

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
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**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

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**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

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Yad Avraham Institute  
New York  
January 9, 2014

B"H

## Beshalach

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

### ***1. G'd's Uncontestable Demonstration of Love for the Jewish People***

The Torah states when the Jewish people left Egypt, **“Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light...”** The Midrash states, “Whatever measure that one measures out to others, G'd measures out to him (based on the principle of measure for measure). The Torah tells us that after Avraham hosted the angels he escorted them out. As it states, **‘...Avraham walked with them to escort them.’** Because Avraham escorted the angels, G'd escorted the Jewish people in the desert for forty years...” It is interesting to note that the Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that in the merit of Avraham's hospitality towards the angels, the Jewish people merited special gifts, which sustained them in the desert for forty years. Whatever aspect of the hospitality that Avraham performed himself for the angels, G'd provided for the Jewish people Himself in the desert. However, the hospitality that Avraham provided through an intermediary, G'd also provided in the desert for the Jewish people through an intermediary. Since Avraham provided the shade of his tree and the bread himself for the angels, G'd provided the Clouds of Glory and the Manna Himself. However, since Avraham provided the water for the angels through an intermediary, G'd provided the water in the desert through an intermediary. Moshe needed to strike the rock in order to bring forth water. (The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia however does not mention Avraham escorting the angels.)

The Midrash continues by citing a verse, “ ‘All Heaven and Earth I (G'd) fill...’ The world is filled with His Glory. If this is so, why does the Torah tell us that ‘He went before them?’ G'd went before the Jewish people in order to reveal to the nations of the world His love for them. The purpose of this revelation was so the nations of the world should accord them with the proper level of respect. However, not only did they not offer the proper respect to the Jewish people, the nations of the world murdered and victimized them in the most severe manner.

It is because of this mistreatment of the Jewish people the verse states, ‘At the end of time I will gather all of the nations and bring them to the valley of Yehoshafat. I will judge them there for My nation and portion Israel that they had dispersed among the nations.’ The verse does not say that G'd will judge the nations for being idolaters, murderers, or adulterers but rather because they victimized His Portion, Israel. Egypt will become desolate and Edom will be annihilated.” Thus, G'd escorted the Jewish people for forty years in the desert was to openly demonstrate His special love for the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us, that G'd brought upon Egypt ten plagues, which were all revealed miracles that were known to the entire world. For the sake of His people, G'd punished and decimated the most advanced and powerful nation in the world. As the Midrash states, “G'd says, ‘Although the nations of the world are deserving of punishment because they have violated My Word, I did not punish them until they mistreated you (the Jewish people).’ One would think that after such an open display of revealed miracles (the ten plagues), it would sufficiently reveal G'd's special love for the Jewish people. Why was it necessary for G'd to escort the Jewish people to demonstrate His love for them to the nations?

The Torah states before the onset of the plagues, **“V'yadaber Elokim el Moshe...Ani Hashem...- G'd spoke to Moshe... I am Hashem.”** “Elokim” is the appellation for G'd which connotes the Attribute of Justice, while the appellation “Hashem” connotes the Attribute of Mercy. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh in one of his interpretations of the verse explains that the Torah uses both appellations to indicate that through the plagues, the Attribute of Justice and Mercy were both simultaneously in effect. The Egyptians experienced the Attribute of Justice through the plagues, which brought suffering and devastation upon them, which they deserved for all the evil that they had perpetrated (besides the enslavement of the Jewish people). Simultaneously, the Jewish people were beneficiaries of these plagues because their masters and oppressors were being punished. In addition, by witnessing the Hand of G'd and seeing Divine Retribution being

delivered upon the evil, their belief in G'd was strengthened. Thus, the Jewish people were beneficiaries of the Attribute of Mercy. However, since the Attribute of Justice was simultaneously in effect to punish the Egyptians for their evil ways of the past, the display of G'd's special love to the Jewish people was not obvious. It was blurred because it could be perceived that He was punishing the Egyptians for not heeding His Word.

G'd therefore escorted the Jewish people for forty years in the desert to openly demonstrate His special love for them so that the nations of the world would accord them the respect that they deserve. Seeing G'd, Omnipotent One, escorting the Jewish people should have been sufficient for the nations of the world to appreciate their value to revere them. Unfortunately, rather than respecting and revering them, they behaved in a contrary manner, thus causing them to be even more liable to be destroyed at the end of time.

## **2. Yitzchak's Quantification of his Son Yaakov**

The Torah tells us that when the Jewish people found themselves caught between the Egyptian army and the Sea, they became frightened. The Torah states, **"The Children of Israel raised their eyes and behold!...They cried out to Hashem..."** Rashi cites the Midrash, "The Jewish people took hold of the craft of their Forefathers (which is prayer). As it states regarding Avraham, **'Avraham called out in the name of Hashem...'** Regarding Yitzchak, our Patriarch, the Torah states, **'Yitzchak went out to supplicate in the field...'** Regarding Yaakov our Patriarch the Torah states, **'He met the location...'** The term 'meeting' refers to 'prayer.' The verse in Yishaya states, 'Fear not you, worm Yaakov...' Why are the Jewish people compared to the worm? Although the cedar tree is mighty, when it is attacked by the worm it will be toppled by the penetration of its mouth. Although the mouth of the worm is soft and the cedar is hard, it is able to penetrate something that is hard (the cedar). Identically, the only power that the Jew has is through his mouth – the power of prayer (tefillah). The nations of the world are compared to the cedars. As it states, 'The Assyrians stood like the cedars of Lebanon. G'd will smash the cedars of Lebanon.' When the Jewish people are overwhelmed by the nations of the world, they repent and then cry out to G'd in prayer."

The Torah states regarding the war against the Midianites and the death of Bilaam, **"They killed the**

**kings of Midian...and Bilaam son of Beor they slew with the sword."** Rashi cites Chazal who ask, "Why does the Torah choose to reveal that Bilaam was killed with the sword? When Bilaam came against the Jewish people (to destroy them), he exchanged his craft for their craft. The Jew only advances through the articulation of his mouth through supplication. Bilaam came upon the Jewish people to curse them with his mouth. Therefore, when it was time to kill Bilaam, the sword was chosen to bring about his death, to indicate that the Jewish people had exchanged their craft (power of speech) with the craft of the nations of the world, which is the sword. Where do we find that the craft of the nations of the world is the sword? As it states regarding the blessing that Yitzchak had given to his son Esav, **'By your sword you shall live.'**"

The verse that is cited by the Midrash to establish that the sword is the craft of the nations of the world is drawn from the blessing that Yitzchak had given to his son Esav. Seemingly, this blessing is particular to Esav and the Edomites, his descendants, and not the nations of the world. What relevance does Yitzchak's blessing to Esav have to the characterization of the nations of the world? When Yitzchak said to Esav his son, **"By the sword you shall live,"** he was not blessing Esav with the statement but rather it was a characterization and quantification of Esav's essence, that his power lies in his physicality, as is so with all the nations of the world. When Yitzchak said to Esav "By the sword you shall live..." he was communicating to him, that he has no relevance to succeeding him as the Patriarch, because he has no relevance to spirituality. On the other hand, Yitzchak said when he blessed Yaakov, "The voice is the voice of Yaakov" to indicate that the essence of Yaakov is not his physicality but rather his spirituality- his relationship with G'd through supplication and the study of Torah. Each of Yitzchak's statements to his sons was a quantification of their essence.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin cites the verse from Eyov, "Man was born to toil..." The Gemara explains that the verse is referring to the "toiling with the mouth" and not physical toil. The Gemara concludes that "the toiling of the mouth" is not referring to ordinary speech but rather the verbalization of Torah.

The Jewish people at the Sea, when they were faced with danger, understood that their only solution was to take hold of the craft of their forefathers, which is prayer. Yaakov being the most special of the Patriarchs, achieved a level of spiritual perfection that he was worthy

to be quantified as the total spiritual person. He was thus given the name "Israel" by G'd because there is nothing in the physical or spiritual realm that he was not able to dominate. He lorded over man and the angel. The Jewish people, being the children of Israel, the decedents of Yaakov possess that same ability to succeed through their power of speech to overcome all difficulties and even if they seem to be impossible.

### ***3. Being Privy to G'd's Kingship, a Precursor to Sinai***

After the Sea had closed upon Pharaoh and the Egyptian army, Moshe and the Jewish people sang the song of the Sea. The splitting of the Sea was the greatest revelation of G'd's Presence. In the song that was sung by the Jewish people it states "**Behold, this is my G'd I will glorify Him!**" Rashi cites Chazal (Machilta) who state that G'd's Presence was so palpable that one could point to it with his finger. Chazal tell us that what the lowly maidservant at the Sea had seen, Yechezkel the prophet did not see. Although what the maidservant had witnessed was greater than what Yechezkel had experienced; nevertheless, the maidservant remained limited while Yechezkel's classification was "prophet." This is because the revelation that was seen by the maidservant was granted to her by G'd although she was not qualified to be privy to this degree of revelation. Thus, she did not have the capacity to process and internalize what she had seen. It is similar to one who has no expertise in evaluating diamonds being shown a diamond of exceptionally rare value. Although the person may understand that what he is looking at is precious and rare, he has no capacity to appreciate the basis for its preciousness. However, Yechezkel, through his own initiative developed to become the spiritual person who had the capacity to fully process and appreciate the level of G'dliness to which he was exposed. What did the maidservant at the Sea witness that was not seen by Yechezkel the prophet?

The Torah states that after the splitting of the Sea the Jewish people exclaimed, "**This is my G'd'....**" then they proclaimed, "**Hashem shall reign for all eternity.**" Evidently, they witnessed the all-encompassing Kingship and Majesty of G'd, which caused them to proclaim Him as the Eternal King. We recite in the blessing following the Shema in the evening service, "And His Kingship they accepted upon themselves willingly. Moshe and the Children of Israel raised their voices to You in song with abundant joy- and said unanimously 'Who is like You....Your children beheld Your Kingship as You split

the sea before Moshe: '**This is my G'd!**' they exclaimed. They then said, '**Hashem shall reign for all eternity.**'" The dimension of revelation that was witnessed by the lowly maidservant at the time of the splitting of the Sea was a presence of G'd's Kingship as the Supreme Being who Reigns over all existence. Regardless of the awesomeness of the miracles that the Jewish people witnessed in Egypt, they were not privy to His Kingship. It was because G'd had shown them His Kingship that they declared, "**This is my G'd'.... Hashem shall reign for all eternity.**" No prophet had ever witnessed (other than Moshe) the Kingship of G'd.

At Sinai, the Jewish people were privy to an even more advanced revelation of G'd. G'd opened for them all the heavens and the depths of the earth before the Jewish people to allow them to understand that nothing exists besides Himself. At Sinai, it was established on an absolute level that there is nothing else but G'd. The splitting of the Sea was a glimpse and a semblance of what they would witness at Sinai.

Chazal tell us, "There is no king without subjects." When G'd revealed His Kingship to the Jewish people they understood and appreciated His concern and love for them. Without the Jewish people, the King cannot fully reign because He would have no subjects. It is only the Jewish people who declare themselves as G'd's subjects through the recitation of the Shema twice daily, when they accept upon themselves the yoke of heaven. Vilna Gaon z'tl explains that there is a difference between a king and a ruler. A king understands and appreciates that his viability as king is dependent upon having dedicated subjects. Thus, he is concerned for the welfare of his subjects. In contrast, a ruler rules and dictates, regardless of the condition of the masses. Within the revelation of G'd's Kingship at the Sea, the Jewish people understood His love and concern for them. This understanding evoked the expression, "**This is my G'd and I will build Him a Sanctuary...**" The "Sanctuary" mentioned in the verse refers to the Mishkan (and ultimately the Temple) that the Jewish people would later build to accommodate His Presence. The degree of understanding of G'd's Kingship, will determine the degree of praise and love of the Jewish people for Him. Thus, the experience at the Sea was a precursor for the Jewish people to be taken as G'd's people at Sinai.

#### ***4. The Power of Prayer, A Manifestation Of G'd's Kindness***

The Torah states when the Jewish people found themselves caught between the Sea and the advancing Egyptian army they began complaining, **“Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us out to die in the wilderness?”** Moshe said to the people, **“Do not fear! Stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem...He shall do battle for you, and you shall remain silent.”** Initially, when the Jewish people saw that they were caught between the Sea and the Egyptian army, they began to pray as Chazal tell us, “They took hold of the craft of their forefathers...” However, G'd did not respond to their supplication.

The Torah continues, **“G'd said to Moshe, ‘Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel and let them journey forth!...’**” Rashi cites Chazal, “We learn from G'd's statement that Moshe was praying on behalf of the Jewish people. G'd said to him, ‘This is not the time to be lengthily involved in prayer because it is a moment of trouble for the Jewish people. You should tell them to journey forth.’”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, “One would think that the most appropriate time to engage in prayer is when one is in a state of great difficulty. If so, why did G'd tell Moshe not to continue praying?” After the Jewish people witnessed the ten plagues of Egypt, which were all revealed miracles, they found themselves confronted with the Egyptian army. They said, **‘Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert?’** Their expression of complaint to Moshe was an indication of their lack of belief and faith in G'd. They believed that He had put their existence in jeopardy and they would possibly die. This inappropriate statement evoked an intense a level of prosecution from the Attribute of Justice that was so severe, that supplication would be totally ineffective. It is only within the context of the Attribute of Mercy that prayer can be effective. The Jewish people needed to take an initiative that would demonstrate a level of belief and trust in G'd that would quell the Attribute of Justice to allow the Attribute of Mercy to come into effect. Thus, G'd told them to journey forth into the Sea. If they would travel directly into the Sea without concern for their safety, it would indicate their absolute belief and faith in G'd. This would rectify their failing. Only then would they merit the reinstatement of the Attribute of Mercy to be saved.

Chazal tell us that the first one to jump into the Sea was Nachshon Ben Aminadav. He walked into the sea to the point that he was about to drown. He called out to G'd, “I cannot advance any further, or I will die!” It was then that the Sea split. The miracle took place at that moment, because the Attribute of Mercy was activated. There is nothing that can stand in the way of a Jew when he demonstrates his belief and faith in G'd.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe initially presented himself to the Jewish people as the Redeemer the verse states, **“The people believed...”** The Midrash tells us that the moment the Jewish people declared their belief in Moshe as their Redeemer the bondage ceased. Why was that so? Based on the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh we can understand the reason. The Jewish people were enslaved by the Egyptians and were their mere chattels. They were engulfed in idolatry and spiritual contamination. Through their enslavement they became pagans. Despite there physical and spiritual predicament, the Jewish people immediately believed that Moshe was the Redeemer. They believed and understood that G'd is the only determining factor in existence. Because of their belief the bondage ceased because they were no longer subject to the Attribute of Justice which was manifested in physical bondage. When one has trust and faith in G'd he is truly free because the natural order is not what determines is perspective of his own existence. The Mishna in Ethics of our fathers tells us that it is only the one who is engaged in Torah study who is truly free. This is because through the study of Torah one's belief and faith in G'd is internalized. He thus transcends all constraints of life.

#### ***5. The Symbolism of the Donkey***

The Torah states regarding the positive commandment of redeeming the firstborn, **“...you shall set apart every first issue of the womb to G'd...Every first issue donkey you shall redeem with a lamb or kid...”** The firstborn of every domesticated kosher species assumes a state of sanctity upon its birth. The donkey, although it is a non-kosher species, also assumes a consecrated status upon its birth and it must be redeemed by giving a sheep to the Kohen. Rashi cites Chazal who offer two explanations why the firstborn of the donkey assumes a sanctified status. The first explanation offered by the Midrash is that since the donkey was the pack animal that assisted the Jewish people to transport the wealth out of Egypt, fulfilling G'd's promise to Avraham at the covenant between the parts, its firstborn thus

assumes a consecrated status. The other interpretation cited by Rashi states that the Egyptians are referred to by the prophet Yechezkel as “donkeys.” As it is stated by the prophet, “Their flesh is the flesh of donkeys.” One can understand that the firstborn of the donkey assumes a consecrated status because the donkey was crucial and essential to the promise to Avraham to be fulfilled. However, what relevance does the classification of the Egyptian people as “donkeys” have to sanctity? One would think that since the Egyptians had enslaved and victimized the Jewish people, the donkey represent something that is the antithesis of sanctity.

Ramban in his commentary asks, “Why were the Egyptians punished for enslaving the Jewish people? It was something that was ordained by G’d at the covenant between the parts.” He cites an opinion that although it was ordained that the Jewish people were to be enslaved, the Egyptian people did not need to be the ones to fulfill that decree. It could have been carried out by another nation. Ramban rejects this opinion because the fulfillment of G’d’s Will is a mitzvah. If so, there is a principle that states whoever is the first to fulfill the dictate of G’d is meritorious. Thus, the Egyptians should be classified as meritorious. If so, why were they punished for the enslavement of the Jewish people? Ramban explains that although the enslavement of the Jewish people was the Will of G’d, the Egyptians did not enslave them in order to fulfill His Will but rather it was because of their insecurity and hate, that they imposed bondage upon them. The enslavement of the Jewish people did not emanate from a holy source.

The Jewish people needed to be enslaved in Egypt in order to be purged of the impurities that existed within their spirituality. The Torah refers to the Egyptian experience as “the iron smelter.” Just as the smelter removes the impurities of iron by smelting them away, so too did the bondage of Egypt purify the Jewish people. As a result of this purification process the Jewish people were able to stand at Sinai to receive the Torah. Since the Egyptians were the ones who facilitated the purification process on behalf of the Jewish people they have relevance to the consecrated status of the Jewish people. The Torah thus gives the firstborn of the donkey a holy status to indicate that it was due to the Egyptians who are classified as “donkeys” that the Jewish people attained their sanctity.

Maharal of Prague z’tl explains that the word “*chamor* (donkey)”, is derived from the word “*chomer*,” which means material. Meaning, of the seventy root

nations of the world, the Egyptian people were the most devoid of spirituality. Thus, they have the greatest relevance to the mundane. They are therefore referred to as *chamorim*, to indicate that their essence is merely physical.

The Maharal cites a Midrash which asks, “Where do we see that G’d extracts light from darkness? Avraham from Terach.” Although Terach, the father of Avraham, was a pagan and evil, Avraham his son was the light that was extracted from the darkness because he illuminated the world by introducing G’d’s Presence. There is a principle that the ultimate level of spirituality, must emanate from a location that is the most devoid of spirituality. The Jewish people thus needed to be in Egypt, which was the location that was the most devoid of spirituality in order to ascend to the pinnacle of their spirituality at Sinai. Thus, the Egyptians, who are referred to as “donkeys” were the direct cause of the Jewish people to be qualified to stand at Sinai. Therefore the donkey is the only non-kosher species that has relevance to sanctity.

The Torah tells us that there is a negative commandment that prohibits one from afflicting an Egyptian, because “**you were strangers in the land of Egypt.**” Rashi cites Chazal who explains that since the Egyptians hosted the Jewish people in their country, the Jew has a debt of gratitude. If the Egyptians had inflicted untold suffering upon the Jewish people, why should they have a debt of gratitude towards them? It is because Egypt was the host country at a time of their suffering. Although they had embittered the lives of the Jewish people, they would not have been able to achieve their holy status without experiencing the bondage in that location. They are thus indebted to the Egyptians.