**Parshas Va’eira - כבד לב פרעה**

**News Analysis**

Did you hear about the attack in Haifa this week? “Oy vey!” you’re thinking, “not another terrorist attack!” No, not quite. The report stated that a man walking on a road in Haifa, was chased and attacked by a goat, sustaining light injuries and requiring transport to the hospital. How did this make it into the news? We dread every news report lately. Stabbings, shootings, bombings and all manner of mayhem and catastrophe - here, in Eretz Yisroel and in every corner of the globe, is vying for newsprint space and airtime. A goat attack? It almost sounds like comic relief. Yet, based on the Mishna in Ta’anis, the Rabbonim of Haifa would have considered declaring a communal fast day, after such an incident. An attack by a domesticated, usually gentle and harmless goat, is shocking and out of the ordinary. It is yet another manifestation of the מדת הדין we are in the throes of.

The escalation of מדת הדין in recent times is foremost in everyone’s mind. What do we make of it? What do we make of the Ten Makkos, for that matter? What is the message of the forces of nature seemingly conspiring to bring the mightiest nation of its time, to its knees? The מכהof ערובunleashed every species of animal on the hapless Mitzrim. Even the gentle, domesticated animals viciously lashed out, much like to the poor fellow in Haifa. Why is this happening? Because the Eibishter directed it to happen. That’s why.

Each of the Makkos had a bottom line – בזאת תדע כי אני ה', למען תדע כי אין כה' אלוקינו, למען תדע כי אני ה' בקרב הארץ, and so on. Such upheaval is brought on individuals, communities, nations and the world, when recognition, reliance and faith in Hashem’s control of all events is forgotten or denied. He who causes things to go out of control, is He who is the Master Controller of the normal course of events. We and the entire world are undergoing these Makkos, ר"ל. This is all Hashem’s decree, to make it clear that we cannot be the masters of our fate. Every time we rely on our smarts and might, on yet another technological advance, or a sure-fire, get-rich-quick scheme, or a new “Kuntz” to make our lives easier, quicker and more “Geshmock”, we increase the risk of taking the Eibishter out of the picture.

Speaking of animal stories, the YalkutShimoni relates the whimsical tale of a boat arriving at the port bearing the lion, the fox and other animals. The donkey-toll collector demands payment of the toll fee. The fox exclaims, “Such Arrogance! We are traveling with the King of all animals, and you are asking for the toll? The money goes to the king anyway!” The stubborn donkey sticks to his guns. “I will take payment from the king and deposit it in his coffers.” The enraged lion took hold of the foolish donkey and tore him to pieces. He then instructed the fox to lay out all the parts in their appropriate order. While he was doing his work, the fox filched the donkey’s heart to munch on. The lion comes to survey the work and inquires of the whereabouts of the donkey’s heart. “Oh, there was no heart”, says the sly fox. “Obviously, anyone who could foolishly demand payment from the king, has no heart to have understanding with.” Pharaoh, says the Yalkut, was that donkey. כבד לב פרעה – Pharaoh’s heart was useless. He didn’t get the message that he is dealing with מלך מלכי המלכים הקב"ה.

We all laugh at foolish Pharaoh-in-Pajamas-in-the-Middle-of-the-Night, who stubbornly refused to get the message, until his entire empire was in ruins. Look around you right now and see that same brand of stubbornness. Pharaoh, it seems, can’t claim exclusive rights to “De Nile”. Governments, with all their power, equipment and strategic capabilities, are being stymied in their efforts to respond to a floodtide of threats, disasters and upheaval. What does it all mean? The time of the revelation of Malchus Hashem is at hand. Anyone who is simply sitting on the sidelines, as if all this is the cyclical ebb and flow of world events and the ups and downs of life, is not getting this message. If things seem to be going awry and nothing is going your way, it’s a memo from On High. We are being called upon to strengthen our connection with Hashem, with more and stronger Tefilla, increased effort in Torah and greater MesirasNefesh for Tzedakah and Chesed. ויראנו נפלאות כימי צאתנו מארץ מצרים.

Have a wonderful, peaceful Shabbos and a YeshuadikehChodesh, yk

**L’RavchaD’Milsa Parshas Va’aira**

**Thursday, Parshas Vaeira -26 Teves**

***TekufasTeves*** *- The Halachic Winter Solstice occured at 11:09 A.M. EST. Ask any “EuropeashehYidineh” and she’ll warn you “azmir tur nishttrinkenvasserven der Tekifehfalt!” - it’s forbidden to drink water as the Tekufah occurs. Some say it’s an old wive’s tale but the Beis Yosef does give Eitzos to avoid the problem. Several reasons are advanced by Avudraham for this. Some say it is because the Malochim who protect the water change guard at the tekufah and leave it unwatched for a short time. Others say that the constellation of Cancer fights with Libra and drops blood into the water. Another authority accounts for the drops of blood in the water at Tekufas Nisan by pointing out that the waters in Mitzrayim turned to blood at that particular moment. At Tekufas Tammuz, Moshe hit the rock and caused drops of blood to flow from it. At TekufasTishrei the knife which AvrohomAvinu held to shecht Yitzchok dropped blood. At TekufasTeves, Yiftach sacrificed his daughter.*

**Rabbi ShlomoBrevda, zt”l, (1931-2013)** Rabbi Brevda authored numerous Seforim and traveled to many parts of the world delivering mussar and words of encouragement to people of all ages. He was well known for his research of the Vilna Gaon, publishing many of his writings. RavBrevda was born in Crown Heights, Brooklyn in 1931. His father, Rabbi Moshe Yitzchak Brevda, had brought his family to the United States from Baranovich, Poland shortly before Shlomo’s birth. Growing up as an average American boy, he attended Yeshiva University’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) with plans to pursue a college education. However, he was advised by RIETS’s Rabbi Yeruchim Gorelik to pursue his learning elsewhere; thus, he joined the Mir Yeshiva that came to New York following its miraculous escape from the Holocaust. At Mir, RavBrevda became a disciple of Rabbi ChatzkelLevenstein, the yeshiva’s mashgiach. Rabbi Brevda was a student of some of the greatest leaders of his generation. After learning in Mir, he attended Beth MedrashGovoha in Lakewood, N. J. under the tutelage of Rabbi Aharon Kotler. In the 1950s, in EretzYisrael, he became a ben bayis by the Brisker Rav, Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik. In fact, the Brisker Rav founded his illustrious yeshiva upon learning that Rabbi Brevda did not have a place to learn. Additionally, RavBrevda often traveled to BneiBrak to visit the ChazonIsh, who expressed bafflement that an American young man born and raised in the lap of luxury would travel to EretzYisrael to study Torah. Toward the end of his life, he traveled to many different yeshivos and kollelim and was considered by many as their personal mashgiach. His inspiration to others was credited for making many ba’aleiteshuvah.

**Erev Shabbos Parshas Vaeira-27 Teves**

**Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch**, Frankfurt am Main, Germany (1808-1888). His father, Rav Raphael Aryeh (1777-1857), who changed the family name to Hirsch, was the son of Rav Menachem Mendel Frankfurter of Altuna (1742-1823). Rav Menachem Mendel was a talmid of RavYonasanEibeshitz and was the Rav of three communities of Altuna, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck (“AHU”). At the age of 18, RavShamshon Raphael went to Mannheim to learn at the yeshiva of Rav Yaakov Ettlinger, author of AruchLa’ner. Rav Hirsch received smicha from RavEttlinger after learning there for a year. Thereafter, he attended the University of Bonn. That education would serve him well later in life as he combated the forces of Reform with eloquence. When he was 21, he was appointed Chief Rabbi of the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg. There, he married Chana Judel. He also authored IggrosHatzafon (The 19th Letters), under the pen name Ben Uziel. One year later, he published Chorev. In 1847, he became Chief Rabbi of Moravia, a region of 50,000 Jews in 52 communities, and which is now the Czech Republic. In 1851, he became the Rav of Frankfurt am Main, which he transformed into a Torah bastion. His best known works are the classic six-volume Commentary on Chumash.

**RavPinchasHirschprung, Chief Rabbi of Montreal** (1915-1998). At the age 15, he published a Torah journal, Ohel Torah, along with his friend, RavYeshaya Yosef Margolin, in Galicia. He then joined Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, learning under Rav Meir Shapiro. At the outbreak of War World II, RavPinchas fled to Vilna, which was still neutral territory. In 1942, he acquired a visa to travel to Canada with a group of students from Mir and Lubavitch. When he arrived in Montreal, he was offered the position of RavKehillasAdasYisrael. When Yeshiva MerkazHatorah was established, RavPinchas was made its Rosh Yeshiva. Eventually, he was RavHa’Ir of Montreal.

**Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Vaeira**-28 Teves

**Rav Shmuel Berenbaum, Rosh Yeshiva of Mir** in Brooklyn (1921-2008). Born in the small Polish-Lithuanian town of Kinishen, Reb Shmuel began his formal learning at Yeshiva Ohel Torah of Baranovitch in 1935 under the leadership of RavElchononWasserma. During his years in the Mirrer Yeshiva, he became very close with the famed Mashgiach of the Mir, RavYechezkelLevenstein. Rav Shmuel escaped from Europe together with the Mirrer Yeshiva and spent six years with the yeshiva in exile in Shanghai. He arrived in the United States with the yeshiva led by the mashgiach, RavChatzkel, in 1947, and continued to learn in the yeshiva. In the early 1950s, RavAvrohomKalmanowitz zt”l, who had sustained and saved the yeshiva in Shanghai and rebuilt it in America , took Rav Shmuel as a son-in-law. After his marriage, Rav Shmuel joined the kollel of the Mirrer Yeshiva. In 1964, with the passing of RavKalmanowitz, RavShraga Moshe Kalmanowitz, oldest son of RavAvrohom, together with Rav Shmuel, became roshei yeshiva of the Mirrer Yeshiva.

Sunday, Parshas **Bo** -29 Teves-Yom Kippur Katan

**The Mahari”l, RavYehoshuaLeibDiskin** (1818-1898), the Rav of Brisk, Yerushalayim leader, son of Rav Binyamin Diskin, rav of Volkovisk. He was born in Horodno. Reb YehoshuaLeib was engaged before his bar mitzva and at the age of fourteen he married the daughter of HaRavBrode and lived with his father-in-law in Wolkowitz. He became rov in various cities such as Lomza, Mezritch, Kovno, Shklov, and finally in Brisk. Moved to EretzYisrael after Yom Kippur in 1876. In the 1880s, he was offered the position of [Chief Rabbi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Rabbi) of [New York](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York), which he declined. RavYehoshuaLeib’ssecond wife, Sarah, was known as the "Brisker Rebbetzin." She came from a prestigious family descended from Rabbi [Yechezkel Landau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yechezkel_Landau) (the *Nodah bi-Yehudah*) and [Joshua Zeitlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_Zeitlin). She brought 40,000 [rubles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_ruble) into their marriage - a huge sum in those days - with which the couple established the [Diskin Orphanage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diskin_Orphanage) in Jerusalem in 1880.

**ChachamHaRav Yitzchak Kaduri** (1901-2006). Born to toRabZeev Diva in Baghdad. Upon his second visit to EretzYisrael in 1923, he changed his last name from Diva to Kadouri and fixed his place of study at YeshivatPorat Yosef in the Old City. He studied Kabbalah under the tutelage of Rabbi Ephraim Cohen and Rabbi Salman Eliyahu (father of former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu). After marrying his first wife, Sarah, HaRavKadouri lived in ShechunatHabucharim, one of Jerusalem's first neighborhoods built outside the Old City walls. He would stay at the yeshiva all week, coming home shortly before Shabbos. Following the petira of Rav Ephraim Hakohen, head of Jerusalem's mekubalim, toward the end of 1949, RavKadouri was selected to head the group. He found a new institution called YeshivatNachalat Yitzchak. Graced with a phenomenal memory, he was said to have known the entire Babylonian Talmud by heart. His closer students say that the blessing of the Ben Ish Chai and that of the LubavitcherRebbe - both of whom blessed him that he might live to see the Final Redeemer - came true. The students say that Rabbi Kaduri told them he met the Messiah on Cheshvan 9, 5764 (Nov. 4, 2003). He reportedly said that the Messiah is not promoting himself, and that a study of his [Rabbi Kaduri's] words in recent months would provide hints of his identity.

**Monday, Parshas Bo-Rosh ChodeshShvat**

*Rain on Rosh ChodeshShvat is brought down to be a SimanBrocho.*

**ShaulHaMelech** and his sons died in battle in Gilboa

**First Yartzteit: Maran HagaonRav Chaim Epstein zt”l, rosh yeshiva of Yeshiva ZichronMeilich** in Brooklyn, NY. He was 79.

One of the eineiha’eidah and gedolei Torah of the Diaspora, Rav Epstein was the morehderech for tens of thousands of bnei Torah across the globe. He was one of the most prominent talmidim of RavAharon Kotler zt”l and carried on his rebbi’s mesorah with great fortitude throughout his life.

Rav Epstein possessed a phenomenal range of yedioshaTorah, but talmidim attest that his humility hid so much of his Torah greatness. He carried himself and spoke with simplicity, not allowing others a complete glimpse of his mastery of Torah. Close talmidim relate the unbelievable breadth of knowledge that Rav Epstein possessed.

Thousands benefited from Rav Epstein’s clarity of thought and unadulterated daas Torah. They sought him out for advice and guidance in all areas, recognizing his lucid manner of thinking and his ability to break down issue after issue with the brilliance of a manhigbaTorah and without any agenda whatsoever. His purity of thought and clarity of vision were unparalleled.

Gedolim themselves turned to Rav Epstein for his advice and daas Torah. Maran HagaonRav Shmuel Kamenetsky shlit”a, rosh yeshiva of Yeshiva Philadelphia, remarked not long ago that he would speak to Rav Epstein - who was a decade younger than him - for his thoughts and Torah outlook on various issues.

The void that has been left with Rav Epstein’s passing is difficult to quantify. He quietly and largely behind the scenes guided and directed so many aspects of the American Torah world, from yeshivos, to contemporary chinuch, to klal matters. On an individual level, he guided thousands of yechidim and families. Klal Yisroel has been left bereft, like children who have lost a loving father.

At Yeshiva ZichronMeilech, located at the corner of Ditmas Avenue and Dahill Road in Brooklyn, NY, Rav Epstein delivered riveting shiurim, known for their depth and complexity, as well as inspiring and pointed shmuessen, directing his talmidim with love and care. For over four decades, Rav Epstein served as rosh yeshiva, and he took a personal interest in his many talmidim and cherished the kesher he maintained with them, a relationship that continued for years after they left the yeshiva.

Rav Epstein’s parents were Rav Yosef Dovid and Rebbetzin Shaina Itta Epstein zt”l. Rav Yosef Dovid was a respected member of the Mir Yeshiva in Europe, where he maintained an especially close relationship with the rosh yeshiva, Rav Eliezer Yehuda Finkel zt”l, and was the mazkir, or secretary, of the yeshiva. Rav Yosef Dovid was an outstanding talmidchochom and mechaberseforim, and was highly regarded by the other talmideichachomim of the Mir. The Epstein family spent the war years with the Mir Yeshiva in Shanghai and ultimately made their way to American shores, residing in Williamsburg.

Rav Epstein’s wife, who passed away just over four years ago on 6 Cheshvan 5771, was Rebbetzin Esther Musha Epstein a”h. Rebbetzin Epstein was born in America in 1943 to her parents, RavDovid and RebbetzinBasya Bender. Rav Bender was a master mechanech and a menahel in Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, while Rebbetzin Bender was one of the pioneers of the American Bais Yaakov movement and a surrogate mother to generations of students.

Rav Epstein and the Rebbetzin got married in 1961 and then moved to Lakewood, NJ, to join the BaisMedrashGovohakollel, then in its early years, under RavAharon Kotler. At the time, the Rebbetzin sacrificed greatly to enable Rav Epstein to grow in Torah and become a gadolbaTorah. The move to Lakewood spelled loneliness, hardship, sacrifice and perhaps even scorn. It was far from a popular move and people saw no future in it. But the rosh yeshiva and the rebbetzin did it with happiness and grace, recognizing the great opportunity that existed. The rest is history.

The Epsteins later moved to Boro Park, Brooklyn, where Rav Epstein became known as a marbitz Torahand assumed the position of roshyeshivah of Yeshiva ZichronMeilich. The warm, friendly and happy atmosphere of the unadorned and modest Epstein home on 46th Street was a place of comfort and chizukfor so many thanks to the greatness and sensitivity of the rosh yeshivaand his rebbetzin.

Over the years, people flocked to Rav Epstein, confided in him, and looked to him for moral and physical support. He was very smart and intuitive, with a shrewd understanding of human nature. He counseled many people in shalom bayis and other personal issues. He had no airs about him and everyone felt comfortable talking to him, thus enabling him to reach all types and relate to people on any level. To be able to relate to people of all levels while possessing such remarkable greatness in Torah was just one aspect of the gadlusof the rosh yeshiva.

In June of 2011, Rav Epstein founded Keren EzerL’Nefesh-Chasdei Esther Musha in memory of Rebbetzin Epstein a”h. The mission of the Keren is to provide financial assistance to families of yeshiva and Bais Yaakov students who require mental health services. Working together with school faculty, Keren EzerL’Nefesh enables mechanchimand mechanchosto make proper mental health care arrangements for those suffering from these challenges and begin the process of creating hope and instilling growth in the lives of their talmidim. The Keren has had an amazing impact and has helped so many people, all thanks to the rosh yeshivaand his recognition for the need of such an organization.

**Tuesday, Parshas Bo-2 Shvat**

**“The Rebbe R’ Zisha”** of Anipoli (1800) famed for his extreme piety (he once fasted 3 days after saying Hamotzi “only” with the thought that he was hungry) and great dedication to PidyonShivuyim.

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