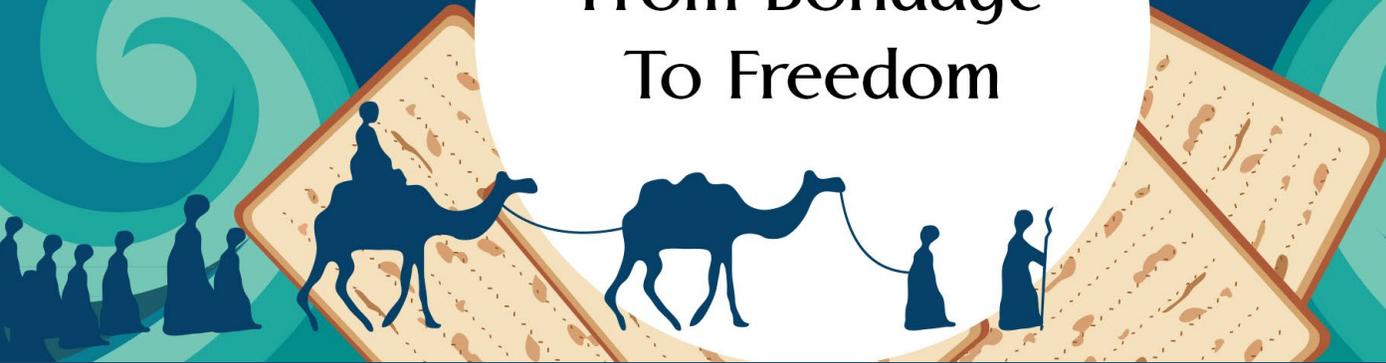


A People Evolve: From Bondage To Freedom



Pesach Video Series Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Unleashing the Forces Of Creation Through the Seder

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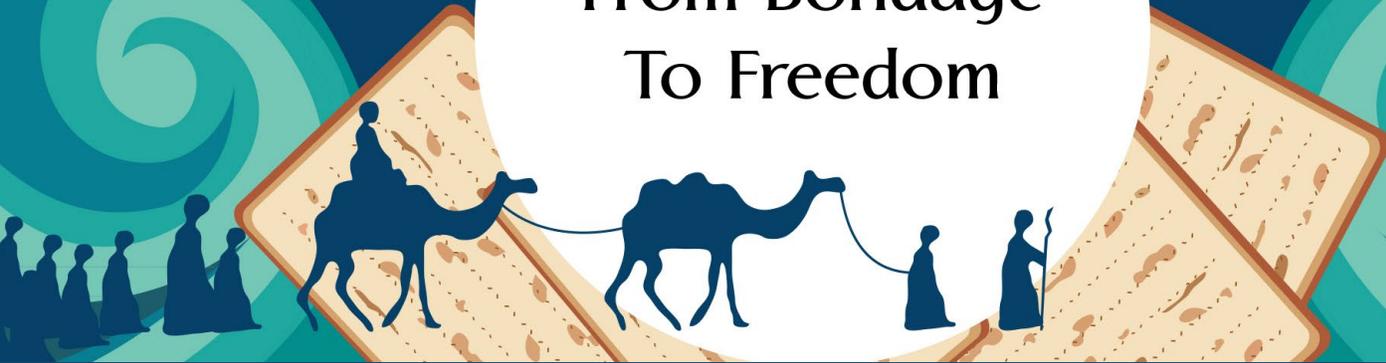
1. Jewish Holidays and Festivals are re-enactments of those original moments.
2. The initial energies & influences of these events & miracles are re-released at those particular times.
3. At the Seder we do many things that are only rabbinic:
4. Reclining to demonstrate freedom, eating bitter herbs to commemorate the embitterment of the bondage, the 4 cups of wine.
5. Ancient custom to provide for the poor: wheat for matzo and the means to purchase wine for the Seder.
6. The custom has been expanded to provide food for the Holiday for the needy.
7. Shalah Hakadosh: The Jews were not worthy of redemption because they were pagans in Egypt.
8. Due to G-d's indiscriminate kindness, they were redeemed.
9. Becoming a Jewish People is equivalent to the beginning of existence.
10. Psalms: "The world was created due to G-d's Chesed."
11. Nissan: The month of redemption. G-d unleashed forces that brought about redemption due to G-d's Chesed.
12. The Jew during the Month of Nisan displays Chesed to emulate and activate G-d's unlimited kindness.

Tracing Our DNA To Our Most Special Patriarchs

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1. Yaakov: The most special of the Patriarchs.
2. He fathered the 12 Tribes.
3. Midrash: Yaakov was given his name by G-d; the spelling contains 4 letters.
4. Each letter corresponds to a level of distinction.
5. Yud (10) corresponds to 10 commandments.
6. Ayin (70): the 70 elders.
7. Kuf (100): the height of the covered sanctuary in the Temple.
8. Beiz (2): the two tablets.
9. In the merit of Yaakov the Jews were redeemed from Egypt.
10. Avraham was redeemed from the kiln due to Yaakov.
11. The unique traits Jews possess – Compassion, Shame, conscience, and acts of loving-kindness – are attributed to Avraham.
12. We are beneficiaries of Yaakov for redeeming Avraham from the kiln.

A People Evolve: From Bondage To Freedom



Pesach Video Series

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Why Did G-d Wait?

Egypt, at the Height of its Civilization & Prowess, is Demoralized & Decimated by G-d's Intervention & Demonstration of Power. The Narrative of Exodus.

Why The Bondage?

Children are not culpable for the sins of their parents & antecedents. Why then the bondage ?

What About Choice?

What exactly is the value and objective of Man's existence? It is to make choices that are ultimately attributed to his own initiative. Pharaoh, although initially had choice, from the sixth plague, onward no longer had free choice yet is held accountable for his rejection if G-d.

The Significance of 10

What is the significance of the number 10? What was the purpose of the Ten utterances of G-d at Creation, 10 and the Chosen People? The Ten Commandments?

The Plagues: Nature or Miracle

Passover! Each plague took place over 1 week; and there was one plague per month in Egypt. Were these events "nature" or "miracles"? What did the pagans believe?

Were We Worthy Enough?

The Connection between the blood of the Pascal Lamb & the Blood of the Covenant.

Full Participation

You must be FULLY Involved. Fulfilling the Obligation of the Pascal Lamb.

Parshas Tzav



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Nighttime And Adjudication

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Holy Vestments & Consecration

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The Hand of the Cohen and Consecration

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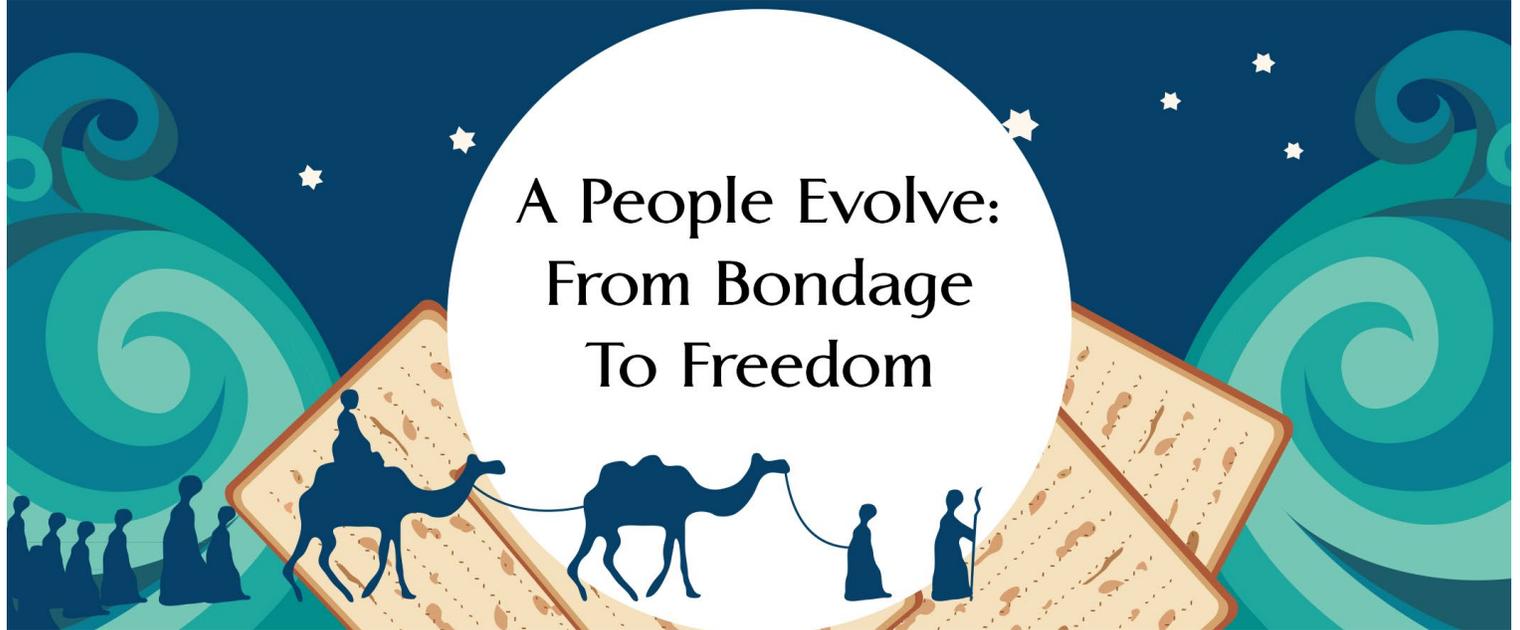
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The Chafetz Chaim

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Tzav/Pesach

A People Evolve: From Bondage To Freedom



The Objective of the Egyptian Exile

Torah: “*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: “*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 and 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: “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*.”

Midrash: 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.”

The Egyptian Bondage, An Outgrowth of Avraham's Question

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 *Toras 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.

Nitzivz'tl in his introduction to *Haamik Davar* (Commentary on *Torah*): "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? *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."

Torah: "*Bereishis bara Elokeem* – In the beginning G-d created..."

Midrash: 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.

Gemara in Tractate *Nidarim*: 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.

Torah: 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.

Torah: "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know *Yosef*."

Rashi: 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: "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

Torah: "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef."

Rashi: 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 citing a *Midrash*: "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.

Torah: 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!"

Gemara in Tractate Avoda Zorah: 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

Torah: "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..."

Torah: "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef."

Sforno: "*Va'yishretzu*" can 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). "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 descendants."

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.

Torah: "...They (the Egyptians) embittered their (the Jewish people) lives."

Sforno: "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: *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.

Torah: When *Esav* had returned wary and exhausted from the field, he came upon *Yaakov* cooking a pot of lentils.

Midrash: 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 Prerequisite to Establishing Ephraim and Manasheh as Tribes

Torah: When *Yosef* had realized that his father was ill, he brought his two sons *Ephraim* and *Manasheh* to receive a blessing. “*Yosef* took the two of them... He blessed *Yosef* and he said, ‘O G-d before Whom my forefathers *Avraham* and *Yitzchak* walked... May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers *Avraham* and *Yitzchak*, and may they proliferate abundantly like fish within the land...’”

Torah: *Yaakov* had given them an additional blessing by saying, ‘May G-d make you like *Ephraim* and like *Manasheh*’ – and he put *Ephraim* before *Manasheh*.” It is interesting to note that the *Torah* states regarding the first blessing given by *Yaakov*, “he blessed *Yosef*.” Regarding the second blessing the *Torah* states “he blessed them (*Ephraim* and *Manasheh*).” Why is the first blessing identified as a blessing to *Yosef* when in fact *Yaakov* blessed *Ephraim* and *Manasheh*?

Torah: Although *Ephraim* and *Manasheh* were the grandchildren of *Yaakov* and not his children, he gave them the same status as is sons – which were tribes of Israel. The reason they merited the equivalent status of *Yaakov*’s sons was because of *Yosef*’s unique spiritual dimension. However, regardless of their dimension of spirituality, *Ephraim* and *Manasheh* were not the sons of *Yaakov*. They were one more generation removed from each of the Patriarchs (*Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*). If this is so, how did *Yaakov* elevate their status to be the equivalent of his sons?

Yaakov’s blessing to *Yosef* was that his children should assume the status of Tribes. However, they could not assume that status unless there is a direct linkage between *Yaakov* and *Ephraim* and *Manasheh*. Thus, the blessing that he gave *Yosef* was, “...may my name be declared upon them (*Ephraim* and *Manasheh*), and the names of my forefathers *Avraham* and *Yitzchak*...” Thus, by associating his name with *Ephraim* and *Manasheh*, *Yaakov* elevated them to the status of Tribes.

The second blessing which *Yaakov* had given to *Ephraim* and *Manasheh* was directed to them – “...he blessed them...” This blessing was that they should be the conduit of blessing for the Jewish people. Before *Yosef* had revealed himself to his brothers under the guise of Viceroy, he had positioned them around his table and

had *Binyamin* sit next to him. He had said to *Binyamin*, "May G-d be gracious (*chain*) with you..." Why did *Yosef* give him such a blessing?

Torah: When *Yaakov* was confronted by brother *Esav*, *Esav* had asked, "Who are these children?" *Yaakov* responded, "These are the children with which G-d was gracious (*chananie*) to me." Regarding his children, *Yaakov* used the expression "*chanina* (graciousness)." However, since *Binyamin* had not yet been born at that moment, *Yaakov's* expression of "*chanina*" was not associated with him. Thus, when *Yosef* blessed *Binyamin* he used the expression of "*chanina*" because it was not initially applied to him. What is the value of *Yosef's* blessing of "*chanina*" to *Binyamin* if in fact *Yosef* was not his father, *Yaakov*?

Yosef, in terms of his dimension of spirituality, had a semblance of his father *Yaakov*. The *Torah* tells us that he had similar characteristics and abilities as his father. However, regardless of *Yosef's* spiritual greatness, he was not in reality his father *Yaakov*. He is not considered one of the Patriarchs. Therefore, in order to establish *Ephraim* and *Manasheh* as Tribes, they had to be linked to *Yaakov*, the Patriarch. Thus, he blessed them by saying, "may my name be declared upon them..."

The Privilege of Choice

Torah at the beginning 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 in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (the Laws of Repentance): Pharaoh had forfeited his power of free choice. 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: 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? 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.

Torah: It was Pharaoh's refusal to "humble" himself before G-d that caused his heart to be hardened.

Gemara: 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.

Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin: 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

Torah, "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."

Torah: 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.

Gemara: 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. "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?

Torah: 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 descendants 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.

What Criteria is Needed for Redemption?

Torah: Regarding the month of *Nissan*, “*Hashem* said to *Moshe* and *Aaron* in the land of Egypt saying, ‘This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year.’”

Midrash: “...This month has special value because it is during this month (*Nissan*) that you (the Jewish people) will be redeemed. *Moshe* said to G-d, ‘How could this be the month of our redemption? You had said to *Avraham* our Patriarch that it is only after 400 years of servitude that we will be redeemed. We have been in servitude for only 210 years.’ G-d responded, ‘When I want you to be redeemed I do not consider computations. Rather, I will redeem you when I want to do so – and this is the month of your redemption.’”

Torah: After *Moshe* and *Aaron* had approached Pharaoh to ask him to release the Jewish people he withdrew their straw subsidy – but still demanded the same quota of bricks. This intensified the bondage and embittered the lives of the Jewish people.

Chazal: It was because of this intensification that the redemption was expedited. Initially the enslavement was to be 400 years; however, because of the intensification of the bondage, it only needed to be

210 years. This intensification was a *chesed* (kindness of G-d). However, the *Midrash* cited earlier is explaining the time of redemption differently. It was only when “G-d wants” to bring about the redemption that it happens. Meaning, when G-d wants to redeem the Jewish people, He will override all previous criteria. It is because of G-d's intense love for the Jewish people that He wants to bring about their redemption – despite the fact that the Jewish people may be content with their own state of exile.

Mishna in Tractate *Sotah*: There are a number of indicators which point to the imminent coming of *Moshiach*. “The faces of the leaders of the generation will be like dogs. Arrogance will be at an overwhelming level. A daughter will stand up against her mother (total lack of respect). The elders will honor the youth etc.” The *Mishna* concludes, “We can only rely upon our Father in heaven.”

Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'l: The concluding statement of the *Mishna* is telling us that the situation will become so bleak and hopeless that the only approach to resolution will be our Father in Heaven. However, *Reb Chaim of Volozhin* states that the closing statement of the *Mishna* can be understood differently. When the Jews despair and thus declare that we can only rely upon G-d Himself, this itself is one of the indicators of the imminent coming of *Moshiach*.

Regardless of how we understand the closing statement of the *Mishna*, *Moshiach* will only come when the Jew understands that his state of exile is unacceptable, despite his material success. One must come to the realization that the only security of the Jew is G-d, his Father in heaven. Just as G-d desires to redeem the Jewish people, so to must they desire redemption. However, the *Midrash* that was previously cited gives us another understanding. Under normal circumstances, all the criteria that were previously mentioned must be in place to merit redemption. However, if G-d should deem it the time of redemption because of His intense love for the Jewish people, He will bring it about instantaneously.

Gemara in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah*: “Just as your forefathers were redeemed in the month of *Nissan*, you will in the future be redeemed in *Nissan*.” Meaning, just as G-d redeemed us from Egypt despite the fact that we did not fulfill the criteria of being in servitude for 400 years, identically in the future, even if the criteria for redemption will not be met, it will occur.

The Setting for Kiddush Hashem

Torah: “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...” 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: 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: 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: 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: 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

Torah: “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 citing *Chazal:* “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 explaining *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: 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.

Midrash: 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 *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 citing *Chazal*: We can 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.

Greatness Lies in What is not Obvious

Torah: "The minister of *Midian* (*Yisro*) had seven daughters; they came and drew water and filled the

troughs to water their father's sheep. The shepherds came and drove them away. *Moshe* got up and saved them and watered their sheep. They came to *Reuel* (*Yisro*) their father. He said, "How could you come so quickly today?" They replied, "An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds, and he even drew water for us and watered the sheep." He said to his daughters, "Then where is he? Why did you leave the man? Summon him and let him eat bread!"

Rashi citing *Chazal*: When *Yisro* said, "let him eat bread" he meant that *Moshe* should be considered as a candidate for marriage to one of his daughters. Why did *Yisro* feel that *Moshe* was worthy to be a prospective husband for one of his daughters? Were there no other available men for marriage in the *Midian* community? *Yisro*, the sheik of *Midian*, was not a person of ordinary ability. He was an individual with exceptional understanding and ability and was therefore sensitive to many events and issues that most were not. As we see, *Yisro* heard (as the entire world had) that G-d had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt. *Yisro* was affected by this information differently than the rest of the world. He was compelled to leave his glory to join the Jewish people in the desert. When *Yisro* heard what "the Egyptian man" (*Moshe*) had done for his daughters he immediately appreciated the how special he was. He understood that the man was a person of unique character.

Although *Moshe* went out of his way to assist *Yisro's* daughters, he nevertheless did not seek any remuneration or acknowledgment. This level of behavior was something out of the ordinary. Under normal circumstances, the individual who offered this level of assistance would have returned with the daughters so their family would understand and appreciate what he had done for them. Even though he put his life in jeopardy when fending off the attackers and subsequently watered *Yisro's* flocks, he walked away without any interest in acknowledgment. *Yisro*, being a highly astute individual, immediately recognized *Moshe's* unequalled quality of person. He therefore asked his daughters, "why did you not bring him back?" – he was a qualified husband for one of them.

Midrash Tanchuma: "Hashem does not give greatness to a person unless he has been checked and tested in an insignificant area. It is only then that Hashem causes him to ascend to greatness." The *Midrash* gives the example of two world-renown individuals: *Dovid HaMelech* (King David) and *Moshe Rabbeinu*. *Dovid*

as a shepherd would take his flock into the desert to graze, because he was concerned that if they would graze closer to the community they may graze on lands that were not his and thus he would be in violation of stealing. Even if *Dovid* had not taken his flock into the desert, he would have been careful and vigilant not to allow them to graze in a location that was not his. Nevertheless, *Dovid* conducted himself in a manner that was above reproach.

Even if it were remotely possible for the sheep to steal, this was not acceptable to him. Therefore, *Dovid* was chosen to be the king of Israel. The *Midrash* is teaching us that through one's actions, which seem to be insignificant, one is chosen for greatness by Hashem. Similarly, *Moshe* also led the flocks of his father-in-law into the desert to graze out of the same concern. Hashem said to *Moshe*, "Since you were so faithful in your responsibility to your flock, because you wanted your behavior to be above reproach, you shall lead My flock (the Jewish people)." *Yisro* understood from something that seemed to be unnoticed and insignificant to others, that *Moshe* was a person who was very special and unique. It is through one's behavior that is normally unnoticed that one reveals his true character.

Gemara in Tractate *Shevuos*: A judge must value a case that is worth one cent as much as another case worth an enormous amount of money. The judge is not permitted to even switch the order of adjudicating the case of minimal value with the case of greater monetary value. The *Gemara* tells us that both cases are of equal importance. Thus, the judge must be a person of such caliber that he does not differentiate between the inconsequential amount of money (the penny) and an enormous amount of money.

In order to recognize a special individual, one needs to be special himself. When *Reb Yisroel Salanter z'tl* was a mere youth of seventeen years, he recognized the greatness of a certain individual in his community who was working in a distillery. By the age of ten, *Reb Yisroel Salanter* was proficient in the entire Talmud. At the age of seventeen, he was already recognized as a great *Torah* mind. *Reb Yisroel Salanter* approached this individual on his way to the distillery and asked him to become his *rebbe* (teacher). The individual replied, "I am no more than a laborer in a distillery. Why would you think that I am qualified to be your *rebbe*?" *Reb Yisroel* replied, "I have noticed the manner in which you conduct yourself during the Morning Service.

Every aspect of your conduct during the service adheres meticulously to the various opinions of the *Halachic* Decisors (*poskim*). Your behavior is one of a kind and therefore it indicates to me that you are a hidden *Torah* Sage." This was *Reb Yosef Zundel of Salant z'tl*, one of the leading *Torah* Sages of that generation. *Reb Yisroel Salanter* was able to perceive and recognize what others could not. Because he himself was special, he was able to identify his rebbe *Reb Yosef Zundel of Salant*. We can see that the true greatness of an individual is revealed in the way one conducts himself in areas that are unnoticed by others.

The Eternity of The Jewish People Rooted in G-d

Torah in *Shemos*: *Hashem* instructed *Moshe* to present himself to Pharaoh and request that the Jews be released from their bondage. "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!'"

Midrash: 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?

Parshas Va'eira: Before the plague of Blood, "*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: 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 "*Hashem* (YKVK)," 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.

Parshas 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: 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.

Torah: *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: 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 – YKVH (*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

Parshas Va'eira: "V'yadaber Elokim – G-d spoke to *Moshe* and said to him, "I am *Hashem*..."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The *Parsha* begins with the appellation of "Elokim" because it connotes the Attribute of Justice. At the end of the previous *Parsha*, 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..."

Midrash: 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: 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.

Midrash Tanchuma: *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.

Midrash: "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. *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

Torah: 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 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*.

Torah revealing the objective for the Plague of Wild Beasts and its subsequent removal: "...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..."

Torah 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): "*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: "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.

G-d- the Infinite

Torah: "Say to the Children of Israel: 'I am *Hashem* (YKVK), and I shall take you out from under the burdens

of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall be a G-d to you..." G-d said to *Moshe* to inform the Jewish people that He was going to free them from the enslavement of Egypt. In this verse the four expressions of redemption are mentioned. Meaning, the Jewish people will experience four levels of extrication before they are fully redeemed.

Mahral of Prague z'tl in Gevuras Hashem: The number four signifies being totally opposed. When one is surrounded on all four sides, one has no route of escape. For example, the Four Kings who had taken *Lot* (*Avraham's* nephew) as a captive, had done so only as a ruse to entrap *Avraham* to destroy him. The Four Kings totally opposed *Avraham's* existence. The exile that was decreed upon the Jewish people by G-d in the Covenant between the Parts was, that the Jews shall be "strangers in a land that was not their own" for a period of 400 years (which is a multiple of four). The Jewish people are destined to experience four exiles until the end of time – Babylon, Persian/Medes, Greek, and Roman. *Maharal* also explains that there is another connotation of the number four, which is the loss of identity- because one is totally surrounded and subsumed by his situation. For example, a slave exists only for his master and has no value or identity unto himself, as the Jewish people in Egypt.

G-d said to *Moshe* to communicate to the Jewish people the four expressions of redemption, which will manifest themselves through the four-letter Name of G-d – YKVK. The only way the Jew could be extricated from his state of bondage, which is represented through the number 400, is only through the four expressions of redemption emanating from YKVK.

Torah: G-d did not reveal His Name of YKVK to the Patriarchs, He only revealed Himself through "*Keil Shakai*." However *Moshe*, the Redeemer, was privy to the Name of G-d – YKVK- which connotes G-d as the Infinite Being who transcends all existence. Only through the Name YKVK were the revealed miracles (in Egypt) were able to come about. These miracles were a disruption of the natural order. Just as YKVK is the infinite, which cannot be contained or quantified, so too the revealed miracles that emanate from that source cannot be concealed and thus present themselves in the most obvious manner.

Torah: *Moshe* addressed the Jewish people using the four-letter Name of *Hashem* in conjunction with the four expressions of redemption, as he was commanded to do.

"So *Moshe* spoke accordingly to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to *Moshe* because of shortness of wind (*kotzer ruach*) and hard work." Because the Jewish people were overwhelmed and limited as a result of the intense hard labor, they were not able to relate to the reality of the infinite – YKVK. The Jewish people were only able to internalize the reality of G-d's unlimited ability (YKVK) was by witnessing and experiencing the revealed miracles that were to take place in Egypt.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos* tells us that the miracles at the end of time will overshadow the miracles of Egypt. The Jewish people who are destined to experience the four exiles until the end of time, will only be extricated from them through revealed miracles, which emanate from YKVK. It is only through that level of revelation, that the Jewish people will be extricated eternally from exile.

We quote a verse from *Tehillim* (Psalms) in our daily prayers, "Some with chariots, and some with horses, but we- in the Name of *Hashem* (YKVK), our G-d, we call out." The nations of the world establish the setting for the four exiles. They are the 70 nations of the world who have always opposed the existence of the Jewish people. The significance of the number 70 is the natural order. The natural order came about through the seven days of Creation.

The Jewish people arm themselves, as King David states, by calling out with the Name of *Hashem* (YKVK). Thus, they transcend the natural order. The armaments and the might of the nations of the world are irrelevant because their function only has meaning on the natural level. The Jewish people transcend and supersede the constrictions of nature because they call out and identify with the Infinite – YKVK.

King David in *Tehillim*: "I will smash my enemies with the Name of *Hashem*..." It is only when one we attach and identify ourselves with YKVK that we can overcome and suppress the opposition of the world. It is true that the *Torah* tells us that the Jewish people are required to maintain a standing army; however, as *Ramban* explains this is only because of the principle- "one does not rely on miracles." However, the power behind our physicality is the Name of *Hashem* and not our own physical prowess. Every Jew must understand that our power emanates from G-d - the Infinite Being YKVK and not from ourselves. If this becomes our reality, then we can transcend and subdue the opposition of the world, which is bound by nature.

The Solution to Our Problem

Torah: “During those days, it happened that the king of Egypt died, and the Children of Israel groaned because of the work and they cried out (*vayizaaku*). Their outcry (*vayaal shavaasam*) because of the work went up to G-d. G-d heard their groaning (*naakasam*), and G-d remembered His covenant with *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and with *Yaakov*...” The *Torah* uses three different terms for “crying out” – *vayizaaku*, *vayaal shavaasam*, *naakasam*. Seemingly each of these expressions conveys a different meaning.

Sforno: The term “*vayizaaku*” refers to the crying out of the Jewish people from the physical pain that they endured because of the bondage. The term “*vayaal shavaasam*” was an outcry to *Hashem* not emanating from *Teshuvah* (repentance) or *tefillah* (prayer) but rather they cried out to G-d to alleviate their difficulties. The term “*naakasam*”, which G-d had heard and was attentive to, refers to the sincere *Teshuvah* and *tefillos* (prayers) of the *tzaddikim* (righteous people) of the generation, who were a small minority of the Jewish people. Their outcry was received by *Hashem*. G-d heard and responded to this outcry “*naakasam*” and thus remembered the covenant.

The reason the Jewish people went into exile in Egypt was because *Hashem* had decreed that the offspring of *Avraham*, our Patriarch should be exiled. As it is stated, “You shall know that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not their own. There, they will be enslaved and afflicted for 400 years. Ultimately they will go out from there with great wealth.” Seemingly *Hashem* had said to *Avraham* that after 400 years the Jews would be redeemed, regardless of their circumstance. That was communicated to him in the “covenant between the parts.” The redemption of the Jewish people was seemingly inevitable and not contingent on any precondition.

Sforno: G-d only remembered the covenant because of the sincere *Teshuvah* and *tefillah* of the *tzaddikim*. Seemingly without the *Teshuvah* and *tefillos* of the handful of *tzaddikim*, *Hashem* would have not recalled the covenant that He had made with *Avraham*. How do we understand this?

Midrash: The Jewish people merited redemption because of three reasons. They did not change their language, their manner of dress, and they retained their Jewish names – thus fully retaining their Jewish identity. Seemingly, if the Jewish people had been acculturated

to the point that they would have shed these trappings of their identity, they would have not merited redemption. How do we understand this despite the guarantee that was given to *Avraham* our Patriarch?

Verse in *Yechezkel* (which we recite at the Seder): Before the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt, they were “naked.” Meaning, they were devoid of spirituality because they did not perform any *mitzvos*. It was because of this that *Hashem* had provided the Jewish people with two *mitzvos* – the *mitzvah* of circumcision and the *mitzvah* of the Pascal lamb. The verse states, “Through your bloods, you shall live.” The “bloods” mentioned in the verse is referring to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Pascal lamb. Thus, in the merit of circumcision and the Pascal sacrifice the Jewish people merited redemption from Egypt.

Chazal: The Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of the righteous women. The women had not despaired from redemption and thus encouraged their husbands to procreate, despite the difficulty of the bondage. It was because of these righteous woman that there was a Jewish people. Why were the Jewish people redeemed from Egypt? Was it because they did not shed their Jewish identity? Was it because of the righteous women? Or was it because of the two *mitzvos* that were given to them? Or was it because of G-d’s guarantee to *Avraham* our Patriarch?

It is true that *Hashem* had promised *Avraham* that his offspring would ultimately be redeemed from bondage. However, if those offspring were to assimilate and be fully acculturated into the Egyptian society, they would be bereft of any spirituality. Thus, not having any relevance to redemption. The value and purpose of redemption was for the Jewish people to receive the *Torah* at Sinai. If however the Jewish people had completely lost their capacity for spirituality, then there would be no basis for redemption.

However, because they retained their language, dress, and Jewish names it was an indication that they had a capacity and relevance for spirituality. Their identity only addresses the capacity of the Jewish people vis-à-vis spirituality. However were they worthy of redemption? The Jewish people in Egypt were idolaters and devoid of any *mitzvos*. They needed a spiritual posture. Thus, *Hashem* gave them the opportunity to perform the *mitzvos* of circumcision and the bringing of the Pascal offering in order to give them spiritual worthiness.

It was because the *tzaddikim* of the generation cried out with sincere *Teshuvah* and *tefillah* that *Hashem* was attentive to the covenant. At that time, the covenant had no relevance to the remainder of the Jewish people because they were disinterested in spiritual matters. The prayers and *Teshuvah* of the *tzaddikim* activated the Mercy of *Hashem* so that the covenant should be considered relevant. The outcries from pain and suffering were not enough to activate the Attribute of Mercy. The Jewish people needed to recognize the gravity of their situation and needed to change.

Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zorah: Yitzchak*, our Patriarch, enacted the afternoon prayer (*mincha*). This is derived from the verse which tells us that *Yitzchak* “went (*la’suach*) into the field.” The word “*la’suach*” means “*sicha* – speaking,” which implies *tefillah* (prayer).

Ritvah (earlier commentator) in his commentary on Tractate *Avodah Zorah*: “It is known that *tzaddikim* pray on behalf of their generation.” Thus, *Yitzchak* prayed on behalf of his generation.

The Jewish people are currently in a difficult situation. The vast majority of the Jews are unaffiliated and not connected to their Judaism. There is a rampant level of assimilation in our society. Relatively speaking, the handful of Jews who do observe the *mitzvos* and appreciate the immeasurable importance of *Torah* have a great responsibility to their fellow. Just as *Hashem* heard and responded to the sincere *Teshuvah* and *tefillah* of the minority of the Jewish people in Egypt (the *tzaddikim*); so too will He respond to our prayers and *Teshuvah*. It is only through our sincere repentance and prayer that the Attribute of Mercy will be activated and *Hashem* will bring about the ultimate redemption.

The Value of Doing a Mitzvah in the Most Perfect Manner

Torah: When *Moshe* returned to Egypt, he had not yet circumcised his youngest son. “It was on the way, in the lodging, that *Hashem* encountered him (*Moshe*) and sought to kill him.”

Rashi citing *Chazal*, “We had learned that *Reb Yosi* had said, “It is not (G-d forbid) that *Moshe Rabbeinu* had not taken the *mitzvah* of circumcision seriously, but rather it was because of the danger of traveling that he did not circumcise his son.” If *Moshe* had circumcised his son, before he had left *Midian*, he would have had to delay his

journey for three days. G-d had commanded him to go to Egypt immediately. Thus, before his departure from *Midian*, *Moshe* was not able to circumcise his youngest child. If this is so then why did *Moshe* deserve to be killed when he came to his lodging on the way to Egypt?

Midrash: Because *Moshe* had delayed the circumcision for a moment, by giving priority to his lodging needs (before the circumcision), he deserved to die. It was only because his wife *Zipporah* attended to the circumcision of their son was he spared.

Torah: Because the astrologers and stargazers of Egypt had seen in the stars that the Redeemer of Israel was to be born, Pharaoh decreed that all male Jewish children should be thrown into the Nile. The only person who was qualified to be the Redeemer of Israel was *Moshe*. Thus, in an attempt to prevent redemption from taking place, the decree was issued.

It is interesting to note that the redemption and exodus from Egypt was a prerequisite to the receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai. If the *Torah* ultimately would have not been given at Sinai, the objective of existence would not have been realized. The sole purpose of creation was for the Jewish people to receive the *Torah* at Sinai. If the Jewish people would have rejected the *Torah* at Sinai, the world would have reverted back to a state of preexistence. Thus, if *Moshe* was killed, the Jewish people would not have been redeemed. Thus, the *Torah* would not have been given at Sinai. Consequently the world would have come to an end. Seemingly, for a momentary hesitation regarding circumcision, G-d was willing to kill *Moshe* and not allow the world to realize its purpose. How do we understand this?

Midrash Tanchuma: “The Prophet says, ‘They betrayed *Hashem* and bore strange children. The Jewish people did not circumcise their children. It was because of this, that they would be consumed with new decrees. This is to teach us that when *Yosef* passed away they stopped circumcising themselves. They had said, ‘We want to be like the Egyptians.’” When *Hashem* saw this, the special love He had for them was negated.” The consequence of *Hashem* negating His love for the Jewish people was replaced by the hatred of the Egyptians.

Torah: A new mandate came upon the Jewish people and thus they were subjected to bondage. Why was the ceasing of circumcision a cause for the negation of G-d’s love for the Jewish people?

Midrash: There was a debate between *Rebbe Akiva* and *Tornistropis*, the Roman governor of Jerusalem (who was the one who ultimately put *Rebbe Akiva* to death). *Rebbe Akiva* had asked *Tornistropis*, “Whose accomplishment is more perfect – G-d’s or man’s?” *Tornistropis* responded, “G-d’s accomplishment is more perfect.”

Rebbe Akiva said, “I must disagree. Man’s accomplishment is more perfect. A farmer plants a seed and it grows into a wheat kernel. He then threshes the wheat and mills it into flour, which ultimately is made into bread. What is more perfect the kernel of wheat created by G-d or the bread which is the finished product created by man? – You see, that man’s accomplishment is more perfect.”

Tornistropis responded, “You Jews believe in G-d and His perfection. If a child is born with a foreskin as G-d’s creation, then why do you remove it through circumcision? How do you tamper with the perfection of G-d’s creation in this manner?” *Rebbe Akiva* answered, “You do not understand. The world and man were created imperfect so that man should have the opportunity to perfect himself and the world. Thus, the removal of the foreskin is perfecting man.”

If one believed that the world is purely physical then the concept of perfecting the world in a spiritual context has no relevance. Removal of the foreskin would be considered mutilation and not an act of perfection. Thus, the act of circumcision is a reflection of one’s belief. If one believes that the world is fundamentally spiritual then one must believe in circumcision. The Egyptians believed that the world is limited to the physical.

When the Jewish people chose to stop circumcising themselves, and exist as the Egyptian people, they were in effect proclaiming that existence was limited to the physical. Thus, rejecting the fact that the physical is only a means for the spiritual. The Jewish people thus negated and terminated their relationship with G-d. Consequently, the Jews were no longer worthy of G-d’s love, because of their estrangement, and thus were subject to the bondage of Egypt.

Moshe was returning to Egypt as the Redeemer of a people who had chosen not to circumcise themselves. As mentioned, circumcision is an expression of one’s belief in spirituality. If *Moshe* was to fulfill his role as the Redeemer, he must fulfill the *mitzvah* of circumcision in the most perfect way. As a result of his momentary hesitation, and not giving circumcision priority over

everything else, G-d wished to kill him. *Moshe* had to be perfect in the area where the Jewish people had failed.

We understand from all that we have discussed that one needs great merit in order to survive exile as a Jewish people. The Jewish people have been in a state of exile for over 2,000 years because of our failing of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred between Jews). In order to merit the ultimate redemption, we need to correct this failing in the most perfect way. *Moshe* only came into existence as that special individual, to be the Redeemer. However, because of his momentary hesitation he did not perform the *mitzvah* of circumcision in the most perfect way and G-d was prepared to allow the world to revert to a state of preexistence.

Complication Emanates from Man’s Self-Interest

Torah: *Hashem* commanded *Moshe* to present himself before Pharaoh to prove that he is the agent of G-d by transforming his staff into a snake. *Moshe* did as he was commanded to do. Pharaoh summoned his sorcerers and magicians, who also transformed their staffs into snakes. Pharaoh was unmoved with *Moshe*. The *Torah* concludes, “...and the staff of *Aaron* swallowed their staffs. Pharaoh hardened his heart and he did not heed them as *Hashem* had spoken.”

Rashi citing the *Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: The verse does not state that *Aaron*’s snake swallowed their snakes, but rather that his “staff” swallowed their staffs. This was to indicate that the transformation of *Moshe* and *Aaron*’s staff was definitely not witchcraft but was the Hand of *Hashem*. Nevertheless Pharaoh hardened his heart and dismissed it as sorcery and not the Hand of G-d. If Pharaoh had in fact believed that *Moshe*’s accomplishment was due to witchcraft, then why does the *Torah* predicate Pharaoh’s position on the hardening of his heart?

Torah: “*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, ‘Pharaoh’s heart is stubborn, he refuses to send out the people...’” Meaning, the reason Pharaoh did not discern between what *Moshe* had done and the actions of the sorcerers was that he had chosen to harden his heart because he did not wish to send out the Jewish people. Seemingly, the *Torah* is telling us that if he would not have chosen to be obstinate, he would have clearly appreciated *Moshe*’s action as being miraculous and thus would have sent out the people.

We see that regardless of the magnitude of an event, one is able to process it as he chooses and not be affected. A person has the ability to deny reality to accommodate his own agenda. *Hashem* elucidated this fact to *Moshe* - that it was not because the action that he had brought about was lacking; but rather, it was due to Pharaoh's choosing to harden his heart.

Rambam in *Hilchos Deos*: Regarding establishing the ideal balance in a characteristic, one should seek out the equidistant point between the two extremes. For example, even if the characteristic that one possesses is positive – such as being overly generous- it is important for him to temper this characteristic to be able to act objectively regarding giving. Just as being miserly is obviously something that is negative, identically being overly generous is also considered something that is negative. One would think that possessing a good characteristic on an extreme level would be considered something positive.

The human being is differentiated from the animal by his ability to reason, process, and evaluate. The animal has no such capability; but rather, functions through instinct. A person can only make a proper evaluation if he is able to assume a position of objectivity. Otherwise, his evaluation would be flawed because of his own conflicts of interest- whatever they may be. If one's conflict is that he is overly generous (he has a need to give) then even if the cause that he chooses

to support is something that does not deserve any acknowledgment, he will choose to ignore the obvious. He will support the cause despite its unworthiness.

How is this person's behavior any different from an animal that functions purely on instinct? This person's response to the cause is instinctive rather than rational. Thus, in order to maximize on one's endowment of intelligence (which is the essence of the human being), one must try to establish a position of objectivity through moderating his characteristics. He must seek out the equidistant point of that characteristic in order to attain the ultimate in objectivity.

The *Torah* is telling us that despite the fact that Pharaoh was the monarch of the most advanced civilization in existence, (who could have only been qualified as such because he was the most intelligent and discerning person), chose to deny the obvious because he did not want to send out the Jewish people. The cause of his denial was his own conflict of interest.

We classify ourselves as being one type of person, yet our behavior indicates to the contrary. If one identifies as an observant Jew and truly has an interest to live as such, then why does one very often transgress the *Torah*? It is only because he chose to act instinctively rather than rationally to accommodate his own interest, thus, hardening his heart (not allowing himself to be affected) as Pharaoh had done.



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