense. For example, if a ferry operator who normally takes a fixed fare for a trip pressures a desperate person to agree to a much higher fare for his standard service, the traveler is subsequently obligated to pay only the normal fare. (But once he pays, he cannot demand a refund – *Yevamos* 106a; *Choshen Mishpat* 264:7.)

*Chazal* explain that a customer can excuse his renegeing by saying, *Meshateh ani bach*, “I was only joking.” One way to understand this phrase is that the excuse is precise. If someone asks an outrageous price for something, a customer may sarcastically reply, “No problem. I’ll give you a million dollars,” as a way of emphasizing his outrage. According to this understanding, the seller should have grasped that the agreement was insincere. Another approach is that the real problem is the lack of consideration; the terminology is a way of saying that according to our values, getting extra payment

without giving extra service is so unconscionable that it is a joke. The merchant was misled, but justifiably so.

***“Pharaoh’s levity toward his own promises as sovereign, as a result of his stubbornness and cruelty, are insulting to Moshe, the people of Israel, and Hashem. But his scoffing attitude is equally dismissive of the dignity of the Egyptian people.”***

Can Pharaoh excuse his behavior by saying that Moshe’s demands are unconscionable? There are two problems with this excuse. One is that the demand is not at all unreasonable. A sovereign is permitted to conscript free citizens for vital national projects, but not to impose such a heavy burden that it prevents them from fulfilling basic human needs, including worship. On the contrary, it is exactly the legitimate nature of Moshe’s demand that justifies bringing plagues on Egypt for Pharaoh’s failing to grant it.



An article by Elishai Ben Yitzchak entitled *Al Hahavtacha Haminhalit* gives another reason why Pharaoh cannot excuse his duplicity: A sovereign, and indeed any community authority, is obligated to fulfill promises even in cases where a private individual would be entitled to renege. He quotes the Maharam Rotenberg (Mordechai, *Bava Metzia* 457), who forbids a community from backing out of an

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agreement to hire a teacher, and the Rosh (cited in the Rema, *Choshen Mishpat* 163:6), who rules that the verbal agreement of a community has force even when a formal act of *kinyan* (acquisition) would be required to obligate an individual. The Ribash (responsa 676) dismisses the excuse of *meshateh ani bach* by pointing out that "it is not the way of a community to joke."

*Chazal* (*Bava Basra* 3b) likewise rule that one may rely on the promise of a king, even a wicked king like Herod, because it is a general rule that "a king who promises to uproot a mountain will uproot the mountain and not renege."

Pharaoh's levity toward his own promises as sovereign, as a result of his stubbornness and cruelty, are insulting to Moshe, to the people of Israel, and of course to Hashem. But his scoffing attitude is equally dismissive of the dignity of the people of Egypt, who as a distinguished community deserve a leader who understands the gravity of his royal responsibilities. His own advisors admonish him about this, asking incredulously, "Haven't you noticed that Egypt is being destroyed?" (*Shemos* 10:7).

Rashi points out repeatedly in his commentary that Moshe's conduct toward Pharaoh exemplifies that we should always show great respect to people who bear communal authority (*Shemos* 5:3, 11:8). In this way we show respect for the community as a whole. But it is equally true that people who bear communal authority must also show respect for the community by



## Work or Slavery

Rabbi Tzvi Broker

Career Coach and Director of Pilzno Work Inspired

In the language of the Torah we find a striking connection between the words for slavery, *avdus*, and work, *avoda*.

Putting aside the joke that your boss is more of a taskmaster than a manager, what can we learn from this connection?

***The Torah didn't envision work as a stress inducing, endless frustrating and depleting experience.***

It's fascinating to note that when Pharaoh sought to enslave the Jewish people he used work as his strategy. What was his intention? A careful exploration of Pharaoh's tactics reveals that he forced the Jews to work in ways that were against the essence of how work is meant to be.

The Midrashim reveal how Pharaoh

intentionally assigned people jobs that were misfits for them. He broke down the walls of work-life balance by preventing his workers to engage in regular family life. He robbed the Jews of any feelings of achievement that come with completing something by assigning them to build structures on ground that would collapse once they were completed. If Pharaoh's goal was productivity, he surely would need to hire a new COO!

But if his goal wasn't for the work to get done, what did he want?

Ultimately, Pharaoh's true intention was to crush the moral of the Jewish people. He understood that the best way to achieve this is to have them engage in the most unhealthy work environment and conditions.

We can learn from Pharaoh what work isn't meant to be. The Torah didn't envision work as a stress inducing, endless frustrating and depleting experience. Chazal are full of teachings that refer to work in the most of positive ways.





## PARASHA AND PARNASSAH



For example, in *Pirkei Avos* we are taught (*Avos* 1:10) "Love work!". The Eitz Yosef explains that the Tanna's choice of words is intentional. He didn't say that one should love the salary one gets from work and hate the work itself. Rather, one should love work to the extent that he doesn't feel like it's a burden."

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 49b) exclaims: "Praiseworthy is work because it brings honor to those who do it ."

The worldview from these two (and many other sources) is that work was designed to be an intrinsically enjoyable and positive experience. Through your work you should ideally be involved in your interests and manifesting your best talents. This naturally brings joy and a deep sense of fulfillment. You should feel accomplished by what you achieve with Hashem's help, as the Passuk

in Tehillim (128) teaches: "When you (eat) reap the benefits from the work you do. Fortunate are you and it's good for you!"

***work was designed to be an intrinsically enjoyable and positive experience.***

When reading through the narrative of Mitzrayim, ask if your own career journey has been more like the Torah's vision for Avoda, work or Pharaoh's vision of Avdus, slavery

While it's common for people to go through stages of their lives in which they must responsibly take a less than ideal job it's also important to know what to strive for. With Hashem's help, each one of us can experience work the way Hashem intended.



# Taking Interest



## Increased Value and Ribbis

Rabbi Shloimy Muller

Talmid of Rav Pinchas Vind *shlita*, founder of the Beis Horaah L'Inyanei Ribbis

Let us move onto another area of ribbis which particularly affects those from abroad who are privileged to live in Eretz Yisrael.

The classic case of ribbis is when one borrows a certain amount of money or items and agrees at the time of the loan to return more than he borrowed. For example, one who lends an almost full bottle of oil or grape juice asks the borrower to return a full bottle. Even if the lender didn't stipulate this, the borrower may not return more than what he borrowed.

Another form of ribbis is when one borrows an item and then returns the same item, which in the interim has risen in value. He therefore has given his lender more than he received; hence the ribbis. An example of this is if one borrowed a box of leftover matzos after Pesach and promises to return it before the coming Pesach, when he receives his own fresh batch of matzos. The value of a box of hand matzah after Pesach is far less than its value before Pesach.

Based on this, Chazal instituted a new prohibition in ribbis, that not only may one not make such a return, but one is forbidden to loan goods that may rise in price.

The reason is, as mentioned, that Chazal were concerned that perhaps the price of the item will rise and the borrower will repay more value than he borrowed.

At first glance this halacha would seem to preclude most lending, as almost everything eventually rises in price. As we will discuss, there are several leniencies which cover many of our day-to-day loans.

The only thing that is definitely exempt is currency, i.e., money. The reason is that money does not rise or fall in value.

The local currency is actually the barometer with which we measure the prices and values of items. If prices go up, that shows us that the goods have risen in value, and the same is true of the converse. The currency, however, always stays the same. Therefore, there is no concern that the value will change.

This is true regarding only local currency. However, foreign currency can be measured against the local currency and its value is therefore subject to change. In the coming weeks we will discuss this problem along with some solutions.



## The Chasam Sofer

Rabbi Dov Loketch – Rabbi of Agudas Yisrael Mogen Avraham, Detroit

### Chadash Asur min HaTorah

The Chasam Sofer is famous for the approach of chadash asur min haTorah, disapproving of even seemingly slight, benign changes to the traditional way of doing things. The expression refers to the prohibition of *Chadash* on partaking of the new grain that grows in the early spring. The Chasam Sofer borrowed this halachic phrase to express his stance against making even minor modifications to the way things are done in shul and in religious life generally.

This principle was formulated in response to the Western European Reform movement, which was making significant inroads in Hungary at the time. Then, unlike the Reform movement today, which openly rejects the authority of halacha, the movement called for relatively minor changes in traditional practice, such as having a non-Jew play an organ in shul on Shabbos. This practice actually had origins in tradition – it was common in many European Jewish communities for weddings to be performed right before Shabbos, with the wedding celebrations held

in the form of an elaborate Friday night meal at which non-Jews were hired to play music. It was not, seemingly, much of a change to have non-Jews playing music in shul as well, but the Chasam Sofer nevertheless strongly opposed this innovation. He argued that at a seuda there is an obligation of simcha, and so music is appropriate, but the environment in shul must be characterized by reverence and solemnity, and thus music has no place.

Another example was reciting prayers in the vernacular instead of lashon hakodesh, which the Mishna (Sota 7:1) explicitly allows. The Chasam Sofer contended that while halacha permits davening in the vernacular for private individuals who are incapable of davening in lashon hakodesh, it does not allow davening in the vernacular in shul as standard practice.

Nevertheless, the Chasam Sofer did not oppose all changes to religious life. His firm position was directed specifically toward the innovations championed by the Reform movement, which aimed at fundamentally transforming Jewish life.





## BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY

He understood that the leaders and proponents of the new movement were not going to stop with these innovations, but rather sought to enlist the Jewish world in a steady process of assimilation. And so, he insisted on strictly maintaining all traditional norms, refusing to allow tampering with customs to even the slightest extent if that would accommodate the Reformers' assimilationist agenda.

When it came to other matters, however, the Chasam Sofer was not at all an extreme opponent of innovation. A scholar named Rabbi Ephraim Moshe Pinner set out to produce a German translation of the Talmud – a project which was considered radical at the time – and the Chasam Sofer initially supported the endeavor. He later retracted his approval only because he thought that certain sections of the Talmud should not be made accessible to the non-Jewish world, as they could be misunderstood in ways that might lead to hostility toward the Jews.

But in principle the Chasam Sofer wholeheartedly embraced this innovative, groundbreaking project teach all his children languages and general studies. Several of his talmidim left the yeshiva and enrolled in academic institutions, and he remained closely in touch with them. He was not radically

anti-modern, as people might assume given his stance. This approach was directed specifically at the changes introduced by the Reform movement, which he realized was seeking to gradually abandon Jewish tradition entirely.

### **Yishuv Eretz Yisrael**

The Chasam Sofer was a fervent proponent of settling and developing Eretz Yisrael, which he emphasized numerous times in his writings. In fact, a number of sefarim have been written on the subject of his enthusiastic support of the resettlement of Eretz Yisrael, culling fascinating passages from his works where he speaks of the great mitzva of living in and developing the land.

The Chasam Sofer explains that in galus, halacha follows the view that it is preferable to devote oneself to Torah, as there is no mitzva to help the economies of other nations. But in Eretz Yisrael, working the land and in other professions is included in the mitzva of yishuv Eretz Yisrael.

Elsewhere, he expresses his strong opposition to those who move to Eretz Yisrael in a state of poverty, relying on charity. He argues that the mitzva of yishuv Eretz Yisrael is to help build the economy of the land, and moving there while indigent has the opposite effect.





## Controlling Your Anxiety

Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

Relationships Coach and author of *The Moderately Anxious Everybody*

Confronting the things we're afraid of can help us develop the resilience we need to cope with them. When we see that the fears in our life we thought were permanent and powerful can be shifted, our anxiety is reduced.

When we're anxious, we set things up so we minimize our interaction with anxiety. If we're scared of the dark, we put on the light. If we're scared of the outside, we stay inside, and if we're scared of people, we stay alone. Our anxiety doesn't improve; it just doesn't get triggered. And we keep preventing ourselves from facing our anxiety triggers until the point where we're so far removed from them that we remain convinced we can't cope with them. In our ivory towers, we never have the chance to discover our resilience. The power that our anxiety has to keep us frozen becomes more deeply entrenched.

But there is an alternative. If you're scared of the very concept of change, then you're allowing an anxious and meaning-reduced existence to be your destiny.

If you face the fear of change (which isn't any worse than the pain of

anxiety you're already living with) and you make even one small improvement in your life, you've scored one point for meaning and one point against anxiety. Hiding from the things in our life that aren't working and are holding us back, means they assume the monstrous power of our imagination.

**Don't let your anxiety convince you that change is a bad thing.**

By turning to confront them, we see them for what they are. They're more likely to take on real-life dimensions, to present as actual and manageable. Once you've found the courage to activate a change, your life as it is will be as improved as the change you implemented, and your terrible fear of change will be reduced by the fact that you faced it.

Don't let your anxiety convince you that change is a bad thing. Choose something that the healthy part of you buried underneath the anxiety is timidly expressing excitement over. (It's not actually timid; it's just



## EDUCATION, RELATIONSHIPS, PARENTING



trying to avoid the wrath of your anxious persona.) Choose something manageable. Choose something enjoyable. When we enjoy the experience of our habit changes, they last. Changes that make us feel miserable are the wrong changes to be focusing on. They're neither long-lasting nor the correct choice. Ask Hashem to help you find the clarity to identify the change that will make your life happier and more meaningful.

If the very notion of change is met with resistance (by your anxiety, that is, not by your inner self, which probably wants the change), then ask Hashem to help you find the courage to get you going. Tell your anxiety not to worry. You won't be brave for long. It's just a quick recess from its tyranny. Nothing permanent. All good.

Or better yet, get angry at your anxiety for making your life miserable. Let it know that today, for once, you will run things your way, not its way. You're going to gift yourself by making one improvement in your life.

Do what works for you. And you'll find that once you've successfully faced down one aspect of your life that needs to be changed, you'll find strength in knowing you have more power over your fears than your fears have over you. And you'll likely

be motivated to begin a journey of making more changes that improve the current state of your life.

### Action Steps

- Understand that change is the ingredient necessary to take the theory and make it practice.

- If you're excited about making changes, slow yourself down and pick just one change to implement. For now, at least.

- If you're terrified of making changes, pep yourself up and pick just one change to implement. For now, at least.

- Where you feel absolutely powerless, don't try to win a battle. The experience of admission of powerlessness has its place in life, too.

- Choose something that you know deep down you will succeed in and bring you the most happiness.

- Change starts with one step. The difference between 1 step and 10 steps is 9 steps. But the difference between no steps and 1 step is worlds apart.

- Choose a prize for yourself that you're excited about and award it once you've taken your first step. It worked when you were a kid. It'll work now.

- Do it today.



### Praying in a Non-Jewish City

Josh and Tammy Kruger

#### The Story

The Green family arrived in Europe for their long awaited vacation. After picking up their luggage they loaded everything into their rented car and began their drive to their hotel.

“We’re driving to a large city that has a big Jewish community” Mr. Green told his family. “We should make it there well before nightfall, in time to daven mincha with the local minyan.”

Unfortunately, despite having a map book and a GPS system, Mr. Green managed to get very lost on the way. As they entered a small town he sighed and said “Sorry, the sun is going to set within the next half hour and we’re still a long way from our destination. I think we should pull over here and daven mincha by ourselves”.

Mr. Green parked the car and everyone stepped out to pray. As they looked around, they noted that nearly all the surrounding buildings had crosses on their walls.

“Wow!” said their youngest daughter. “The people in this city sure like math! I didn’t know that

addition was so popular in Europe.”

Mrs. Green held back a laugh and explained the religious significance of the crosses .

“Are we allowed to daven in such a place?” asked their oldest son. “Maybe we should drive out of the town and daven on the highway.”?

“I don’t know” said Mr. Green. “When other drivers see people standing next to a parked car on the highway, they often check to make sure everything is alright. What if police or another driver get out and start talking to us while we’re in the middle of the amida? I’m worried that I won’t be able to concentrate properly.”

“I have an idea” said their son. “I can send a message to Rabbi Levy! He loves when his students send him she’elos. It’s lunch time now in our school, so he should be available immediately to send us an answer”.

He typed in “Good morning, Rabbi, we are in Europe and wanted to know if it’s better to daven by the roadside where we may be interrupted by people passing by, or in a city with crosses on the walls of the buildings?”



## PARASHA HALACHA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

### Discussion

**Q:** What is the connection between our story and the parsha?

**A:** During makas Barad, Pharaoh asked Moshe to pray to Hashem to stop the plague. Moshe answered that he would leave the city and then pray to Hashem. According to Rashi, the reason Moshe left the city was because it was full of avodah zarah (Shemot 9:29).

**Q:** What do you think is a better option for the Green family and why?

**A:** According to Rabbi Yechiel Stern it is preferable to say your tefilla on the roadside instead of davening in a city or hotel that is full of non-Jewish religious articles out of concern for possible idolatry. However, if one believes that there is a good chance that they will be distracted or stopped by other people who are passing along the same road, then it is actually preferable to stay in the city and simply pray there instead (R Stern, Chamishah Chumshei Torah im Medresh Halacha, Shemot 9:29).

**Q:** If a person has to daven in a place where their is a cross present, what should they do?

**A:** If it's possible, it's best to cover the cross (Kaf Hachaim, 113:27). This solution will work when the location is in a private room but is obviously impossible in a public building. In that case, it best to pray in the corner of the room, where they will not be facing directly towards the cross (Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chaim 94:10).

### Back to the story

Within seconds of sending their text message, they received a reply from Rabbi Levy. They returned to their car and drove out of the city. "Okay, kids," said their father, as he turned onto a quiet small road that came up on their right side. "Let's daven here. It is really quite empty and very few cars come this way. It would be very unusual for anyone to interrupt us".

One of the girls whispered to the other children, "When you're davening, don't forget to put in an extra prayer to ask Hashem to please help Dad find his way to the hotel already! The map and GPS aren't helping him, so by now I'm pretty sure that only G-d will be able to"...

The family did find their way to the hotel and enjoyed the rest of their vacation.