

THE MAKING OF A NATION

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YadAvNow.com Weekly Audio Series: Beshalach

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Ownership, Kingship, Independence Lead to Freedom

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There's A Continuous Level of Withdrawal of Choice

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They Left Egypt as Princes with their Sense of Self Restored

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They Traveled United With One Purpose

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The Roadmap For The Ascent

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1. The Jews left Egypt after witnessing 10 plagues.
2. Each was a revealed miracle and more profound than the other.
3. Each plague had a dual value: As a punishment for the Egyptians; & as an enlightening experience for the Jews to purge the paganism from their midst.
4. Midrash: G-d said, "Woe I wish I could have increased the number of Plagues before I sent them out of Egypt."
5. Bais Halevi: King David in Psalms says, "His mercy is upon all his beings."
6. So why does G-d bemoan not punishing the Egyptians to a greater degree?
7. Bais Halevi: Because the Jews were not fully purged from the paganism of Egypt, they succumbed to the sin of the golden calf.
8. Had the Jews witnessed additional revealed miracles, there wouldn't have been a trace of the idolatry of Egypt.
9. As descendants from these Jews we possess traces of those elements of impurity & must be aware of this.

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The Uncontested Spokesman of G-d

1. The 10th plague, the killing of the first born, took place exactly at midnight.
2. Moshe communicated the plague would take place at “about” midnight.
3. G-d had said – “exactly” at midnight.
4. Moshe used ambiguous context so not to be accused of being a liar.
5. The soothsayers of Egypt would say it did not happen as Moshe had said- but rather, a moment before or after midnight.

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6. If the firstborn were killed does it matter if it was a moment before or after?
7. Rambam: Moshe, being a prophet, is not based on miracles- but rather the Jewish People heard G-d say to Moshe, “Go say to them” such and such, etc.
8. G-d wanted the plagues to display His dominion in the world.
9. Had the sorcerers of Egypt believed that Moshe made a mistake they would attribute all the plagues to witchcraft.

The Making of a Family

1. Moshe located Yosef’s remains to take them out of Egypt.
2. Yosef had adjured his brothers to do this before they leave Egypt.
3. Each tribe’s remains were removed by their descendants; why not Yosef’s?
4. Yosef adjuring his brothers added the word “Zeh” meaning, from this. Why?
5. Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh: The numerical value of Zeh is 12, the number of tribes.
6. When Yosef was sold into slavery, the unity of twelve was broken.

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7. Twelve had to be restored to a unified entity.
8. The brothers assumed responsibility for the removal of Yosef’s remains to restore the unity.
9. Moshe, as leader and king, was the equivalent of the Jews engaging in the reunification.
10. When the sea split on behalf of the Jews it was in the merit of Yosef.
11. Midrash: “What did the sea see and split, the remains of Yosef.”



The Power of PRAYER

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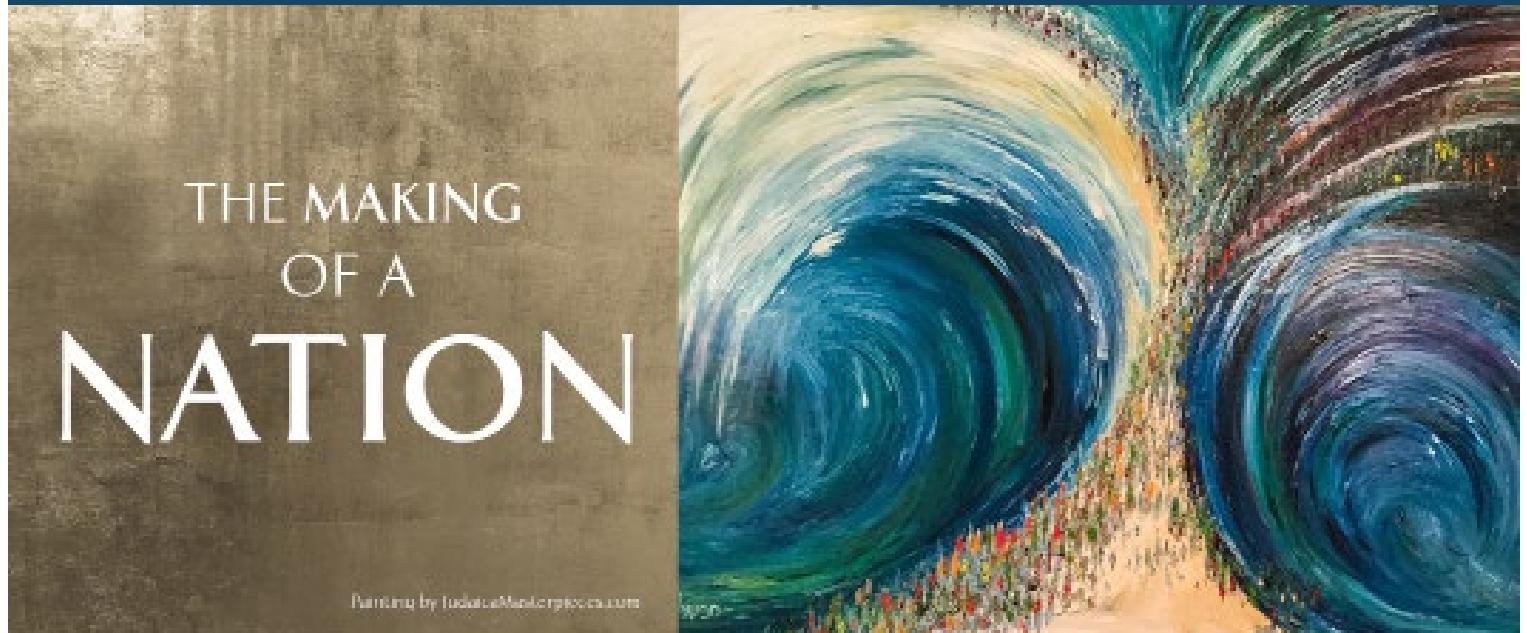


The Power of Prayer - Part 12

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Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Beshalach



The Symbolism of the Donkey

Torah: Regarding the positive commandment of redeeming the firstborn, "...you shall set apart every first issue of the womb to G-d... Every first issue donkey you shall redeem with a lamb or kid..." The firstborn of every domesticated kosher species assumes a state of sanctity upon its birth. The donkey, although it is a non-kosher species, also assumes a consecrated status upon its birth and it must be redeemed by giving a sheep to the Kohen.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: There are two explanations why the firstborn of the donkey assumes a sanctified status. The first explanation offered by the *Midrash* is that since the donkey was the pack animal that assisted the Jewish people to transport the wealth out of Egypt, fulfilling G-d's promise to Avraham at the covenant between the parts, its firstborn thus assumes a consecrated status.

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

Ramban: "Why were the Egyptians punished for enslaving the Jewish people? It was something that was ordained by G-d at the covenant between the parts." He cites an opinion that although it was ordained that the Jewish people were to be enslaved, the Egyptian people did not need to be the ones to fulfill that decree. It could have been carried out by another nation.

Ramban rejects this opinion because the fulfillment of G-d's Will is a *mitzvah*. If so, there is a principle that states whoever is the first to fulfill the dictate of G-d is meritorious. Thus, the Egyptians should be classified as meritorious. If so, why were they punished for the enslavement of the Jewish people? Although the enslavement of the Jewish people was the Will of G-d, the Egyptians did not enslave them in order to fulfill His Will but rather it was because of their insecurity and hate, that they imposed bondage upon them. The enslavement of the Jewish people did not emanate from a holy source.

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

Maharal of Prague *zt"l* explains that the word "chamor (donkey)" is derived from the word "chomer," which means material. Meaning, of the seventy root nations of the world, the Egyptian people were the most devoid of spirituality. Thus, they have the greatest relevance to the mundane. They are therefore referred to as *chamorim*, to indicate that their essence is merely physical.

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

Therefore the donkey is the only non-kosher species that has relevance to sanctity.

Torah: There is a negative commandment that prohibits one from afflicting an Egyptian, because "you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: Since the Egyptians hosted the Jewish people in their country, the Jew has a debt of gratitude. If the Egyptians had inflicted untold suffering upon the Jewish people, why should they have a debt of gratitude towards them? It is because Egypt was the host country at a time of their suffering. Although they had embittered the lives of the Jewish people, they would not have been able to achieve their holy status without experiencing the bondage in that location. They are thus indebted to the Egyptians.

To be Worthy of the Attribute of Mercy

Torah: When the Jewish people found themselves caught between the Sea and the advancing Egyptian army, "G-d said to *Moshe*, 'Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel and let them journey forth!...'"

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "We learn from G-d's statement that *Moshe* was praying on behalf of the Jewish people. G-d responded to him, 'This is not the time to be lengthily involved in prayer because it is a moment of trouble for the Jewish people. You should tell them to journey forth.'

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: "One who thinks that the most appropriate time to engage in prayer is when one is in a state of great difficulty. If so, why did G-d tell *Moshe* not to continue praying?" After the Jewish people witnessed the ten plagues of Egypt, which were all revealed miracles, they found themselves confronted with the Egyptian army. They said, 'Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert?' Their claim against *Moshe* demonstrated the such a profound lack of faith in G-d that it put into jeopardy everything that was meant to come about for the Jewish people. It evoked a level of prosecution from the Attribute of Justice that was so severe, that supplication would be ineffective.

They needed to take an initiative that would demonstrate a level of belief and trust in G-d that would quell the Attribute of Justice and allow the Attribute of Mercy to come into effect. Thus, G-d told them to journey forth

into the Sea. If they would travel directly into the Sea without concern for their safety, it would indicate their absolute faith (trust) in G-d. Thus, rectifying their failing. Only then would they merit the Attribute of Mercy to be saved and reinstated as His people.

Sforno: "When Moshe cried out, he did not do so because he was fearful of Pharaoh and his army because G-d had already assured him that the Egyptians would be destroyed...But rather his crying out was because he was concerned that the Jewish people had demonstrated a lack of faith when they said, 'Were there no graves in Egypt...?' Moshe was concerned that by speaking in this manner they had forfeited their merit for the miracle of the Sea. He therefore prayed on their behalf that despite what they had said, the miracles should come about. G-d responded to him that he need not pray. His concern for the Jewish people's spiritual viability was unfounded. He is thus considered to be one who was suspecting of an innocent party. (Therefore there was no need for prayer.)"

Throughout history, the Jewish people are continuously in a state of peril and suffering. However, one does not understand what is needed to bring about Divine Assistance to alleviate the suffering and danger. If the Attribute of Justice needs to be quelled, then one must demonstrate his unwavering faith in G-d. If this is not the issue, then one needs to pray. Since it is an irresolvable dilemma one must do both.

G-d's Kingship, a Precursor to Sinai

After the Sea had closed upon Pharaoh and the Egyptian army, Moshe and the Jewish people had sung the song of the Sea. The splitting of the Sea presented the greatest revelation of G-d's Presence. In the song that was sung by the Jewish people it states "Behold, this is my G-d I will glorify Him!"

Rashi citing *Chazal (Machilta)*: G-d's Presence was so palpable that one could point at it with his finger. What the maid servant at the Sea had seen, *Yechezkel* the prophet did not see. Although what the maid servant had witnessed was greater than what *Yechezkel* had experienced nevertheless, the maid servant remained limited while *Yechezkel*'s classification was a prophet. What did the maid servant at the Sea witness that was not seen by *Yechezkel* the prophet?

Torah: G-d Himself entered into Egypt to kill the firstborn of the Egyptians. The Jewish people had all witnessed this revealed miracle. As the *Torah* states, "It was at midnight that Hashem smote every firstborn..." Although the *Torah* tells us that G-d Himself was present in Egypt in the tenth plague and the Jewish people had witnessed the effectiveness of His Presence; the dimension of revelation at the splitting of the Sea was so palpable that they were able to point to Him and declare, "This is my G-d!"

In the blessing following the *Shema* in the evening service: "And His Kingship they accepted upon themselves willingly. Moshe and the Children of Israel raised their voices to You in song with abundant joy and said unanimously 'Who is like You....Your children beheld Your Kingship as You split the sea before Moshe: 'This is my G-d!' they exclaimed. They then said, 'Hashem shall reign for all eternity.'"

The dimension of revelation that was witnessed at the time of the splitting of the Sea was an expression of G-d's Kingship as the Supreme Being who Reigns over all existence. Regardless of the awesomeness of the miracles that the Jewish people witnessed in Egypt, they were not privy to His Kingship. It was because G-d had shown them His Kingship that they exclaimed, "This is my G-d'.... Hashem shall reign for all eternity" No prophet had ever witnessed (other than Moshe) the Kingship of G-d.

Chazal: "There is no king without subjects." When the Jewish people saw the Kingship of G-d they simultaneously understood and appreciated His concern and love for them. Without the Jewish people, the King cannot fully reign because he would have no subjects. It is only the Jewish people who declare themselves as G-d's subjects through the recitation of the *Shema* twice a day, when they accept upon themselves the yoke of heaven.

Vilna Gaon zt"l: There is a difference between a king and a ruler. A king understands and appreciates that his viability as king is dependent upon having dedicated subjects. Thus, he is concerned for the welfare of his subjects. In contrast, a ruler rules and dictates regardless of the condition of the masses. Within the revelation of G-d's Kingship at the Sea, the Jewish people understood His love and concern for them.

This understanding evoked the expression, "This is my G-d and I will build Him a Sanctuary..." The "Sanctuary" mentioned in the verse refers to the *Mishkan* (and ultimately the Temple) that the Jewish people would later build to accommodate His Presence. The degree of understanding of G-d's Kingship, will determine the degree of praise and love of the Jewish people for Him. Thus, the experience at the Sea was a precursor for the Jewish people to be taken as G-d's people at Sinai.

Misinterpretation of the Obvious

Torah: Despite all of the revealed miracles that the Jewish people had witnessed in Egypt, they complained to *Moshe* several times after they had been taken out of Egypt. The first instance that they complained was when they saw they were trapped between the Sea and the Egyptian army that was pursuing them.

Torah: "They said to *Moshe*, 'Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert? What is this that you have done to us to take us out of Egypt?' *Moshe* was not disturbed by their complaint and responded, "Do not fear...*Hashem* will do battle for you..." After this, Jewish people had witnessed the splitting of the Sea during which they had experienced the revelation of G-d at a level that surpassed the revelation of the prophet *Yechezkel*. They exclaimed, "This is My G-d and I will exalt Him!"

Chazal: G-d's Presence was so palpable that the Jewish people were able to point to His Presence. After this, the Jewish people came to *Marah* but realized that they could not drink the water because it was bitter. They complained to *Moshe*, "What shall we drink?" *Moshe* once again did not express disdain regarding their behavior.

Torah: "...He threw it (the tree) into the water and the water became sweet." The Jewish people traveled further when they began to complain to *Moshe* and *Aaron* that they did not have food to eat. The *Torah* states, "If only we had died by the hand of *Hashem* in the land of Egypt...When we ate bread to satiety, for you have taken us out into this desert to kill the entire congregation by famine." *Moshe* once again did not react to the complaints of the people, but rather, the *Torah* states, "*Hashem* spoke to *Moshe* saying, 'In the afternoon you shall eat meat (quail) and in the morning you shall be sated with bread (manna), and you will know that I am *Hashem*, your G-d."

Torah: When the Jewish people camped in *Rephidim* they again complained to *Moshe* because they did not have water to drink.

Torah: "Give us water that we may drink!" *Moshe* said to them, 'Why do you contend with me? Why do you test *Hashem*?'...*Moshe* cried out to *Hashem*, 'What shall I do for this people?' *Moshe* was told to strike the rock and water came forth for the people to drink.

Torah: "...they tested *Hashem* saying, 'Is *Hashem* among us or not?'" Subsequently, they were attacked by the *Amalekites*, a people who did not fear G-d. This was considered to be measure for measure punishment for their failing. Since they questioned if G-d was in their midst they were attacked by people who did not believe in G-d. Why did *Moshe* choose to reprimand them at this moment rather than all of the previous times when they had complained? After leaving Egypt the Jewish people did not understand why they were worthy to be redeemed through revealed miracles. They understood that they were idolaters to no less a degree than the Egyptians.

Chazal: At the time of the splitting of the Sea, when the Jewish people passed between the walls of water, the angels came before G-d who was about to destroy Pharaoh and the Egyptian army and said, "These are idolaters and these are idolaters." The angels did not understand why the Egyptians were more culpable than the Jewish people, since they were both pagans.

The Jewish people initially understood and believed that the only reason they merited redemption from Egypt was because G-d's promise and covenant to *Avraham*, our Patriarch at the covenant between the parts that his offspring would be in bondage for 400 years and then be taken out with great wealth. Their redemption was thus unrelated to their personal worthiness. Based on their understanding of redemption, they would free of their masters to become G-d's people.

However, after the Jewish people left Egypt, in the most miraculous manner, they realize that they were being pursued by Pharaoh and his army. They began to reflect on their predicament, "If the merit of the Patriarchs was sufficient for us to be redeemed from Egypt, why are we being pursued by the Egyptians? Evidently, it was not the will of G-d that we should leave Egypt." *Moshe* alleviated their fear by saying, "Do not be afraid, G-d will do battle for you..." Subsequently, the Sea split.

After Pharaoh and the Egyptian army was destroyed the *Torah* states, "They believed in G-d and Moshe his servant..." Their belief that they were not personally worthy of redemption; however, since there is a principle "The devoutly righteous (*tzaddik*) decrees and G-d fulfills" they understood that the impetus that they left Egypt was due to the decree of *Moshe* and *Aaron* who wanted the Jewish people to be freed of their Egyptian masters. However, in order for this principle to be effective, the *tzaddik* must merit G-d's Assistance. If the *tzaddik*'s merit was not sufficient, it could redeem them from Egypt but no further.

Therefore at the Sea, they began to believe that *Moshe*'s merit was not sufficient to split the Sea and they were going to be killed. They thus complained to *Moshe*, "Were there no graves in Egypt..." After the Sea split and the Egyptians were destroyed, they sang G-d's praises. They believed in G-d and *Moshe*, His servant. It was only because of *Moshe*'s merit that they were deserving of the miracle. Based on this understanding, all that had transpired, including the bitter waters of *Marah* to be sweetened, was due to *Moshe*'s merit. We see something similar to this that occurred later when G-d wanted to destroy the Jewish people. *Moshe* said to G-d, "Erase me from Your book."

Sforno: What *Moshe* was saying was "Rather than destroying the Jewish people for their sin, transfer to them all of my merits. Consequently, I will have no merits and be erased from His book." This is an example of a *tzaddik* using his merits to alter a decree. When the Jewish people were presented with the bitter waters of *Marah* they again they complained to *Moshe*. He did not react because he understood their misunderstanding of why they were taken out of Egypt. They attributed their current problem to his lack of merit.

However, after they received the manna the *Torah* states, "...you will know that I am *Hashem*, your G-d." Meaning, after receiving the manna, the Jewish people would achieve a level of clarity to understand with certainty that the manna was due to G-d and unrelated to the merit of *Moshe*. After the manna, any further complaint would be considered to be a claim against G-d because it was established that their survival was unrelated to *Moshe*. It was not *Moshe* and *Aaron* that had taken them out of Egypt but rather G-d Himself.

Torah: When the Jewish people came to *Rephidim* and complained that they did not have water to drink,

"...they tested *Hashem* saying, 'Is *Hashem* among us or not?' This complaint elicited a reaction that none of their previous complaints did, because after understanding that it is G-d who determined their fate, their complaint was an expression of their lack of faith in Him. Therefore, they were deserving to be attacked by the Amalekites.

Torah: Before *Moshe* passed away he rebuked the Jewish people for all of their failings over the forty year period in the desert. One of the rebukes that *Moshe* had said was, "You had tests G-d ten times..."

Chazal: Included in the ten times was the complaint that they had said before the splitting of the Sea, "where there no graves in Egypt..." If in fact they believed at that time that it was *Moshe*'s merit and not G-d Himself, why should their failing be considered as testing G-d, since it was only after receiving the manna that they understood that G-d had taken them out. One could say that since they had complained after receiving the manna, which clearly established G-d as the One who had taken them out of Egypt, and subsequently they complained in *Rephidim* it is an indication that regardless of their level of understanding they would have complained against G-d even before the splitting of the Sea.

Blessing Emanates from Faith (from the portion of Bo)

Torah in *Parshas Bo*: "...They baked the dough that they took out from Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven from Egypt for they could not delay, nor had they made provisions for themselves." The reason the dough did not rise was because the Jewish people did not have sufficient time to prepare the bread before they were driven out. This the same reason they went into the desert unprepared and without provisions.

During the *Musaf* Service of *Rosh Hashanah*, in the portion of *Zichronos* (Remembrances) we quote verses that will cause G-d to recall events of the past that will cause the Jewish people to be remembered in a positive vein. One of the verses that is recited is from the prophet *Yermiya*. He said, "I (G-d) will always remember on your behalf the kindness of your youth that you followed Me into an uncharted desert." This "kindness" will stand on behalf of the Jewish people until the end of time. Why was this considered a

"kindness?" Perhaps one could say that because the Jewish people went out into the desert without knowing what the future would bring, it was considered to be a "kindness" because of their unique level of trust in G-d. However, we see from the verse that Jewish people demonstrated their complete trust in G-d when they went out into the desert without sufficient provisions.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "This is to give praise to the Jewish people that they did not ask G-d, 'How are we to go out into a barren desert without sufficient provisions?' Rather, they believed and they went...What was their reward for this? They were sanctified to be the holy people of G-d." Their going out into the desert without sufficient provisions was a confirmation of their belief and faith in G-d. This was the "kindness of their youth."

Torah: Only one-fifth of the Jewish people left Egypt. Four-fifths had died during the days of darkness. Why did the majority of the Jewish people perish in the days of darkness if they had witnessed the Hand of G-d through the revealed miracles? Those who perished would have rather remained in Egypt in a state of bondage rather than going out into the desert where they did not know what the future would bring. They understood that they would be continuously needing the intervention of G-d to survive. They would be concerned every day if G-d would perform miracles for them or not. Thus they chose to remain in Egypt.

The only Jew who survived the days of darkness were those who had an interest to leave. Those who chose to remain in Egypt were considered evil (*reshaaim*). In

contrast, G-d extolled the one-fifth that had left Egypt as being special because their going out into the desert without sufficient provisions was a testament of their unwavering faith in Him. The faith that was demonstrated by the Jews who left Egypt caused them to be worthy to be taken as G-d's people at Sinai.

Midrash: When G-d had offered the *Torah* to the nations of the world, they asked, "What is written in it?" G-d responded to each nation accordingly and afterwards each nation chose to reject the *Torah* based on its own self interest. In contrast, the Jewish people, when they were offered the *Torah* at Sinai, declared, "*Naaseh v'Nishmah* – we will do and we will listen."

Gemara in *Tractate Shabbos* citing a verse from *Proverbs*: "The innocence of the straight shall lead them..." This was the basis for the faith and trust in G-d of the Jewish people who left Egypt. The uncertain predicament of the Jewish people at the time they were "driven out from Egypt" was actually a blessing. It provided a unique context in which they could demonstrate their exceptional level of faith in G-d.

Matzah is thus a symbol of the faith that the Jewish people had in G-d when they left Egypt. Regardless of how difficult a situation may be, if one has faith in G-d and adheres to His Will (although it may initially seem to be potentially detrimental and irresponsible) it will actually result in blessing. By refraining from working on *Shabbos*, although it seems to be denying oneself opportunity, it is to the contrary. By following the dictate of G-d, one will receive blessing.



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