

First the Release Then On To Freedom

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Our Jewish Women In Egypt Assured Our Destiny



Weekly Video: First the Release Then On To Freedom



Weekly Torah Commentaries Series: Pesach



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Then On To Freedom

Activating G-d's Kindness in the Month of Nissan

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah* states, "In the Month of *Nissan* our forefathers were redeemed, in *Nissan* (in the future) they are destined to be redeemed." Why is the month of *Nissan* considered to be especially relevant to the redemption of the Jewish people?

Ramah in the Code of Jewish Law (*Shulchan Aruch*) states that there is a custom among the Jewish people to provide the means for the needy before Passover in order to purchase flour for *matzos* (*kimcha d'pischa*), as well as other Holiday needs. *Mishna Brurah* cites the Jerusalem *Talmud* which states that this custom is ancient among the Jewish people. For ages, the Jewish people have been providing for the needy so that they should be able to celebrate the Holiday with dignity and without lacking the basic necessities.

Rambam writes that if one celebrates the Holiday without concern for his fellow who may not have the adequate financial means to provide for himself, it is considered that he is celebrating the holiday to "sate his own belly." His celebration does not qualify as a "Holiday for G-d (*Moadei Hashem*)."

However, the issue of not providing for the needy, as *Rambam* states, is not limited to the Passover Holiday, it also applies to the other Festivals. However, there is something specific about providing the means to celebrate the Passover *Seder* properly with *matzah* and whatever the *Seder* requires. Why is there a special obligation to provide for these specific *mitzvos*?

Shalah HaKadosh explains that the Jewish people were not sufficiently worthy to merit redemption from Egypt. Despite that fact, G-d did redeem them. The *Midrash* tells us that as the Jewish people passed through the Sea, enclosed on each side by walls of water, the angels began prosecuting them before

G-d. They had said, "Why are you sparing the Jewish people and destroying the Egyptians? These are idolaters and these are idolaters."

Since the Jewish people were classified as idolaters to no less a degree than their Egyptian masters, why were they being redeemed and the Egyptians destroyed? Although *Chazal* tell us that the Jewish people had some degree of worthiness to be redeemed because they did not shed their identity as Jews, although they had been the chattels of the Egyptians for many years (they did not change their names, dress, or language). Nevertheless, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt was because of G-d's unlimited Kindness. It was purely an act of benevolence that He had taken then out of Egypt.

Each of the Patriarchs chose to emulate a specific Attribute of G-d. *Avraham* our Patriarch chose to emulate G-d's Attribute of Kindness (*Chesed*). *Yitzchak* chose to emulate G-d's Attribute of Justice (*Din*) and *Yaakov* chose to emulate His Attribute of Mercy/Truth (*Rachamim/Emmes*). Why did *Avraham* choose the Attribute of Kindness and not any of the other Attributes?

King David writes in Psalms, "*Olam chesed yibaneh* – the world was created out of (His) Kindness." G-d is the perfect and complete Being who is in need of nothing. He created existence only out of His Kindness to give man the opportunity to develop in a setting that will qualify him as one who is deserving of reward. This opportunity for spiritual advancement is only due to the Kindness of G-d.

Avraham chose to emulate G-d's characteristic of Kindness because just as G-d brought about existence through His Attribute of Kindness, so too would *Avraham* bring about a new existence with kindness. *Avraham* was the equivalent of entering into a new creation because he was the only individual in a world of paganism to recognize G-d and espouse His existence. *Avraham* himself was the equivalent of a new existence and thus established himself as the progenitor of the Jewish people, who were destined to be G-d's people.

The Jewish people were taken out of Egypt only for the specific objective to receive the *Torah* at Sinai. As a result of accepting G-d's *Torah* they became

His holy People, which was the equivalent of a new creation that did not exist before that moment. This process of creation began with the Ten Plagues of Egypt and culminated at Sinai, with the receiving of the *Torah*. Since the process of redemption was the equivalent of a new creation, G-d utilized His Attribute of Kindness to bring it about. Thus, the month of *Nissan* is the month that G-d demonstrated His Attribute of kindness.

Zohar writes that when one takes a proper initiative on the terrestrial level, it activates infinite forces within a similar context in the spiritual realm. In order for the Jewish people to be beneficiaries of the ultimate redemption they must be worthy of G-d's Kindness. Since the month of *Nissan*, in its essence is a month that G-d had demonstrated His infinite Kindness, when the Jew provides for his fellow what is needed for the *Seder* to appreciate G-d's Kindness (regarding the redemption from Egypt), it will activate redemption, which is the ultimate kindness.

What is the Meaning of Freedom for a Jew?

The Men of the High Assembly, who composed the text of all the prayer services, chose to refer to the Festival of Passover as "the time of our freedom (*zman chairuseinu*)." It is true that we recount in the *Seder* service that it was during this time that G-d redeemed the Jewish people from Egypt. They were enslaved for hundreds of years and had suffered during their bondage under their Egyptian taskmasters. The Jewish people were the equivalent of the chattel of the Egyptians. However, had G-d freed them from their bondage through His infinite Kindness.

The objective of taking the Jewish people out of Egypt was not only to free them from their physical oppressors, but rather it was so that they should stand at Sinai and receive the *Torah*. Every aspect of the process of their redemption and progressing towards Sinai was essential to qualify them to receive the *Torah* and become G-d's Holy people. The Ten plagues and all the revealed miracles that had transpired relating to their redemption caused the Jewish people to be weaned from their pagan beliefs and become spiritualized. During their enslavement

in Egypt they had become pagans to no less a degree than their Egyptian masters. However, at Sinai the Jewish people chose to accept the *Torah* with the unequivocal declaration of “*Naaseh V'nishma* (We will do and we will listen).” Thus, the objective of redemption from Egypt was achieved. What is the meaning of freedom as it pertains to the Jew?

The Jewish people could have chosen not to accept the *Torah*. If they had done so, they would have perished under the mountain and all existence would have come to an end. The creation of the world and its ongoing existence was contingent upon the Jewish people accepting the *Torah* at Sinai. However, they agreed to be committed to the dictate of G-d without knowing its extent and ramifications.

Regarding the Ten Commandments that *Moshe* had received at Sinai, the *Torah* uses the term “*charus*-engraved.” The words of the Ten Commandments were etched through the stone Tablets. The *Mishna* in *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of our Fathers) states that the word “*charus*” should not be read with its vowels but rather it should be read as “*cheirus* – freedom.” (Both words are spelled with the same letters; however, they are punctuated with different vowels which determine their reading). As it states, “There is no free man other than the one who engages in *Torah* study. Why is this so? If one is without a master dictating his existence, he should be considered free to do as he chooses. However, the *Torah*, through the word “*cheirus*” alludes to the fact that this is not so. The *Torah* which is replete with dictates and commandments, which guide every aspect of one’s life, seemingly would deny one’s freedom rather than making him a free man.

One who is truly free is able to make decisions based on choices that are in his best interest. One must establish an objectivity to be able to make that evaluation. In order for one to make these choices he must have a sense of clarity in order to discern between what is good and what is the antithesis of goodness. If one attempts to choose what is truly good based on his own sense, intellectualism, and experience he will be subject to his own human inclinations and desires. These human needs create a conflict of interest that do not allow the individual to appreciate all the full ramifications the issues in order

to make the proper choice. Thus, one is enslaved by his own impulses and material needs. He is blinded from what he truly needs to advance his spirituality.

In contrast, one who engages in *Torah* study is able to extricate himself from the animalistic and material drives to utilize the material in order to facilitate spiritual growth. One will have an understanding that the material itself has no intrinsic value unto itself. Therefore, the one who engages in *Torah* study is truly free, whereas the one who is not involved in that process is being driven by the animal that exists within every person.

We say in the *Haggadah* that it was G-d Himself who took the Jewish people out of Egypt. It was not through an angel or any other spiritual entity. *Arizal* explains that the spiritual impurity of Egypt was so intense that not even an angel, who is a spiritual being, would have been tainted by the environment. Therefore, only G-d Himself could have extricated the Jewish people from that location of impurity. At the time of their redemption they were permeated and infected with impurity to the point that their spiritual system was completely shut down. They did not have the capacity to process and relate anything within the spiritual realm. G-d not only freed the Jewish people from their physical bondage, He had extricated and purged them from the spiritual impurity that they had absorbed during the Egyptian bondage.

The *Torah* states, “*Yisro*, the Minister of *Midian*, the father-in-law of *Moshe*, heard all that G-d had done for *Moshe* and Israel, His People – that *Hashem* took Israel out of Egypt.” After *Yisro* heard all that G-d had done for the Jewish people, he abandoned his position as Minister of *Midian* and his community to join the Jewish people in the desert. Why was *Yisro* so impressed with all that he had heard?

Yisro was world renowned as a pagan priest of idolatry. He was the most proficient person in all forms of idol worship. In the past, he had been one of Pharaoh’s personal advisors. He thus understood and appreciated the intense impurity that existed in Egypt.. When he had heard that G-d had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt and that they were able to express themselves at the Splitting of the Sea, as they had done as a result of processing the miracles that

they had witnessed, he was amazed and taken aback. He realized that G-d had cleansed and purged them from the impurity that they had attained in Egypt.

It was not humanly possible for one to be freed from the influences of Egypt unless G-d Himself intervened. After *Yisro* had heard what had transpired, he abandoned his position of honor in order to join the Jewish people in the desert. The spiritual freedom that the Jewish people had attained was unequalled in existence. G-d gave them an objectivity, which gave them the ability to make the proper choice. The process of full spiritual emancipation culminated in the receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai.

When we mention in our prayers that Passover is the “time of our freedom (*zman chairuseinu*).” we must understand that we are not only referring to our physical freedom, but also the spiritual freedom to have the clarity to make the proper choices. We are only able to function as G-d’s people because of that special level of freedom that we had attained at the time of the exodus from Egypt.

Redemption from Egypt, the True Kindness of G-d

We recite in the Passover *Haggadah* and at every *bris* (circumcision) a verse from the Prophet *Yechezkel* which states, “In Egypt you were naked and devoid...” *Chazal* explain that the verse is referring to the spiritual state of the Jewish people when they were in Egypt. Since they had become pagans, they were devoid of *mitzvos*. The Prophet concludes, “I saw you wallowing in your bloods. Through your blood, you shall live. Through your blood you shall live.” In order for the Jewish people to be worthy of redemption from Egypt they needed to have sufficient spiritual merit. Therefore, G-d gave them the opportunity to perform the *mitzvah* of circumcision and the *mitzvah* of sacrificing the Pascal lamb. It is through the “bloods” of circumcision and the Pascal sacrifice that the Jewish people were made sufficiently worthy for redemption. Why did G-d specifically choose these two *mitzvos* in order to give the Jewish people sufficient merit?

Shalo HaKadosh writes that the redemption from Egypt was a replication of the creation of the world.

King David writes in Psalms, “*Olam chesed yibaneh* – the world was created with *Chesed* (Kindness).” Nothing existed before Creation. Therefore, there was no one who was deserving of Creation. G-d created existence out of His Kindness in order to give man the ultimate opportunity to spiritually perfect himself. Just as creation initially came about in a context in which there was no one who was worthy of it, so too were the Jewish people redeemed from Egypt, despite their lack of worthiness. The only reason G-d had given them the opportunity to be redeemed was purely out of His Kindness. The redemption from Egypt, emanating from G-d’s Kindness, was a replication of the creation of the world.

Every day we conclude the *Amidah* (silent prayer) with a request that G-d should rebuild the Temple where we shall worship Him and “the offering of *Yehudah* and Jerusalem will be pleasing to G-d, as in the days of old and in former years.” One would think that “...the days of old and in former years” is referring to the time of the First Temple, or the *Mishkan* when the Divine Presence dwelt in the midst of the Jewish people. However, the *Midrash* explains that “days of old and in former years” is referring to the days of *Adam* when he had brought his offering. At the time of *Adam*, because the world was pristine and spiritually untainted by idolatry, the offering that *Adam* had brought had greater value. It was truly pleasing to G-d. Therefore, we supplicate G-d that at the end of time our offerings should be as pleasant to Him as in the time of *Adam*, when there was no impurity of idolatry in the world.

The Jewish people, by slaughtering the Pascal lamb, which was the deity of their Egyptian masters, were in effect purging their midst from idolatry/paganism. Rejecting idolatry in such a vehement manner was a reinstatement of creation at the time of *Adam*. *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* explains, based on a *Zohar*, that *Adam* was created without a foreskin. It was only as a result of his sin, that the foreskin developed as an outgrowth of the impurity that *Adam* had brought upon himself. If the Jewish people were to be redeemed from Egypt, they needed to replicate the setting of existence that was at the beginning of Creation. They were therefore given the *mitzvah* of circumcision so that they would be in the state of *Adam*, before he had sinned.

When the Jewish people accepted the *Torah* at Sinai, they had fully ascended to the level of *Adam*, before the sin. They became eternal spiritual beings. G-d had initially created the world to be a setting in which His Presence could dwell. However, because *Adam* had putrefied existence, the Divine Presence could not dwell on the terrestrial level. At Sinai, the world was restored to its initial setting, in which the Divine Presence could again dwell amongst the Jewish people. However, because they had sinned with the Golden Calf they once again caused existence to revert back to its impure state, as *Adam* had done through the eating of the fruit. Both *Adam* and the Jewish people had putrefied existence with idolatry.

The *Gemara* in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that after *Adam* had sinned, he was classified as a “heretic.” Despite the fact that *Adam* was in the presence of G-d, he ate of the Tree of Knowledge, defying His Will. This was a denial of G-d’s existence similar to that of idolatry. *Ramchal* explains that G-d had initially created man in a way that the soul (*neshama*) was contained within the body. *Adam*’s physicality was spiritualized to the degree that his soul could be infused within his body.

However, after the sin of *Adam*, the body of man became physicalized and thus the soul needed to hover above the body. The body was no longer qualified to contain the soul. There was only one person, other than *Adam*, whose body was sufficiently spiritualized to be the vessel for the soul; it was *Moshe*. Thus, there is a commonality between *Adam* and *Moshe*.

However, just as *Adam* had failed with idolatry, so too did *Moshe*’s decision precipitate idolatry among the Jewish people. *Moshe* had allowed the rabble (*eirev rav*) to leave Egypt along with the Jewish people, without consulting with G-d. It was the rabble that had instigated the sin of the Golden Calf. Once again there is a parallel between the time of creation and the exodus from Egypt.

Maharal of Prague and *Ramchal* explain that the Jewish holidays that are mentioned in the *Torah* are not merely commemorative (to commemorate events of the past). But rather, the Jew is meant to re-experience what had transpired on those particular

moments in history. Whatever energies/influences that G-d had released to bring about those events in the past, are once again released every year at those particular times. The Jew who observes the festival as prescribed creates an infrastructure to capture that energy- thus causing him to be the beneficiary of those influences. Therefore in order for one to be the greatest beneficiary of the Divine Kindness that is made available on *Pesach*, which is what had brought the world into existence, one must create a proper setting by observing and internalizing the laws of the festival.

The Plague, A Reaction to the Defiance of Pharaoh

The *Midrash* cites a verse from Psalms regarding the plague of darkness, “‘He (G-d) sent darkness and it became darker because they did not accept His dominance.’ The darkness that G-d had brought upon the Egyptians was severe. Why was this so? Because the Egyptians were unwilling to become subservient to G-d (despite all of the plagues that had preceded the plague of darkness). G-d had said to the angels, ‘The Egyptians deserve to be smitten with darkness.’ All of the angels agreed in unison and they accepted G-d’s Word. G-d sent the darkness and it to become more intense. The darkness was more than a mere absence of light it was tangible. This is analogous to a king who gives an order to one of his loyal servants to punish a defiant subject with fifty lashes. Rather than administering fifty lashes, the devoted servant of the king gave one hundred lashes. Similarly, G-d had commanded that darkness should come upon the Egyptians and the darkness intensified itself.” Meaning, the angels that were commanded to bring darkness upon the Egyptians, intensified the plague on their own accord.

An angel is a spiritual being that carries out the Will of its Maker with total devotion as instructed. If this is so, how could have the angels intensified the darkness that came upon the Egyptians, which was not in conformance with the Dictate of G-d? The *Torah* tells us regarding the plague of hail that it was a phenomenon of fire and ice coexisting simultaneously. *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain, “Although fire and water are opposing forces, they

made peace with one another in order to carry out the Will of their Maker.” Because G-d Wills that fire should burn and water be the agent that extinguishes fire, that is why nature functions in this manner. However if G-d should Will that water should not extinguish fire, then water and fire will coexist with one another. If this is so, then what is the meaning of the words of *Chazal* “fire and water made peace among themselves...?” This indicates that these forces, on their own, chose to coexist without G-d Willing this new phenomenon.

Rambam writes in *The Fundamentals of Torah* that an angel is an intellectual spiritual being. It is a being that has a unique level clarity to understand G-d and His Will. Thus, it carries out the Will of G-d as instructed. An angel is not a spiritual automaton. It is because of its exceptional understanding of G-d that the angel is compelled to carry out His Will. This is similar to the Sinai experience at the time of the giving of the *Torah*.

The *Gemara* explains that the Jewish people were compelled to accept the *Torah* at Sinai. As it states, “G-d held the mountain over them, as if it were a barrel, and had said ‘If you accept the *Torah* it will be good. If not, there you will be buried.’” According to the literal understanding of the words of the *Gemara*, the Jewish people were physically coerced to accept the *Torah* at the threat of losing their lives. *Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk* explains that this passage within a metaphorical context. The Jewish people had ascended, at Sinai, to an unusual level of clarity that was compared to the angels. Choice only exists when one believes that there is an alternative. However, if one’s understanding of value is unencumbered then one no longer has choice. Thus, they were compelled to accept the *Torah*. It was the equivalent of holding the mountain over them.

When G-d brought the plague of hail upon the Egyptians, the angel responsible for the function of water and the angel responsible for the function of fire chose to coexist because they understood with absolute clarity the desecration of G-d’s Name that was being perpetrated through the defiance of the Egyptians. The Egyptian belief was that all existence was limited and bound by the laws of nature. Thus, fire and water, which are opposing forces could not

coexist. After Pharaoh had witnessed the plague of hail he exclaimed, “This time I have sinned; *Hashem* is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the evil ones.” Seeing this new phenomenon which was contradictory to the laws of nature was a sanctification of G-d’s Name. Pharaoh understood at that moment that there was a power outside of nature that dictates existence.

Similarly, the angel that was responsible to bring about darkness appreciated the desecration of G-d’s Name that was being perpetrated through the defiance of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Therefore, when G-d ordered the plague of darkness to come upon Egyptians, the angels responsible for executing the Will of G-d, intensified the plague in order to punish the one who desecrated G-d’s Name by bringing greater devastation upon the Egyptians just as the loyal servant added fifty lashes to the punishment of the defiant subject.

Taking Nothing for Granted

The *Torah* states, “G-d said to *Moshe*, ‘...Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels.’ *Hashem* granted the people favor in the eyes of Egypt; moreover, the man *Moshe* was very great in Egypt,... in the eyes of the people.” G-d had promised *Avraham* that after the Jewish people completed their years of bondage in Egypt, they would leave with great wealth. In order to bring this promise to fruition, G-d had told the Jewish people to request of their masters silver and gold vessels. One would think that after experiencing nine devastating plagues that had reduced Egypt to rubble, the Egyptian people would have even been willing to relinquish their valuables to them as a result of intimidation. Why was it necessary for G-d to grant the Jewish people special favor in the eyes of the Egyptians in order to borrow their wealth? Seemingly, all that had previously transpired was not sufficient to force the Egyptians to lend their personal effects to the Jewish people.

The *Torah* states at the beginning of the Portion of *Shemos*, “A new king (*melech chadash*) arose over Egypt, who did not know *Yosef*.” After *Yosef* had

passed away, Pharaoh decreed new mandates against the Jewish people as if he did not know Yosef. Yosef had been the Viceroy of Egypt who was responsible for Egypt's survival during the years of famine. The Jewish people were initially revered by the Egyptians during Yosef's lifetime because they were seen as royalty. However, now they were reduced to slaves.

The *Midrash* states, "The Prophet says, 'They (the Jewish People) betrayed G-d and they fathered strange children. Because of this, they will be eaten by 'chodesh.' They bore children and did not circumcise them. The moment Yosef had passed away, the Jewish people nullified the *mitzvah* of circumcision. They had said, 'We shall be like the Egyptians.' When G-d had seen that they no longer wanted to identify themselves with Him, by nullifying the sign of the covenant/circumcision, He nullified the love of the Egyptians for the Jewish people. As it states, 'He changed their heart to despise His people...' Now they will be consumed by 'chodesh.' As it states, 'A new king (*melech chadash*) arose over Egypt.' (Without vowels the word *chodesh* is read *chadash*) This king enacted new decrees to embitter their lives." The Jewish people were no longer esteemed or revered by the Egyptians because they had ceased to circumcise themselves. Since they nullified their covenant with G-d, He nullified the love that the Egyptians had for them. The only reason one finds special favor in the eyes of another is because G-d grants that special favor.

When the Jewish people were still despised by the Egyptians they were their slaves. Naturally a master does not esteem his slave/chattel. When G-d caused the Jew to be seen by his master as special and worthy of respect, it was obvious that it was a miracle being performed by G-d. It is true that even if the Jewish people would not have found special favor in the eyes of their masters they would have released their valuables on loan out of fear; nevertheless, G-d wanted the Egyptians to give up their wealth because they perceived the Jewish people as special. G-d wanted to convey this understanding to the Jewish people – that one's status and acceptability is determined by G-d.

Initially the Jewish people chose to stop circumcising themselves because they believed that by being

uncircumcised they would be embraced by Egyptian society. However, G-d caused them to be rejected and despised by their Egyptian masters. This confirmed that finding favor in another's eyes is not determined by the way one behaves but rather by how G-d wants him to be perceived. Immediately before redemption, G-d wanted to reiterate this understanding and belief- thus causing the Jewish people to find special favor in the eyes of their masters. The Jew needed to understand before redemption that every aspect of his life is determined by G-d Himself.

The Jewish people needed to understand that the great wealth that they were taking was not because they had intimidated the Egyptians, but rather it was only because it was the Will of G-d. There was no aspect of the redemption that was not enmeshed with miracle. We find that although Yosef was exceptionally gifted and accomplished, he would not have been appreciated by his master Potiphar or the warden when he was imprisoned, had it not been for G-d to allow him gain special favor in their eyes. We beseech G-d continuously throughout our prayers that we should find special favor in His Eyes and in the eyes others. Although one may possess unique qualities and abilities, one must understand that one's value is only appreciated if G-d allows it to be so.

The Culpability of the One Who Has Clarity

The *Torah* states after the seventh plague, "G-d said to Moshe, 'Come to Pharaoh...Until when will you refuse to be humbled before Me...' After experiencing all of the devastating plagues which befell Egypt, why was Pharaoh not asked to humble himself before G-d earlier? Why did G-d wait until after the seventh plague to reproach him in this manner?

After the plague of hail, the *Torah* states, "Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder ceased, and he continued to sin; and he made his heart stubborn..." Prior to this moment, when the *Torah* mentioned the hardening of Pharaoh's heart it did not state that "he continued to sin." Why, only after the plague of hail, does the *Torah* state "he continued to sin?" Regarding the third plague (lice), although the sorcerers of Egypt had said to Pharaoh, "It is the

finger of G-d", meaning it could not be attributed to sorcery, he was not considered a "sinner" for remaining unaffected by the plague.

Until the plague of hail, Pharaoh had attributed the previous plagues to a deity. Although the Egyptian sorcerers had recognized that the plague of lice was the "finger of G-d," Pharaoh himself interpreted that to mean that it was the hand of the deity of the Jewish people. The deity of the Jews, although it had demonstrated superior powers, was only one among many other deities. This is in fact the basis for pagan belief. Pagans worship powers that exist within nature, believing that they are independent of G-d. These deities, regardless of their enormous power, are limited to the natural order. Pharaoh was not willing to accept the concept of spirituality, an Omnipotent and Infinite Being, Who transcends and dictates nature. As the *Torah* states, "Pharaoh replied, "Who is *Hashem* (YKVK) that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know *Hashem*, nor will I send out Israel!"

All of the plagues that had transpired prior to the plague of hail were plausible within a natural context. Once the plague was unleashed, its reality was something that existed within the natural order. It was only the enormity of the plague that overwhelmed Egypt. Contrastingly, the plague of hail was the coexistence of fire and water, which are contradictory forces that cannot coexist within nature. As *Rashi* cites the *Midrash*, "Fire and water made peace between them in order to do the Will of their Maker." Thus, Pharaoh could not attribute the plague of hail to a deity. He had understood that the plague of hail was something that transcended nature and therefore was Willed by an All-Encompassing Being. The *Torah* states, "Pharaoh sent and summoned *Moshe* and *Aaron* and said to them, 'This time I have sinned; *Hashem* (YKVK) is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones...' This was the first time Pharaoh had reached a level of clarity to recognize G-d as the Omnipotent Being and not another deity.

However, after *Moshe* had prayed and caused the plague of hail to cease, Pharaoh again hardened his heart and reverted back to his previous stance and did not allow the Jews to leave. This is the reason the *Torah* at this moment states, "He continued to sin..."

It was only because Pharaoh had reached a level of clarity to recognize G-d as the Omnipotent One and despite this, he did not heed His Word. Therefore he was considered to be a "sinner." After achieving this level of clarity, the only basis to reject G-d and assume a position of denial was a lack of humility. Therefore *Moshe* was instructed by G-d to say to Pharaoh, "...Until when will you refuse to be humbled before Me?"

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Pesachim* tells us that the Jew who truly despises Judaism/practicing Jews is the one who had studied *Torah* but chose to leave its path. *Rashi* explains that this Jew detests the others because since he had studied, he knows how he is regarded and seen by other Jews. He knows that others regard him as a lesser person for living the life that he has chosen. However, one can explain this passage in the *Gemara* in another manner. The person, who at one time came upon truth and then chose to reject it, must live in a state of denial in which he must suppress the truth in order to accommodate his conflicts of interest. When one lives a life of falsehood (denial), knowing the truth yet choosing to ignore it, he continuously experiences a degree of guilt that causes an irrational hatred for Judaism.

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Kiddushin* states that if one sins and then chooses to repeat it, it assumes a permitted status to that person. When one transgresses in a particular area (intentional or inadvertent), he has a choice to either correct the wrong by doing *teshuvah* (repenting, or if he chooses to continue along the path of sin he must recognize that behavior as permissible. This is because if he does not, he must continuously live with guilt which is something that a human being cannot tolerate. He must retreat into a state of denial by suppressing the truth and allowing his conflicts of interest to dominate him. This is similar to the one who had studied *Torah* and chose to leave the path.

Pharaoh, who had clearly seen the Hand of G-d in the plague of hail, could not deny G-d's Omnipotence. It was only his arrogance and conflicts of interest that caused him to reject and suppress the truth – which is the meaning of "Pharaoh hardened his heart." This is why the *Torah* refers to his behavior after the

plague of hail as “he continued to sin.” This is the reason *Moshe* reproached him only after the seventh plague and not before.

The Perspective that is Needed for Survival

The *Torah* tells us that after the Jewish people had seen the remains of the Egyptians on the seashore, “They believed in *Hashem* and *Moshe* His servant.” After the Sea had closed upon the Egyptian army, the Jewish people were not convinced that their enemies had perished in the Sea. They were concerned that they would circumvent the Sea in order to continue pursuing them. When their remains were cast on the seashore, they had seen Divine retribution and they believed in G-d and *Moshe* His servant. They were inspired to sing G-d’s praises along with *Moshe*, articulating every aspect of the destruction of their enemies.

The *Midrash* states, “It was because ‘they believed in *Hashem*...’ that the Jewish people merited to inherit the Land. In the merit that *Avraham* believed in G-d, he inherited this world and the world to come. As it states, ‘He believed in *Hashem*, and it was considered a righteousness.’ Similarly, when *Moshe* presented himself to the Jewish people as the Redeemer, ‘they believed.’ ...As it states, ‘The *tzaddik* will live through his belief (in G-d).’” It is understood that if one believes in the in G-d after he is the beneficiary of His Beneficence, his belief is not considered notable.

However, if one has reason to question and despite his difficult predicament, he believes, it is considered something admirable. For example, the *Torah* states that *Avraham* ‘believed in G-d’ after he was promised that he would have a son. Although he had not yet fathered a child from *Sarah*, our Matriarch, at his advanced age, *Avraham* believed in G-d’s promise that he would. Therefore, his belief was considered a “righteousness.” It is when one believes in G-d, despite the one’s circumstance, that belief is considered to be exemplary.

Although the Jewish people were pagans in Egypt, when *Moshe* presented himself as the Redeemer of Israel, the *Torah* states “and the people believed.”

Despite the fact that they had abandoned their Jewish beliefs, when *Moshe* presented his credentials as G-d’s agent, they believed. *Chazal* compare the physical world to the night time period. It is because when there is an absence of light, things are obscured and distorted. One’s perception of truth is very often based upon one’s own conflicts of interest. Throughout history, we as a Jewish people have witnessed and experienced many tragedies and upheavals such as the destruction of two Temples, expulsions, and continuous discrimination and victimization. Without belief and trust in G-d, that all that He does is for the Good, one would have difficulty doing His Will. A Jew can only thrive within the spiritual realm, if he is secure in his belief.

When the Jewish people declared their belief in G-d and *Moshe* His servant it was after witnessing the splitting of the Sea and the many revealed miracles that had previously occurred. They had also witnessed Divine retribution when the remains of the Egyptian army were cast on to the seashore. If their declaration of belief occurred immediately after benefiting from G-d in a context of miracles, why was their declaration of belief at that moment esteemed by G-d that they should merit to inherit the Land and that the Divine Presence should rest upon them? If anyone would witness what the Jewish people had, it is understood that they would declare their belief in G-d. Why is it necessary for the *Torah* to state, “They believed in *Hashem* and *Moshe* His servant?” Seemingly, this is a natural consequence. Evidently, since the *Torah* does share with us their declaration of belief, it must be because their experience was not as convincing as one may think. If it were, the *Torah* would not need to state it.

The Jewish people at this point had left Egypt to go into the desert without any provisions or any sense of security for the future. They had left the security of their homes based on *Moshe*’s directive in the Name of G-d. Despite all of the uncertainties of their predicament, their faith and belief in G-d and *Moshe* was unswerving. This was considered an accomplishment that was valued by G-d. As the Prophet states, “I (G-d) will always remember the kindness of your youth...your following Me into an unplanted land...” It was because of their belief

in G-d that the uncertainty of the future did not distract or hinder them from heeding the word of G-d. The righteous live by their belief. Despite all of the unanswered questions and difficulties of life, every Jew must believe with absolute faith that G-d is continuously watching over us and will speedily bring Moshiach to bring about the ultimate redemption.

The Spiritualization of the Mind

After the Jewish people had witnessed the revelation of G-d at the Sea, the *Torah* states, “Moshe caused Israel to journey from the Sea of Reeds and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur; they went for a three-day period in the Wilderness, but they did not find water. They came to *Marah*, but they could not drink the waters of *Marah* because they were bitter... The people complained against *Moshe* saying, ‘What shall we drink?...’”

After seeing the Hand of G-d in Egypt through the plagues and the splitting of the Sea, it was inappropriate for the Jewish people to complain to *Moshe* that they did not have anything to drink. They should have requested of him to pray to G-d to provide them with water. *Moshe* cried out to G-d and He showed him a tree, which he threw into the water – and the water became sweet. The *Torah* then states, “There *Hashem* established for (the nation) a Decree and an Ordinance, and there He tested them.”

Rashi cites *Chazal*, “*Marah* was the first location in which the Jewish people were given portions of the *Torah* for them to engage in (their study). What were the portions that were given? The laws of the *Shabbos*, the laws pertaining to the Red Heifer (*Parah Adumah*), and laws pertaining to monetary issues/damages (*Dinim*).” Before the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai, the classification of the Jewish people was “Noahides.” They were not yet bound by the laws of the *Torah*. They were not subject to spiritual contamination, because only a Jew (post-Sinai) is susceptible to spiritual impurity. The laws of the Red Heifer had no relevance to their present status. The value of the Red Heifer that was communicated to them was purely for the sake of engaging in its study. Why was it important at this time to engage in *Torah* study?

The Jewish people had witnessed at the Sea the Hand of G-d on the most vivid level. *Chazal* tell us that what the maidservant had seen at the splitting of the Sea even *Yechezkel* the Prophet had not seen. Although they had declared after the Sea closed upon the Egyptians their belief in G-d and *Moshe*, three days later they quarreled with *Moshe* rather than speaking to him in a more respectful manner. One would think that after experiencing this level of revelation and understanding of *Moshe*’s status as G-d’s Prophet, they would have behaved differently. It is evident from their behavior that even when one is exposed to G-d’s Presence, one’s human frailties and conflicts do not allow the person to process and internalize the event sufficiently. Without, the spiritualization of one’s mind and emotion, the events have relatively little impact on his being.

The only thing that gives one the capacity to fully appreciate a spiritual encounter is the study of the *Torah* itself. The Jewish people at this time did not have that available to them. Therefore, G-d gave the Jewish people the portions of the *Shabbos*, the Red Heifer, and laws, in order to engage in their study. Through this process of studying, the Jewish people would be spiritualized in mind and emotion to have the capacity to fully appreciate spirituality. Thus, they would overcome their human impediments.

The blessing that is recited before one engages in the study of *Torah* is, “Blessed are You *Hashem*...and has commanded us to engross/engage ourselves in the words of *Torah*...” One would think that the blessing should be, “...and has commanded us to learn *Torah* ...” *Maharal* of *Prague* explains that the mitzvah of *Torah* study is to engage in its study. The process of engagement, attempting to understand the words and concepts of the *Torah*, is the mitzvah itself. Therefore, the text of the blessing which precedes the study of *Torah* is to engage in its Words. It is this process that impacts upon the person and spiritualizes him. It is not limited to the accumulation of its knowledge.

Chazal tell us, “*Talmud Torah keneged kulam* - the study of *Torah* is equivalent of fulfilling all the mitzvos of the *Torah* combined.” Thus, engaging in *Torah* study touches upon the total spiritual development of the individual. Although the *Torah* in its entirety was not

yet given to the Jewish people at *Marah*, nevertheless, studying the portions of *Torah* that were given to them would impact upon them as if they had studied all aspects of the *Torah*. Consequently, through engaging in these portions, they would become spiritualized in preparation for the Sinai event.

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Avodah Zorah* tells us that the one who engages in *Torah* study and performs acts of kindness will dominate his evil inclination. *Chofetz Chaim* explains in his work *Toras Chesed* that the evil inclination affects a person in two areas of his existence – through his mind and through his physicality. When one engages in *Torah* study, the mind is spiritualized. Thus, his thoughts become impervious to the evil inclination. When one engages in acts of kindness (*chesed*), he is spiritualizing his physicality. Thus, body is not inclined towards evil. The only reason one does not have clarity is because one is distracted by his emotions and desires. The only way one can contend with this issue is to engage in *Torah*, which spiritualizes all aspects of one's being.

Relativity Determines the Degree of Sanctification of G-d

The *Midrash* states, “Why does the Portion begin, ‘It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people...? It is because the same mouth that had said, ‘I will not send them out’ now had said ‘I will send them out.’ What was the reward for this? The Jewish people were given the *mitzvah* of not being permitted to harass the Egyptian. The mouth that initially rejected G-d by saying, ‘Who is *Hashem*... I do not know *Hashem*’ retracted and said during the plague of hail, ‘This time I have sinned; *Hashem* is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones...’ What was his reward? G-d gave his people in ground internment. As the *Torah* tells us that after the Sea had closed upon the Egyptian army, they were buried (and not left to be devoured by the fish of the sea).”

Pharaoh was no ordinary man. He was the monarch of the most advanced and powerful civilization in the world. In addition, he was a pagan who had proclaimed himself as a deity. For Pharaoh to agree to send out the Jewish people because G-d had commanded him to do so through *Moshe* His agent, it

was a sanctification of G-d's Name (*kiddush Hashem*). The world had seen the obstinate and seemingly invincible Pharaoh submit and adhere to the dictate of G-d, which itself was the ultimate sanctification of G-d's Name. Through this his people had merited the negative commandment that a Jew is not permitted to harass an Egyptian. The self-deified pagan monarch who initially denied G-d's existence on the most insolent level – “Who is *Hashem* – I do not know Him?” – now acknowledged His all-encompassing dominion by declaring “*Hashem* is righteous.” He thus merited on behalf of his people that they should receive proper burial after the closing of the Sea. For someone who was known to be the most powerful monarch and self-proclaimed deity to acknowledge the Omnipotent Being, is truly a sanctification of G-d's Name.

The *Torah* states, “You shall not taunt or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain that the term “stranger” is referring to a convert. A Jew is not permitted to cause pain or aggrieve a convert by reminding him of his past. The *Gemara* tells us that this prohibition extends for ten generations. However, we find that very often *Yisro*, *Moshe*'s father in law, is referred to in the *Torah* as “*Kohen Midian* – high priest of *Midian*.” Although this was after his conversion to monotheism, he is continuously referred to in this seemingly pejorative manner. If one is not permitted to remind another of his past, then why does the *Torah* repeatedly emphasize and reiterate that *Yisro* was the pagan priest of *Midian*?

If the *Torah* had not referred to *Yisro* as the high priest of *Midian*, then we would not appreciate the ramifications of his ultimate accomplishment of converting to monotheism. By rejecting idolatry and abandoning his position as the pagan leader of *Midian*, he became a pariah in his own community. The *Torah* tells us that when his daughters would go to water their flocks they were driven away by the other shepherds because of the status of their father. The reason the *Torah* continuously identifies *Yisro* as the high priest of *Midian* is to communicate to us that although he had originally represented the most advanced position as a pagan priest, he rejected it all for the truth of monotheism. It would

be the equivalent of the head of the Catholic Church rejecting all his previous beliefs and acknowledging Judaism as the true religion. An ordinary pagan converting to monotheism would have not brought about such a level of *kiddush Hashem*.

The *Midrash* tells us that when *Yaakov's* children together with the Egyptians had taken him to be buried in the cave of *Machpelah* in *Canaan*, the Canaanites initially wanted to wage war against *Yaakov's* family. However, when they saw the crown of *Yosef*, the Viceroy of Egypt, they encircled it with their own crowns – thus renaming the location to memorialize the event.

The Canaanites exclaimed, "It is a time of profound grieving for the Egyptians. *Yaakov* is being buried." When they had made this declaration, they had either first walked four cubits, according to one interpretation in the *Midrash*, or raised their fingers to acknowledge the event. According to the first opinion, for each pace they had taken to acknowledge the passing of *Yaakov*, they merited that the Jewish people should be kept out of the Land of Israel for one generation. Thus, since they had walked four cubits, the Jewish people were not able to enter into the Land until four generations had passed. Because they were pagans, their acknowledgement of the tragic passing of *Yaakov*, a man who personified and embodied holiness, was considered a sanctification of G-d's Name.

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Avodah Zorah* tells us that *Reb Chananyia Ben Tradion*, his wife, and daughter experienced tragedies at various levels. *Reb Chananyia Ben Tradion* was wrapped in a *Torah* scroll and was burnt to death. His wife was taken out to be killed, and his daughter was sent to a brothel in Rome. When each of them experienced their own personal tragedy, they acknowledged and proclaimed that G-d was just in the punishment that was being meted out to them. Without their declaration, one could think that their tragic fate would be considered a travesty of justice (G-d forbid). However, because they had declared that G-d is righteous and Just in His Judgment, they dispelled any question and embraced G-d's decision. This was a *kiddush Hashem*.

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Yoma* tells us that when one repents out of fear of G-d, his deliberate sins take on an inadvertent status. However, if one repents out of love, then his deliberate sins are converted to merits. When one assumes the status of a sinner and despite that status, he acknowledges G-d by repenting out of fear, it is a degree of *kiddush Hashem* (albeit limited). However, when one assumes the status of a sinner and truly recognizes the wrong and repents out of love for G-d it is a more advanced level of sanctification of G-d's Name – thus he is able to convert the deliberate sins into merits. When one is able to acknowledge G-d in His true context, despite all the distortion of truth, one is bringing about a sanctification of His Name whose merit is profound and unlimited.

The Objective of the Egyptian Exile

The *Torah* states, "*Veileh shemos...*And these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt..." The verse begins with the letter "vav" which means "and." This indicates that there is a connection and continuum between the book of *Shemos* and the Book of *Bereishis*. *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* explains, "*Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov* understood that the Egyptian exile was needed to purge the Jewish people from the sin of *Avraham* our Patriarch. He had posed an inappropriate question to G-d and thus the Jewish people were decreed to be exiled to Egypt.

The state of exile began with the birth of *Yitzchak* and it culminated after being in Egypt for 210 years. The Patriarchs understood that the necessity for the purging process brought about by the Egyptian bondage was for the ultimate objective of being qualified to receive the *Torah* at Sinai/to become the chosen people. So too, the 70 individuals who came to Egypt with *Yaakov* understood the importance of coming there. This is the significance of the letter "vav" (and). Thus, the *Torah* is telling us that the descent to Egypt was with the same level of intent and willingness to bring about a more spiritual people as the Patriarchs had intended.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, "Although the individuals who came to Egypt were identified earlier in the Portion of *Vayigash*, the *Torah* reiterates

their names to discern between them and *Esav*. The *Midrash* tells us that when *Esav* was given a choice to receive the Land of Canaan he was made to understand that this could only come about if the “debt” of exile was paid (going to Egypt). He chose to pass on this opportunity in favor of going to Mt. *Seir*. Yaakov and his family chose to go to Egypt because they understood the value of receiving the gift of the Land of *Canaan*.”

There is a question among the earlier commentators regarding the identification of the Five Books of the *Torah*. Ramban identifies the first book as *Bereishis* (Genesis), the second book as *Sefer Ha'Geula* (Book of Redemption), the third as *Torahs Kohanim* (Laws of the *Kohanim*), the fourth books as *Sefer Ha'Pikudim* (Numbers), and the fifth book as *Mishna Torah* (Review of *Torah*). Each book is identified by its content. However, *Baal Halachos Gedolos* (BHAG) identifies the first book as *Sefer Bereishis*, the second book as *Sefer Sheini* (second Book), and the remaining three books are identified by content.

Nitziv z'tl in his introduction to *Haamik Davar* (Commentary on *Torah*) asks, “If the basis for the identification for each of the Books of the *Torah* is based on content then why does BHAG identify the Second Book by number?” *Nitziv* answers, “BHAG identifies the Second Book by number to indicate that in fact it is the second chapter, which is the closing chapter of the First Book – *Bereishis* (Genesis). The First Book discusses the creation of existence and the evolution of the precursor of the Jewish people, while the Second Book is the culmination of that evolution, which concludes with the Sinai experience/the *Torah* being given to the Jewish people.”

The *Torah* begins, “*Bereishis bara Elokeem* – In the beginning G-d created...” The *Midrash* explains that the word “*Bereishis*” is alluding to the fact that, “*B'shvil Reishis bara Elokeem...* – for the sake of ‘the choicest’ (which is *Torah*) G-d created Heaven and Earth...” The term “*Bereishis*” also alludes to the Jewish people who are the chosen people/choicest and who will receive the *Torah* at Sinai. G-d created existence for the sake of the *Torah* and the Jewish people. In order for them to be worthy and qualified to receive the *Torah*, they needed to experience

the purging process of the Egyptian exile. Thus, the Second Book is a continuation and culmination of the First.

It is interesting to note that four fifths of the Jewish people perished during the days of darkness, which befell Egypt during the plagues. Why did they not merit redemption? The objective of the redemption from Egypt was so that the Jewish people should receive the *Torah* at Sinai. Thus, becoming G-d's chosen people. It was not to remove the shackles of bondage and be free of oppression. Since these individuals had no interest in leaving Egypt, they perished during the plague of darkness.

The Egyptian Bondage, An Outgrowth of Avraham's Question

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Nidarim* tells us that one of the reasons the Jewish people experienced the exile in Egypt was because *Avraham* had posed a question to G-d that was considered inappropriate. The *Torah* tells us that G-d had promised *Avraham* that he and his offspring would inherit the land of Canaan. The *Torah* states, “*Avraham* said, ‘My Lord, *Hashem/Elokim*: Whereby shall I know that I am (my offspring) to inherit it...And He (G-d) said to *Avraham*, ‘Know with certainty that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not their own – and they will serve them and they will oppress them...’ *Avraham* was concerned that if his offspring were to sin in the future, they would not be worthy to inherit the Land. However, G-d's promise to *Avraham* was that his progeny would inherit the Land unconditionally. Thus, *Avraham's* question/concern was unfounded. This was considered a breach of faith and required that the Jewish people should experience exile in Egypt. How did G-d's response to *Avraham*, address his failing?

After remaining in Egypt for 210 years, the Jewish people had deteriorated spiritually to a point that they had become idolaters. At the time of the splitting of the Sea, G-d had decreed that the Jewish people should safely pass between the walls of water, while the Egyptian army was being destroyed. The angels questioned G-d, “Why are You destroying the Egyptians and not the Jewish people? These

(Egyptians) are idolaters and these (the Jewish people) are idolaters." Meaning, the Jewish people were as much deserving of destruction as the Egyptians for their idolatrous behavior.

The *Torah* states, "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef." *Rashi* explains that the king of Egypt did not know Yosef because he was in fact a new king (different person) or the king of Egypt was actually the Pharaoh who did know Yosef; however, he acted as if he did not know him. *Kli Yakar* explains this verse differently, "The king of Egypt did not 'know Yosef' because he was unaware of what had transpired between Yosef and his brothers. Yosef's brothers attempted to destroy him, nullify his dreams, and not allow them to come to fruition (that they would bow to him one day).

However, despite all of their efforts Yosef's dreams came true. It was the Will of G-d to advance Yosef and bring him to an exalted position and nothing could interfere with the Will of G-d. Similarly, G-d had said that the Jewish people would increase in number and ultimately be redeemed from Egypt; however, Pharaoh attempted to stifle their growth and keep them in bondage. Despite all of his efforts, he was unable to interfere with their destiny. Just as nothing could interfere with Yosef's destiny, so too nothing could interfere with the destiny of the Jewish people."

Yosef was the model/profile of the Jewish people. He, like his father *Yaakov*, was the prototype of the Jew in exile. Despite the fact that the Jew is in exile and subject to many obstacles, hardships, and casualties (in the physical and spiritual sense), he nevertheless ultimately survives and flourishes. Pharaoh did not know/appreciate that this was the essence of Yosef nor did he know it was the essence of the Jewish people.

Avraham was concerned that if the Jewish people would sin, they would no longer be worthy to inherit the Land. In response to this, G-d exiled the Jewish people to Egypt where they were subject to bondage and oppression. They became idolaters and as the verse in *Yechezkel* states, "They were stripped naked (devoid of any *mitzvos*)." The Jewish people seemingly had no worthiness to be redeemed from Egypt. Despite this, G-d gave them the *mitzvah* of

"*dam Pesach*- the blood of the Pascal Lamb" and "*dam milah* – blood of circumcision" and thus had merit to be redeemed from Egypt.

Fifty days after the exodus, the Jewish people stood at Sinai and declared, "*Naaseh V'Nishmah* – we will do and we will listen" to receive the *Torah*, G-d's most precious commodity. This demonstrated that despite the fact that the Jewish people had fallen to the depths of spiritual debasement through being acculturated in Egypt, their essence remained intact and unaffected. Thus, they were able to ascend and be worthy of becoming G-d's people.

G-d's response demonstrated that *Avraham's* understanding of the Jewish people was inaccurate. Through the Egyptian bondage, it was indicated that although the Jewish people had fallen to the depths of spirituality, their recovery and rehabilitation was (relatively speaking) immediate. Thus, even if the Jewish people should sin and fail, they still have relevance to the Land of *Canaan*, which will be ultimately the Land of Israel – *Eretz Ha'Kiddoshah* (the Holy Land).

The Innate Negative Characteristic of Man

The *Torah* states, "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef." *Rashi* cites two opinions regarding this verse. One interpretation is that truly a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef. The other interpretation is that it was the same king, however with a new mandate. The meaning of "who did know Yosef" is that the king acted as if he did not know Yosef.

Daas Zikainim Baali Tosafos cite a *Midrash* which states, "*Reb Yehudah Ben Levy* gives us an understanding of the words "who did not know Yosef" with an allegory. A person had stoned the image of the king and was not punished for his behavior. The following day the same individual stoned the king himself. Initially Pharaoh did know Yosef, then ultimately he said, "I do not know G-d." How does the *Midrash* equate the allegory of the individual who stoned the image of the king with Pharaoh not knowing Yosef and ultimately denying G-d's

existence? When the individual stoned the image of the king, it a clear indication that he had no regard for the king himself. Since he was not restrained after disgracing the honor of the king, he chose to go to the next level and disgrace the king himself. However, regarding not recognizing Yosef, seemingly this has no relevance to not recognizing G-d.

It is interesting to note that one does not immediately deny G-d's existence. It evolves through a gradual conditioning process which one undergoes that begins with denying that he is a beneficiary of the good that was done on his behalf by others. The same individual, because he is not willing to recognize that he should be beholden to others, will ultimately deny that he is a beneficiary of G-d's Goodness. Pharaoh should have been beholden to Yosef. His level of indebtedness to him and his family should have been unwavering and permanent. Had it not been for Yosef, Egypt would have perished with the famine. It was only because of Yosef's genius and astuteness did Egypt become the provider for the entire world. Egypt, through the sale of the grain, amassed the wealth of the world. Rather than being beholden to Yosef, Pharaoh subjugated his family to bondage.

A person, although he may be the beneficiary of the goodness of others, is able to enter into a state of denial, which allows him to evade that reality in order to accommodate his own agenda. Despite the fact that it was undeniably clear that Yosef had benefited Egypt more than any other individual, Pharaoh chose to ignore this because of his own insecurities.

G-d provides man with his total existence. It is undeniable that all existence emanates from Him and is sustained by His Goodness. Yet it is possible for one to ignore this fact because of one's own conflicts of interest whatever they may be. This conditioning process, which brings the individual to a level to even deny G-d, begins with one's evading the fact that he is a beneficiary of the kindness of others. This is the analogy stated by *Reb Yehudah Ben Levy*, who explained that it begins with the stoning of the image of the king and concludes with the stoning of the king himself. Identically the denial of G-d begins with one not feeling beholden to others and ultimately concludes with not having

any sense of being beholden to G-d. Thus, Pharaoh was the ultimate ingrate.

It is within the natural makeup of man to have the ability to acknowledge and recognize G-d through the reality of existence or despite that to reject Him. The *Torah* tells us that after *Adam* had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, G-d had asked him, "Why did you eat of the fruit of the Tree?" He replied, "It is the woman that You gave me..." – implying that it was only because G-d had provided that woman that *Adam* sinned. In essence, *Adam* transferred blame to G-d for his own sin. When G-d had created *Chava*, He had done so only because it was necessary for *Adam* to have a counterpart and helpmate. After *Adam's* response to G-d, He said to *Adam*, "You are an ingrate." After G-d had provided *Adam* with all of his needs and accommodated him with a wife (who is a necessity in his life to succeed), he did not acknowledge the Good and furthermore, he blamed G-d for his failing. It is in the fabric of mankind, because of their conflicts of interest, to resist seeing reality for what it is in order to accommodate their own agenda. Thus, man is by nature an individual driven by self-interest, causing him to be an ingrate.

The *Torah* tells us that G-d had provided the Jewish people with the Manna in the desert, which was a spiritual food that accommodated their every nutritional need. Because of the Manna, the Jewish people were fully sated and protected against any type of disease or illness. It was absorbed into their organs so that they did not need to do any bodily functions. However rather than expressing their gratitude to G-d for what He had provided, they complained vociferously, "What is this light food that You have given us? Perhaps we may ultimately die from it!" The *Gemara* in Tractate *Avoda Zorah* tells us that G-d responded, "You are ingrates the children of an ingrate."

G-d was enraged by their behavior because this negative characteristic of being an ingrate/denying that one is the beneficiary of the good, will ultimately lead them to deny the existence of G-d. Pharaoh, because he was unwilling to acknowledge the goodness of Yosef, ultimately denied the existence of G-d.

The Intensification of the Bondage

The *Torah* states, “Yosef died, and all his brothers and that entire generation. The Children of Israel were fruitful, teemed (*va'yishretzu*), increased, and became strong – very, very much so...” The *Torah* continues, “A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef.” *Sforno* explains “*va'yishretzu*” to mean that after the generation of Yosef had passed away, the Jewish people began to behave inappropriately – similar to rodents “*sheratzim*” (pejorative term for improper behavior). *Sforno* states, “Although Yosef’s contribution to the survival of Egypt was part of their history, after his death, Pharaoh did not acknowledge Yosef’s contribution and enslaved his people. After the passing of Yosef and his brothers, the generation that followed had no semblance to that which preceded it. The Jewish people had left the path of spirituality to pursue the material. They had given up their spiritual posture. Thus, Pharaoh had no conscience when he chose to enslave Yosef’s descendents.” Yosef and his brothers lived on a spiritual plane, which clearly quantified them as G-d’s people. However, the generation that followed them is compared to the rodent – completely devoid of spiritual perspective.

The *Torah* states, “...They (the Egyptians) embittered their (the Jewish people) lives.” *Sforno* explains, “When the Jewish people further deteriorated spiritually, the Egyptians increased their level of bondage. The Prophet tells us that the Jewish people did not cast away idolatry...Therefore the wrath of G-d was unleashed upon them.” It is interesting to note that typically when one experiences difficulties in his life, rather than introspecting to understand the cause of the problem, he points outwardly to assign blame. The individual wants to deny that he is in fact the cause of his own situation.

Chazal tell us that *Avraham* was initially destined to live 180 years; however, G-d deducted five years of his life because He promised *Avraham* that he would pass away in a “good old age”. If *Avraham* were to have lived to 180, he would have witnessed the day that *Esav* committed five cardinal sins. It would have been in contradiction to G-d’s promise of passing away in a “good old age.” *Avraham* would have been anguished to know that his grandson is in fact evil.

The *Torah* tells that when *Esav* had returned weary and exhausted from the field, he came upon *Yaakov* cooking a pot of lentils. The *Midrash* tells us that when he entered into his home he noticed that *Yaakov*’s face was soiled with soot as he was preparing the lentils. *Esav* asked him, “What has happened?” *Yaakov* answered, “Our grandfather has passed away.” *Esav*’s reaction was, “There is no justice and there is no Judge!” Thus, he denied G-d’s relevance to existence. *Esav* understood that *Avraham*, his grandfather, was meant to live 180 years. When *Avraham* passed away at the age of 175, *Esav* questioned G-d’s Justice. The irony is that the answer to *Esav*’s question is found within himself.

Esav chose to be a *rasha* (an evil person). In essence, he was the cause of his grandfather’s demise. When he chose to commit five cardinal sins on the day of *Avraham*’s passing, G-d was forced to cause *Avraham* to die before his time. *Esav* became a heretic and denounced G-d because he believed his grandfather died prematurely when in fact he was the cause of *Avraham* losing five years of his life. *Esav* essentially brought about his own spiritual demise and turned G-d into the culprit.

Most people do not understand and appreciate why difficulties and complications come upon them. They believe that their suffering and setbacks are undeserved. When a person does not accurately evaluate himself and believes that he is undeserving of punishment he will feel that G-d is being unfair. Ironically, the basis for his disillusionment with G-d is only a consequence of his own unwillingness/denial to recognize who he really is. One is most often the cause of his own negative predicament. This is what actually happened to the Jewish people when their lives were “embittered.”

The Privilege of Choice

The *Torah* states at the beginning of the Portion of *Bo*, “*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, “Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the hearts of his servants stubborn ...” When *Moshe* and *Aaron* approached Pharaoh to ask him to release the Jewish people, the *Torah* states, “*Moshe* and *Aaron* came to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘So, said *Hashem*, G-d of the Hebrews:

Until when will you refuse to be humbled before Me? Send out My people..." The *Torah* states in one verse that G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart and in the following verse *Moshe* says to Pharaoh – "until when will you refuse to humble yourself before G-d'." The *Torah* is telling us that the basis for Pharaoh's rejection of all the previous events was because he was not willing to acknowledge G-d due to his own lack of humility. Seemingly, we are able to understand this within the context of measure for measure. Just as he was not willing to soften his heart to G-d, G-d in turn hardened his heart.

Rambam writes in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (the Laws of Repentance) that Pharaoh had forfeited his power of free choice. *Rambam* states that if one believes that the classification of "tzaddik (righteous)" or "rasha (evil)" is predetermined, thus indicating that man has no free choice, he is a fool. Every individual is born with the ability to choose between good and evil. Thus, there is culpability for one's choice if he has done evil, and is fully deserving if he has chosen to do good. *Rambam* asks if one is only culpable for doing evil because he had the choice to refrain from evil, then why was Pharaoh culpable for enslaving and withholding the Jewish people if G-d hardened his heart? *Rambam* explains that initially Pharaoh did have the ability to choose between right and wrong but because he had become so evil, G-d revoked his ability to choose. This is the meaning of "I (G-d) have hardened his heart." Although Pharaoh's continued perpetration of evil was not within his control, he is held fully accountable for that behavior because it was his choice not to have choice.

It is interesting to note that although from the sixth plague onwards Pharaoh no longer had free choice because G-d had hardened his heart, nevertheless, regarding each consecutive plague the *Torah* again tells us that G-d hardened his heart. If Pharaoh had forfeited his ability to choose after this sixth plague, then why was it necessary for the G-d to continue to revoke his ability to make the proper choice?

Avraham, our Patriarch, was presented with ten tests by G-d. Each of the tests was progressively more difficult and built upon the previous one to develop *Avraham's* understanding of G-d and give him internal strength and resolve. If *Avraham* was first to be tested

with the *Akeidah* (binding of *Yitzchak*), which was the most difficult of the tests, he would have probably failed. It was only after he developed through his trials and tribulations a greater understanding of G-d that he was able to succeed with the *Akeidah*.

Similarly, the plagues that came upon Egypt occurred in a specific progression of increasing levels of revelation. They each touched upon and affected another aspect of existence. Each one of them revealed another dimension of G-d's ability. Initially the Egyptians understood the plagues as being sorcery/witchcraft. However, when they experienced the third plague of lice, the sorcerers declared, "It is the finger of G-d!" When the seventh plague came upon Egypt, Pharaoh was impressed to the point that he declared, "...I have sinned; *Hashem* is the Righteous One..." The plague of hail was obviously not rooted in witchcraft or nature since two contradictory forces were able to coexist simultaneously. The plague of hail was comprised of water and fire. With each of the plagues Pharaoh came to a new understanding of G-d. Each plague had the potential to bring him to a greater level of clarity and understanding of G-d. Thus, with each new level of clarity and understanding, it was necessary for G-d to revoke his power of choice at that level.

The *Torah* tells us that it was Pharaoh's refusal to "humble" himself before G-d that caused his heart to be hardened. The *Gemara* tells us that regarding a person who is arrogant and haughty, G-d says, "The world is not large enough to contain you and I." In order for one to merit a relationship with G-d one must be humble. If one is arrogant, G-d withdraws from that individual. The *Gemara* in Tractate *Kiddushin* tells us that if it were not for G-d's intervention and assistance to deal with one's evil inclination, it would be impossible to survive spiritually. Because of one's conflicts of interests and natural tendencies/drives, one needs Divine assistance in order to triumph over one's inclinations.

After being exposed to the first five plagues, which are classified as "revealed miracles," one should naturally acknowledge G-d's power. However, because of his arrogance, Pharaoh rejected G-d and behaved as if G-d did not exist. Thus, Pharaoh's rejection of G-d at that point was the ultimate display

of arrogance. G-d therefore disassociated Himself from Pharaoh. Consequently, Pharaoh no longer had the power of choice. Therefore, it was not necessary for G-d to be proactive in hardening Pharaoh's heart, but rather it was because of his own arrogance that his heart was hardened.

The Importance of the Status of the Jew Before Redemption

The *Torah* states, "Hashem said to Moshe, '...Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow to borrow silver vessels and gold vessels.' Hashem granted the people favor in the eyes of Egypt; moreover, the man Moshe was very great in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of the servants of Pharaoh and the eyes of the people." The *Torah* tells us that G-d communicated to Moshe to "please" speak to the Jewish people to borrow the valuables of the Egyptians. The *Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos* tells us that the *Torah* uses the term "please" to indicate that Moshe needed to beseech the people to do so.

The *Gemara* explains that the reason Moshe needed to plead with the Jewish people to comply with his request was so that both aspects of the promise made by G-d to Avraham, our Patriarch, would be fulfilled. The *Gemara* states, "So that Avraham, the *tzaddik*, should not say that the decree – they shall be enslaved and afflicted for 400 years - was fulfilled and – afterwards they would go out with great wealth - was not fulfilled. The people said to Moshe, "We are not interested in wealth. We have been in bondage for 210 years and want to leave as soon as possible with our lives. All we want is to be released." Thus, Moshe needed to beseech the Jewish people to borrow the precious possession of the Egyptians.

It is interesting to note that the reason Chazal tell us that Moshe had to beseech the Jews to borrow the wealth from the Egyptians was so that "Avraham, the *tzaddik*" should not have a claim against G-d. Chazal could have simply said that the reason the Jewish people needed to borrow was to fulfill the promise that G-d had made to Avraham – that they will leave with great wealth. How do we understand this?

The *Torah* tells us that G-d caused the Jewish people "to find favor in the eyes" of the Egyptians. In addition, Moshe was made to have special status in the eyes of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. It is only after the Jewish people and Moshe assumed "favorable" status did they borrow. Why was it necessary for G-d to cause them to assume a special status as a prerequisite to the borrowing? The Jews could have taken the wealth without special status because G-d had already devastated and humiliated Egypt through nine of the ten plagues. What then is the significance of the Jewish people finding "special favor/charm" in the eyes of the Egyptians?

If the Jewish people had been seen by the nations of the world as renegades/fugitives/escapees, who plundered the wealth of their masters and fled bondage, it would not have been a *Kiddush Hashem* (Sanctification of G-d's Name). Avraham, our Patriarch dedicated his life to bringing about *Kiddush Hashem*. The only reason the Jewish people needed to be exiled to Egypt was to purge them of the failing of Avraham – who had asked G-d an inappropriate question. It was a *Chilul Hashem* (desecration of G-d's Name) that the Egyptians should enslave the Jewish people – the descendents of the man who introduced monotheism into existence – and ultimately forfeit their heritage/belief in G-d. In order to bring about a proper correction for the *Chilul Hashem* that had transpired because of Avraham's failing, the Jewish people needed to leave Egypt in a manner that would bring about the ultimate *Kiddush Hashem* to reflect Avraham's lifelong commitment to G-d's Glory.

It was public knowledge that G-d Himself destroyed Egypt on behalf of His people – the Jews. This awareness was a *Kiddush Hashem*. Despite the fact that G-d had destroyed Egypt, the Egyptians willingly gave their precious belongings to the Jews because they were perceived as special – even though they were the chattel of the Egyptians for 210 years. Thus, the world will see the Jews as special.

The Jewish people left Egypt not as a downtrodden band of slaves, but rather as a valued people of great status and prestige. This was a *Kiddush Hashem*. Thus, we can understand the reason Moshe needed to beseech the Jewish people to borrow the precious belongings of the Egyptians.

The Setting for Kiddush Hashem

The *Torah* states, “*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, ‘...Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow to borrow silver vessels and gold vessels...’” The *Torah* tells us that G-d commanded *Moshe* to “Please” speak to the Jewish people to tell them to borrow the silver and gold vessels of the Egyptians. Evidently, by needing to say “please” *Moshe* need to beseech the Jewish people to borrow the wealth of the Egyptians. Without his beseeching, the Jewish people would not have wanted to borrow the wealth.

Sforno explains that the reason *Moshe* needed to beseech the Jewish people was because, “The Jewish people thought, ‘If we simply leave with our own belongings, the Egyptians will not pursue us. However if we borrow all of their wealth and leave the Egyptian never to return, they will pursue us. Thus it is better not to ask to borrow the wealth.’” Thus *Moshe* needed to plead with the Jewish people to borrow the wealth of the Egyptians.

Sforno continues, “G-d said to *Moshe*, “Please speak to the Jewish people to beseech them to borrow the wealth, because it is in only through this that the salvation will come about.” Meaning, what seemed to be not in the best interest of the Jewish people was in fact what brought about the ultimate salvation. The Jewish people borrowed the wealth as per *Moshe*’s pleading and they were pursued by the Egyptians just as they had feared. If they had not taken the wealth, Pharaoh would not have been able to motivate his people to pursue the Jewish people. G-d had already devastated Egypt on their behalf. However, since the Jewish people had taken that which was most precious to the Egyptians, they were pursued. How did this bring about the ultimate salvation?

The greatest miracle of the exodus was the splitting of the Sea. Had the Jewish people not taken the valuables, the Egyptians would not have pursued them and there would not have been a need to split the Sea. The revelation at the splitting of the Sea was at such an advanced level that even the prophet *Yechezkel* did not merit to see what the maidservant saw at the splitting of the Sea. If the Jewish people had not taken the valuables, they would not have been

privy to such a level of revelation. All of the events of the exodus were in preparation for the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai, which was the ultimate salvation. Every experience that the Jewish people had during the exodus was to advance their spirituality in order to make them worthy and give them the greatest capacity to be taken as G-d’s people at Sinai.

Chazal tell us that at Sinai when G-d spoke to the Jewish people, each person prophesized to the level of his own spiritual capacity. Thus, the greater the capacity the more advanced and profound is the level of understanding of the transmission of the *Torah*. If the splitting of the Sea had not occurred, the Sinai event would not have been at that advanced spiritual level. The Jewish people had experienced such a profound level of revelation of G-d’s Presence at the splitting of the Sea that they were able to point and say, “This is my G-d!” Thus, although the Jewish people were initially terrified by the prospect of the Egyptians pursuing them, it was because of their borrowing the wealth that they experienced the ultimate salvation at Sinai in the most advanced state.

Chazal tell us that G-d interacts with the world in the manner of “measure for measure.” The Egyptians were drowned in the Sea because they killed the firstborn Jewish males by drowning them in the Nile – measure for measure. The revelation of Divine Justice in the world is a *Kiddush Hashem* (Sanctification of G-d’s Name). The measure for measure punishment that was brought upon the Egyptians at the Sea was a testament to the world that there is a Judge and there is Justice. The world is not a random stream of events but rather the Omnipotent Being directs every aspect of existence.

The splitting of the Sea was not only beneficial for the spiritual development of the Jewish people as a preparation for Sinai, but also it was a *Kiddush Hashem* as a testament of G-d’s Justice. Even the most advanced civilization in the world was subject to Divine Justice and could not outwit G-d. Thus, *Moshe* needed to beseech the Jewish people to borrow the wealth because despite the fact that the pursuit of the Egyptians was inevitable, it would bring about the ultimate salvation and *Kiddush Hashem*.

The Innate Difference Between the Jewish People and the Nations of the World

The *Torah* states, “Hashem said to Moshe, “...I shall harden the heart of Pharaoh so that I may multiply My signs and My wonders upon Egypt...Pharaoh will not heed you, and I shall put My hand upon Egypt.” *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain, “G-d said, ‘It is known to Me that when the nations of the world do *teshuvah* (repent) they will not do so with a whole heart. It is better that I harden their hearts so that I should have the opportunity to increase My signs (miracles) so that the Jewish people should recognize My strength.’ G-d brings tragedy and destruction upon the nations of the world so that the Jewish people should take notice and fear Him. As it is written, “I have cut down nations and made their corners desolate so that you should take *mussar* (reproach).”

Sifsei Chachamim explain *Rashi*, “G-d said, ‘If I do not harden the heart of Pharaoh, he and the Egyptians will definitely do *teshuvah*. However, it is revealed before Me that it will not be a complete *teshuvah* with a full heart. If I should bring further plagues and tragedies upon them, mankind will say – ‘This is the way of G-d, that he brings destruction upon those who do *teshuvah*.’ They will not realize that it is only because they did not do a complete *teshuvah*. Therefore, I will harden the heart of Pharaoh so that he should not do *teshuvah* of any sort, thus avoiding a desecration of My Name.”

When one does not do a complete *teshuvah*, G-d will bring upon him further punishment to purge him of his spiritual impurity to bring him to the realization that his *teshuvah* was not complete. However because the nations of the world do not perceive the possibility of punishment in this context, G-d will not allow them to begin the *teshuvah* process.

Chazal tell us that when King Solomon built the *Bais HaMikdash* (Temple) he prayed to G-d that when the non-Jew comes to pray on the Temple mount, his prayers should be received regardless of his level of worthiness. This is so he should not accuse G-d of being unfair. However, regarding the Jewish people, G-d should only respond to the prayers of those who are worthy. It is because the Jew will understand

that if G-d does not respond to his requests and supplications, it is due to his unworthiness.

The *Midrash* tells that there is no nation in the history of existence that G-d began to punish that was not ultimately destroyed. The reason for this is the more G-d inflicts punishment upon them, the more they became enraged and defiant with G-d. They believed that they were undeserving of punishment. As a result of their increased rejection of G-d, they ultimately had to be destroyed. The Jew, on the other hand, when tragedy and suffering befall him, will ultimately introspect and reflect on his past behavior. This is a fundamental and innate difference between the way the Jew and the non-Jew process each of their own realities.

It is interesting to note that in the Portion of *Haazinu* the *Torah* states, “G-d says, ‘My arrows will be expended from My quiver (inferring that the Jewish people will not be expended).’” *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain this with an allegory. It is similar to an archer who shoots his arrows at a secure beam. Eventually all his arrows will be expended but the beam remains standing and intact. So too, despite the difficulties and suffering that G-d will bring upon His people (to do *teshuvah*), they will not be destroyed through punishment. Rather, they will introspect and bring themselves to a point of reinstatement. This is not the case with the non-Jew. The Sanctification of G-d’s Name (*Kiddush Hashem*) in Egypt was as a result of the non-Jew not understanding that even if he had done *teshuvah*, it would not have been sufficiently complete. They would have not understood that their difficulties were because of their own shortcomings.

When G-d offered the *Torah* to the nations of the world at Sinai, their response to G-d was, “What is written in it?” They were not willing to accept its dictates unless they knew in advance that it did not conflict with their own interests. When G-d told the Edomites (*Esav*) that the *Torah* contains the commandment “Thou shall not kill,” they responded, “We cannot accept the *Torah* since it is contrary to the blessing that we received from our grandfather *Yitzchak*- that we are to live by the sword.” Thus, they rejected it.

If G-d had told them that the *Torah* contained the *mitzvah* of honoring one’s father and mother, which

was the commandment *Esav* observed meticulously, the Edomites would have agreed to accept the *Torah*. However, the basis for their acceptance would have been to fulfill their own interest rather than submitting to the word of G-d. On the other hand, the Jewish people unequivocally declared, “*Naaseh v’nishma* – we will do and we will listen,” when they were offered the *Torah*. The basis for their acceptance of the *Torah* was that it was the Will of G-d. Their needs and conflicts of interest were not relevant at that moment. The Jew has the ability to see beyond his own circumstances and evaluate the moment correctly even if it means to recognize his own shortcoming.

The Eternity of The Jewish People Rooted in G-d

The *Torah* tells us in the Portion of *Shemos* that *Hashem* instructed *Moshe* to present himself to Pharaoh and request that the Jews be released from their bondage. The *Torah* states, “Afterwards *Moshe* and *Aaron* came and said to Pharaoh, ‘So said *Hashem*(YKVK), the G-d of Israel, Send out My people that they may celebrate for Me in the wilderness.’” Pharaoh replied, “Who is *Hashem* (YKVK) that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know *Hashem*, nor will I send out Israel!” The *Midrash* tells us that when Pharaoh was told that “*Hashem*, the G-d of Israel” wanted the Jews to be released, he immediately consulted his book of deities but did not locate the deity of “YKVK (the four letter Name of G-d)-*Hashem*” listed. Pharaoh thus responded to *Moshe*, “I do not know *Hashem*.” *Moshe* then said to Pharaoh, “The G-d of the Hebrews (*Elokei Ha’Ivrim*) happened upon us...”

It is interesting to note the different appellations for G-d used by *Moshe* and their significance. When *Moshe* initially presented himself to Pharaoh he used the appellation “YKVK – *Hashem*” in conjunction with the Jewish people being referred to as “*Yisroel*-the Children of Israel.” However after Pharaoh’s response, *Moshe* changed his presentation as the agent of the “G-d of the Hebrews *Elokei Ha’Ivrim*” He no longer used the appellation of “YKVK,” and the Jewish people were referred to as the “Hebrews” and not “*Yisroel*.” How do we understand this?

In the Portion of *Va’eira* before the plague of Blood, the *Torah* states, “*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, ‘Go to Pharaoh...You shall say to him, *Hashem* (YKVK), the G-d of the Hebrews (*Elokei Ha’Ivrim*), has sent me to you, saying: Send out My people...So says *Hashem*, Through this shall you know that I am *Hashem*; behold, with the staff that is in my hand I shall strike the waters that are in the River, and they shall change to blood. The fish that are in the water shall die...” In this context the appellation for G-d is “*Hashem*(YKVK)”; however, regarding His relationship to the Jewish people He is identified as “*Elokei Ha’Ivrim*- G-d of the Hebrews.” What is the significance of these changes of reference to G-d?

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the title for the monarch of Egypt was always “Pharaoh.” This appellation contains the Hebrew letters “*ayin, pay, raish*” which spells the word “*aafar* – dust/earth.” The Egyptian people believed that existence was limited to the physical and the powers at hand/ deities were purely to maintain physical existence. They rejected the belief of a spiritual realm, which transcends physical existence. Thus it is befitting that the king of the Egyptian people, who epitomized the essence of his people, is given the title of “Pharaoh” which connotes earthiness and physicality.

The appellation “YKVK-*Hashem*,” which denotes “I was, I am, and I will be,” identifies G-d as the Infinite and Omnipotent Being. The concept of an infinite G-d who is not bound by nature and who transcends existence was something that was rejected by Pharaoh. This is the meaning of his initial response to *Moshe*, “Who is *Hashem* (YKVK) that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know *Hashem* (YKVK), nor will I send out Israel!” There is no such Being or Power that goes beyond the finite.

When the *Torah* refers to the Jewish people as “*Yisroel*” or “*B’nei Yisroel*” it is using the appellation that was given to *Yaakov* after he had wrestled with and defeated the angel. He had dominated the physical and spiritual, thus establishing himself as the one who transcends the constraints of physicality. *Yaakov* was thus given the name “*Yisroel*” which connotes the eternal person, who has relevance to the infinite. Thus, the *Torah* initially refers to the Jewish people as “*Yisroel*” within the context of “*Hashem*(YKVK)” to

indicate that the Jewish people have relevance to the Being who is YKVK – the Infinite/Eternal Being. The basis for the Jewish people being an eternal people is because of their relationship and connection to *Hashem* (YKVK). Just as *Hashem* cannot be quantified; so too the Jewish people cannot be quantified. As G-d had promised *Avraham*, the Jewish people will be as numerous as “the stars in the heaven” and “the sands on the seashore.” This quantification of the Jewish people is not in a quantitative sense; but rather, in a qualitative sense. This is the reason the actual number of the Jewish people has always been insignificant (regarding our physical existence) vis-à-vis the nations of the world.

After Pharaoh rejected *Moshe*’s presentation of his credentials as the agent of “YKVK,” he refers to G-d as “*Elokei Ha’Ivrim*- G-d of the Hebrews” because Pharaoh could not accept the reality of the Infinite. The appellation “*Elokei Ha’Ivrim*” simple means “the Power/Deity behind the people who came from the other side of the river (*Ivrim*).” In terms of the Jews as a physical people, *Moshe* refers to their G-d and them as “*Elokei Ha’Ivrim*” which was a term and identification that Pharaoh would accept and consider.

In the Portion of *Va’eira* the *Torah* uses both appellations for G-d before the onset of the plague of Blood- “*Hashem* (YKVK), the G-d of the Hebrews (*Elokei Ha’Ivrim*)” to indicate that if Pharaoh did not release the Jewish people (no different than other physical nations) he would be punished by *Hashem* (YKVK) – the Infinite Being who transcends the laws of nature. *Sforno* explains that sorcery and witchcraft can only change the appearance of nature. It cannot change its essence. The sorcerers and magicians of Egypt were able to change the appearance and texture of the water to seem that it had assumed the properties of blood. However, its essence remained water. The *Torah* states that *Moshe* had said, “...I shall strike the waters that are in the River, and they shall change to blood. The fish that are in the water shall die...” to indicate that when *Hashem* (YKVK) changed the water to blood, its essence was also changed. *Sforno* explains that the additional verse, “The fish that are in the water shall die...” is to qualify that the change to blood was not merely visual but an actual transformation.

Moshe initially was communicating to Pharaoh that the Jewish people were physical beings only because of their circumstance; however, their essence was spiritual with relevance to the Infinite and Omnipotent Being – YKVK (*Hashem*). Despite the fact that Pharaoh could not believe in such a Being, he would be compelled to accept this belief through the plague of Blood – because it is only the Creator of the Universe (the Omnipotent One) who could transform water into blood.

Appreciating G-d’s Mercy

The Portion of *Va’eira* begins, “*V’yadaber Elokim* - G-d spoke to *Moshe* and said to him, “I am *Hashem*...” *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain, the Portion begins with the appellation of “*Elokim*” because it connotes the Attribute of Justice. At the end of the previous Portion, the straw subsidy that was provided by the Egyptian government (as one of the materials needed to manufacture bricks) was withdrawn from the Jewish people. However the same quota that was demanded of them until time was not reduced- despite the fact that the Jews themselves needed to gather their own straw for the manufacturing of the bricks. *Moshe* said to *Hashem*, “My Lord, why have You done bad to this people? Why have You sent me?” *Hashem* responded to *Moshe*, “Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh...”

The *Midrash* tells us that the word “Now” in the verse infers that *Moshe* would only “now” witness the redemption and exodus from Egypt but will not merit to bring the Jewish people into the Promised Land/ *Canaan*. Because *Moshe* had no right to express himself in the manner that he had, he forfeited the right to enter into the Land. Thus, *Moshe* is addressed by G-d as “*Elokim*” to indicate he was being judged by the Attribute of Justice. Additionally the term “*V’yadaber*- spoke” is a more formal manner of speech than “*vayomer*-said.” G-d was communicating to *Moshe* in a most formal manner.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the verse which concludes with the words “I am *Hashem*,” indicates that *Hashem* is the G-d of Mercy. Meaning what *Moshe* had depicted and understood as having done “bad” to the Jewish people, as an expression

as His Attribute of Justice, was in fact an expression of His Attribute of Mercy. The Jewish people were meant to be in Egypt for 400 years as G-d had said to *Avraham* our Patriarch. However, because of the intensity of suffering, the bondage was reduced to 210 years. Thus, the withdrawal of the straw subsidy was in fact an expression of G-d's Mercy because it shortened their stay in Egypt. *Moshe* should have recognized this as mercy and not questioned G-d as he had done.

The *Midrash Tanchuma* explains that *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov* did not question *Hashem* although He did not reveal His Name (YKVK) to them. However, *Hashem* did reveal His Name (YKVK) to *Moshe* and he did question Him. Thus because of this failing, *Moshe* would only witness the initial redemption but would not enter into the Promised Land. The *Midrash* concludes, "*Moshe* was judged with the Attribute of Justice – as the verse states, '*V'yadaber Elokim - G-d spoke to Moshe...*'" However the Jewish people were judged with the Attribute of Mercy as the verse states, "*I am Hashem.*" Meaning, although *Moshe* was not worthy of the Attribute of Mercy, nevertheless, the ultimate redemption would only come through the Attribute of Mercy.

One could think that the Jewish people, although they are undeserving, succeed because of their leaders. However, this is not the case. It is true that without a person who did not have the qualifications of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, the redemption could not have taken place. However, *Moshe* was only able to evolve into the special person that he was only because he was needed to be the one to take the Jews out of Egypt. Since Jewish people needed to be redeemed they needed a qualified Redeemer. The emphasis is not on the Redeemer – it is on the merit and worthiness of those who are to be redeemed. The Jewish people themselves have merit because of their Patriarchs (*Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*) and thus *Hashem* will always provide them with a qualified Redeemer.

The Objective of the Plagues

The *Torah* states regarding the Plague of Frogs, "*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, Say to *Aaron*, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers...and raise

up the frogs over the land of Egypt.'" The *Torah* tells us that the frogs had pervaded all of Egypt – the houses, the land, and even entered into the innards of the Egyptian people. The plague reached an intolerable level. Pharaoh summoned *Moshe* to request of him to remove the plague. *Moshe* agreed to do so saying, "It shall be as you requested – so that you will know that there is none like *Hashem*, our G-d." Meaning, the purpose of the Plague of Frogs and its subsequent removal was so that Pharaoh should "know" that there is no Being that is comparable to *Hashem*.

The *Torah* reveals the objective for the Plague of Wild Beasts and its subsequent removal. The *Torah* states, "...I shall incite against you...the swarm of wild beasts...so that you will know that I am *Hashem* in the midst of the land..." Additionally the *Torah* states regarding the Plague of Hail, "...For this time I shall send all My plagues against your heart...so that you shall know that there is none like Me in all the world..." The *Torah* makes it a point to continuously use the phrase "so that you shall know ..." It does not state, "so that you shall understand that I am G-d..." Evidently there is a difference between "knowing" and "understanding."

"Understanding" is based on intellectual reasoning and comprehension. One can develop an understanding of something through a process of reasoning. However if it should be demonstrated that one's understanding or evaluation of something was incorrect, based on false reasoning, then it would cause him to change his understanding of fact. Because "Understanding" is based on evaluation, it is thus subject to conflict of interest. However, the term "knowing" is applied and utilized in a situation that is not based on intellectual evaluation and reasoning; but rather, on fact. For example, one "knows" that if he were to put his hand into fire he would be burned. There is no need for the intellectual process to be utilized to come upon this reality. Thus, it is not subject to conflict of interest.

The *Torah* uses the term "know" and not "understand" regarding the objective of the plagues, in order to communicate that G-d's obviousness in each one of these instances was at such a revealed level that it was established as fact. Thus, G-d's Omnipotence

could not be denied. One did not require any level of intellectualism or reasoning to accept this truth.

Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states, “*Rebbe* says, “If one considers these three things he will never sin. You should know what is above you. There is a seeing eye, a listening ear, and all of your actions are recorded in a ledger...” It is interesting to note that the term used by *Rebbe* is not “you should understand” but rather “you should know.” Meaning, if one “knows” that there is a seeing eye, a listening ear, and that all of one’s actions are recorded, it is only then that one will not sin. One must live every moment of his life “knowing” that G-d and His involvement in creation is fact. If one internalizes this as a reality, he will not sin. It is only when one believes this on a conceptual level and not as fact/reality, that one’s conflicts of interests could allow him to see it differently. *Chazal* also tell us, “You should know before whom you stand.” Here again, the term “know” is used rather than understand.

The objective of the plagues of Egypt was to reveal and present to the Jewish people and the Egyptians that G-d is a reality and His omnipotence is fact. King David lived every moment of his life “knowing” that there is a G-d. G-d was always before his eyes as it is stated in *Tehillim* (Psalms), “*Hashem* is always before my eyes.” Anything that is less than “knowing” is subject to one’s conflict of interest.



Yad Avraham Institute

📍 810 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019 📧 ravkalatsky@gmail.com 📞 (212) 259-0300 YadAvNow.com