



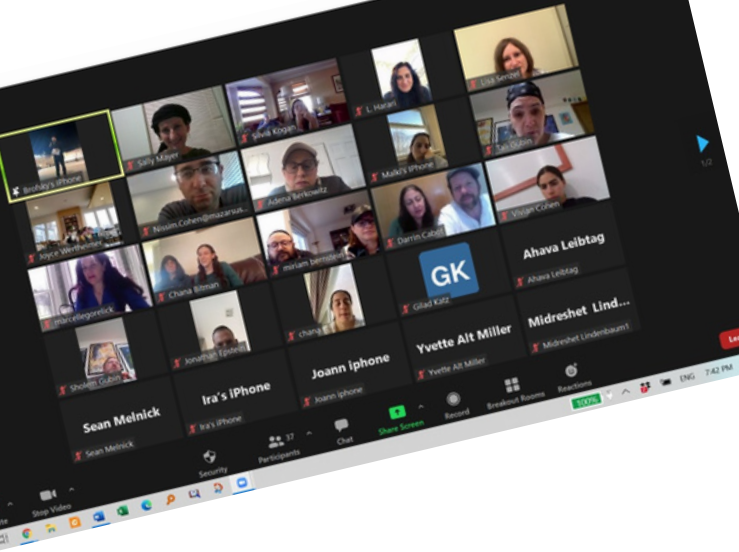
## Parshat Va'era, December 31, 2021

### **The Week in Review**

by Ada Hammer  
Strasbourg, France  
Ecole Aquiba

This week was full of exciting activities. We ended last week with a Shabbat all together at the midrasha with Rabbanit Davina, where we had the chance to listen to her shiur and discuss questions of belief. During Shabbat, Rebecca also gave a shiur and we had the opportunity to celebrate her Aliya this Monday!!! Mazal Tov!

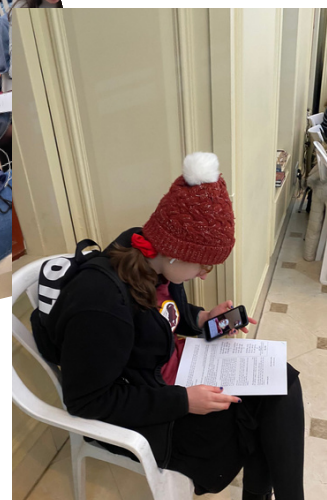
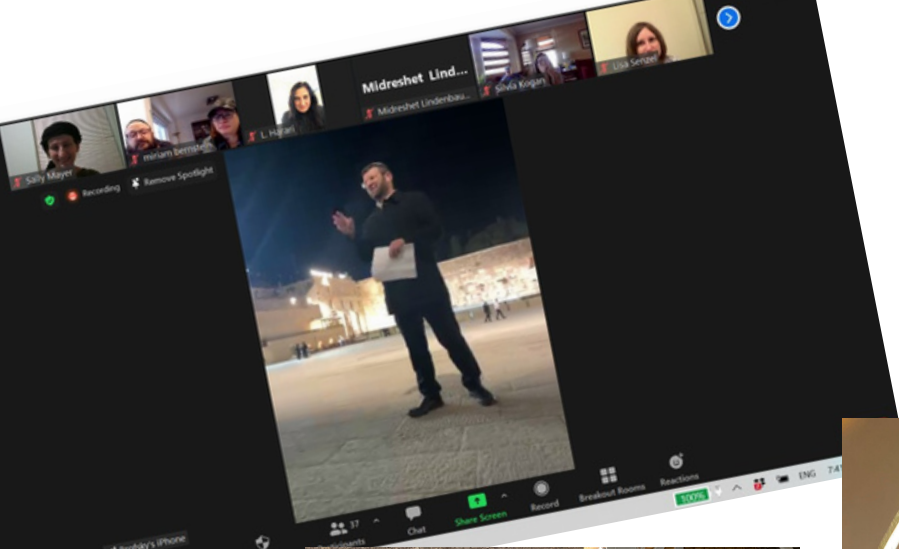
On Sunday night, we all went to the kotel and got to visit the shul behind the kotel and the tunnels! Our parents were also able to be part of the tour on Zoom followed by some learning with them. This Tuesday, the Matmidot had the chance to meet Ilana Kurshan, author of *If All the Seas Were Ink*, who talked about how learning Daf Yomi accompanied her on her life journey and challenged us to find personal meaning in every text we learn. We ended the week with mishmar on the topic of mikvah with Dr. Naomi Marmon Grumet of the Eden Center. The week went by very fast with all of these fun moments, including many interesting ideas in our classes.



# Parent-Daughter Tour of the Old City











# Teacher Feature

Tikva Epstein  
interviews  
Rabbi David Brofsky



## Tell us a little bit about you and your family:

My wife, Mali (Adler) Brofsky, studied in Midreshet Lindenbaum in 1990 (with Rabbanit Sally) and was later a madricha, Beruria Scholar and teacher in ML. She is currently a Tanach and Machshava teacher, and a clinical social worker. We have four children, BH, ages 14, 17, 22 and 24, who spent their childhood hiking with Midreshet Lindenbaum in Eilat and elsewhere!

## What is your favorite thing to learn?

My interests have shifted over the years, but Gemara, Halacha, and intellectual Jewish History are still most interesting to me. I try to find time on Shabbatot to read and expand my horizons.

## What, in your opinion, makes Midreshet Lindenbaum special?

I think ML is unique in that we foster mature relationships with our students rooted in mutual respect while educating towards living a meaningful life rooted in Torah and yirat shamayim. Someone recently told me a beautiful idea - I couldn't agree with it more. Just as HaKadosh Baruch Hu gave us the Torah because He loves us, and not because he loves the Torah, so too teachers should teach Torah because of their commitment to their students, and not just because they love the Torah.

## What is your favorite memory from yeshiva?

I had the unforgettable experience of learning from great talmidei chachamim and ovdei Hashem, especially R. Aharon Lichtenstein and R. Yehuda Amital. I constantly feel their presence.

## What is a hobby of yours?

I don't think I have any hobbies. However, in recent years, my free time has been filled with "giyur"- helping those who wish to formally join the Jewish people - in Israel and abroad. It is a constant source of fulfillment and inspiration.



# Parsha with Darkaynu!



# Mazal Tov Rebecca on your aliyah!





**Matmidot lunch with Ilana Kurshan, author of *If All the Seas Were Ink*, about her journey through learning Daf Yomi**





# D'var Torah from our Students



Elisheva Zemel  
New Rochelle, NY  
Ma'ayanot

After Hashem's promise to Moshe at the end of Parshat Shemot that Pharaoh will ultimately chase the Jews out of Egypt, Parshat Va'era picks up with Hashem's follow-through; the first seven plagues. Pharaoh's reaction to the plagues, forced stubbornness and empty promises, brings about the obvious age-old question: How can we live in a world where our actions merit reward and punishment when Hashem will simply snatch our free will from us, making our decisions subject to a predestined, meaningless world?

Both Rashi and Rambam suggest that because Pharaoh acted poorly and refused to let the Jews leave the land in the first place, in the latter half of the plagues, Hashem punishes him by forcing Pharaoh to refuse even further. This both prevents him from doing teshuva or having the plagues stopped early. This implies that, if someone were to act so wickedly, their choices will then be limited by God. However, despite resolving the issue in the text, Rashi and Rambam do not solve our discomfort at the possibility that free will can possibly be confiscated.

A commentator that takes the completely opposite approach, assuring his readers that we always have free will, is Sforno. Sforno claims that in this specific instance, hardening Pharaoh's heart is the only way for Hashem to *ensure* Pharaoh's free will. This is due to the fact that the plagues weakened Pharaoh's resolve and made him want to give into Moshe's demands, while in actuality, Pharaoh never would have agreed to this in any other circumstance. Hardening Pharaoh's heart *enhances* his free will by letting him decide which outcome he truly wants and not allowing him to get blinded by fear, so, if Pharaoh did decide to make the right decision, it would be on his own terms.

Though this clears up the problem of free will, this answer in no way suffices when pondering another issue: If giving free will means the harm of thousands, why does Hashem cause this to happen? If hardening the heart of Pharaoh means more misery for both the Egyptians and Hebrews, why does Hashem do so in the first place? Couldn't Hashem just simply allow the fear of the plagues to influence Pharaoh's decision to save the many and ignore the fact that it was not Pharaoh's true desire?



While grappling with the extraordinary losses from the Holocaust, Eliezer Berkovits in his book, *Faith After The Holocaust*, systematically addresses the question of why catastrophic events can happen in the world. He claims that the Holocaust in no way was a Divine punishment due to past sins committed by European Jewry, that this is clearly a misconception. “[I]f,” he says, “we hold onto our faith in a personal God, such absolute injustice cannot be a mere mishap in the divine scheme of things. Somehow there must be room for it in the scheme, in which case the ultimate responsibility for this ultimate evil must be God’s...” However, “God’s self-hiding is an attribute of divine nature. Such is God... God cannot as a rule intervene whenever man’s use of freedom displeases Him. It is true, if He did so the perpetration of evil would be rendered impossible, but so would the possibility for good disappear... If there is to be man, he must be allowed to make his choices in freedom.”

God did not cause the Holocaust, He *allowed* it to happen, as He allows us to make our own decisions daily. It is up to us to decide to use this ability for good and not evil. This might be disheartening to some, as it widens the distance between us and God, but, to be sure, this opinion does not conclude that God has completely hidden from the world. As Professor Moshe Kaveh, president and head of the department of physics in Bar Ilan University, claims, the world as described in Parshat Bereishit as “astonishingly empty,” with darkness “upon the face of the deep,” appears stochastic and disorderly; it lacks any evidence to suggest that a greater being is managing it. But, through all the confusion and chaos, “the spirit of God hovers.” If one were to look at single events in their lives, the world might seem random and incomprehensible, but we must take a step back to look at the full picture. Once we do that, all the injustices we feel we have endured can be understood as a little puzzle piece that plays into each of our purposeful stories.

Sometimes things do not make sense, but we must never forget that, though we might not understand or even like a situation, we have the ability to choose how we will respond, whether that be for good or for bad. We have the power to bring beauty to the world. And, if one were to ever feel like Hashem does not truly see them, that all their efforts are in vain, that nothing matters, one must never forget that the “spirit of God hovers,” is there for us even when we face the unimaginable.



Shabbat Shalom!

