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the 10 Plagues

Egypt: 1312 BCE

3320 years ago, 10 unparalleled, predicted and catastrophic events crippled Egypt. Why did God bring them? Why these 10 Plagues? How do we apply these lessons today as we transmit Passover traditions and fundamentals? The clues are in the verses.

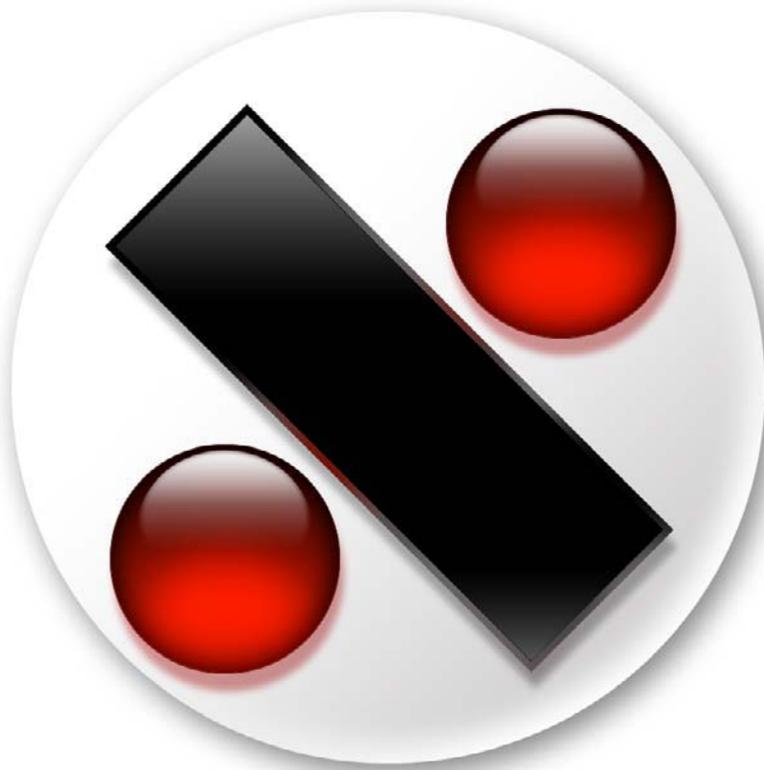
Remember why we left:

Egypt deified water, animals, the skies, planets and man...and so did we. Some of us still do.



Don't forget what to do:

To abandon falsehoods, and man,
and rely on God & truth alone.



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The Seder

Rabbi Bernie Fox

RABAN GAMLIEL SAID, "ANYONE THAT DOES NOT DISCUSS THESE THREE THINGS DOES NOT FULFILL ONE'S OBLIGATION. AND THESE ARE THE THINGS: THE PESACH SACRIFICE, MATZAH, AND MARROR." (HAGADDAH OF PESACH)

This selection from the Hagaddah is derived from the Talmud in Tractate Pesachim. Raban Gamliel explains that in order for a person to fulfill his obligation on the night of Pesach, he must discuss the mitzvot of the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah and Marror. There are two difficulties with Raban Gamliel's law. Raban Gamliel does not specify the obligation that is fulfilled through this discussion. In other words, if a person does not discuss the mitzvot of Pesach, Matzah and Marror, what is the obligation that the person has failed to fulfill? Second, Raban Gamliel does not indicate the source for his law.

First, let us focus on the first question. What obligation has not been fulfilled if the Pesach, Matzah and Marror have not been discussed? Maimonides provides a simple answer to this question. Maimonides places Raban Gamliel's law in the chapter of his code that discusses the laws regarding the mitzvah to discuss the redemption from Egypt on the first night of Pesach. It is clear from the placement of Raban Gamliel's law in this chapter that Maimonides maintains that the discussion

of Pesach, Matzah and Marror is essential to the mitzvah of retelling the events of our redemption from Egypt. Furthermore, Maimonides explains that the discussion of these three topics - Pesach, Matzah and Marror - is referred to as Haggadah.^[1] This seems to confirm that the discussion is part of the mitzvah to retell the events of the redemption.

"AND YOU SHALL SAY, 'THIS IS THE PESACH SACRIFICE TO HASHEM WHO PASSED OVER THE HOMES OF BNAI YISRAEL WHEN HE STRUCK EGYPT AND OUR HOMES HE SAVED.' AND THE NATION BOWED AND PROSTRATED ITSELF." (SHEMOT 12:27)



Tosefot do not directly deal with our first question. Instead, they discuss our second question. What is the source for Raban Gamliel's law? Tosefot explain that the source is the above passage. The passage indicates that there is an obligation to explain the significance of the Pesach sacrifice.

However, Tosefot realize that this answer creates a problem. The passage only specifies that the Pesach sacrifice must be discussed. Raban Gamliel extends this obligation to the Matzah and Marror. The pasuk makes no mention of Matzah and Marror. What is the source for the obligation to discuss these mitzvot? Tosefot offer a rather strange answer to this question.

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“AND YOU SHALL EAT THE FLESH (OF THE PESACH) ON THIS NIGHT ROASTED BY FIRE AND WITH MATZAH AND MARROR YOU SHOULD EAT IT.” (SHEMOT 12:8)

Tosefot suggest that the obligation to discuss Matzah and Marror is derived from the above passage. According to Tosefot the pasuk equates or associates the Matzah and Marror with the Pesach. Tosefot explain that based on this association, the requirement to discuss the Pesach is extended to the Matzah and Marror.

Tosefot’s reasoning is not immediately obvious. The above passage tells us the Pesach must be eaten with Matzah and Marror. In other words, the obligation to eat the Pesach is not fulfilled in its entirety by eating the Pesach alone. Instead, in order to completely fulfill the mitzvah of eating the Pesach, it must be eaten with Matzah and Marror. Tosefot’s contention that the pasuk associates the Pesach with Matzah and Marror is certainly accurate. However, this association is insofar as the obligation to eat the Pesach. The passage does not discuss the obligation to speak about the Pesach. In no sense does the pasuk associate the Matzah and Marror with the Pesach in regards to the obligation to discuss the Pesach.

Rav Yitzchak Mirsky suggests that according to Tosefot, the obligation to discuss the Pesach sacrifice is part of the mitzvah to eat the Pesach. In other words, the eating of the Pesach must be preceded by a discussion of the significance of the mitzvah. Based on this insight, he explains Tosefot’s reasoning. Since the eating of the Matzah and Marror is part of the mitzvah of eating the Pesach – as indicated by our pasuk – the obligation to discuss the Pesach extends to the Matzah and Marror which is eaten with the Pesach.^[2]

So, although Tosefot do not directly discuss the mitzvah that is not fulfilled if Pesach, Matzah and Marror are not discussed, their position has emerged. This discussion is needed in order to completely fulfill the mitzvah of eating the Pesach with its Matzah and Marror.

Tosefot’s position presents an interesting problem. Generally, in performing a mitzvah we are not required to understand the purpose and full significance of the commandment. At most, we are obligated to be cognizant of the obligatory nature of the performance. But according to Tosefot, the mitzvah of eating the Pesach with its Matzah and Marror must be discussed and understood in order to be completely fulfilled. Why is the mitzvah of the Pesach different from other mitzvot?

“AND YOU SHOULD TELL TO YOUR SON” ONE MIGHT THINK THAT THE MITZVAH CAN BE FULFILLED FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE MONTH. THE TORAH TELLS US, “ON THAT DAY.” IF ONE WAS ONLY TOLD THAT THE MITZVAH MUST BE FULFILLED ON THAT DAY, ONE MIGHT THINK THAT IT CAN BE FULFILLED BEFORE NIGHTFALL. THE TORAH TELLS US “FOR THE SAKE OF THIS.” “FOR THE SAKE OF

THIS” ONLY APPLIES AT THE TIME THE MATZAH AND MARROR ARE PLACED BEFORE YOU.” (HAGADDAH OF PESACH)

This section of the Hagaddah is derived from and paraphrases the Michilta. The section deals with the derivation for the proper time for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of recounting our redemption from Egypt. The Mechilta explains that the mitzvah can only be fulfilled on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan. This requirement is not explicitly stated in the Torah. Instead, it is derived from a passage that indicates the mitzvah can only be fulfilled at the time at of the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror. The mitzvot of Matzah and Marror are fulfilled on the fifteenth of Nisan after nightfall. Therefore, according to the Mechilta, the mitzvah of Sippur – the retelling of the redemption – is also relegated to the night of the fifteenth of Nisan.

The implications of this lesson from the Mechilta are very important. According to the Mechilta, the mitzvot of Matzah, Marror and Sippur are inextricably interrelated – to the extent that the mitzvah of Sippur can only be fulfilled at the time of the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror. What is the basis of this interrelationship? It seems clear from the Mechilta that the Torah designed the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror to be fulfilled in the context of Sippur. These mitzvot do not merely coexist on the night of the fifteenth. Together, they merge into a single entity.

This relationship is reflected in Maimonides’ treatment of these mitzvot. In his code, he discusses the mitzvah of Matzah, then the mitzvah of sippur. He then describes how these mitzvot are performed on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan. In other words, after discussing the various mitzvot performed on the night of the fifteenth, Maimonides provides a detailed description of the Seder.

From Maimonides’ treatment of these mitzvot and the Seder, it seems that the Seder is more than a set of instructions for the fulfillment of a set of unrelated mitzvot that happen to occur at the same time. Instead, the various mitzvot of the night merge into a single unified and coordinated entity – the Seder. In other words, the Seder is the halachic entity in which the various mitzvot of the night merge and become unified.

We can now more fully understand Tosefot’s reasoning. Why do the mitzvot of Pesach, Matzah and Marror require discussion, explanation and understanding? This is because the mitzvot are designed to occur in the context of the mitzvah of Sippur. Because of this context the mitzvot cannot be properly fulfilled without explanation and understanding. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 7:5.

[2] Rav Yitzchak Mirsky, Haggadat Hegyonai Halacha (Jerusalem, 5762), p III.



The Nile River

Inanimate, yet deified, Egypt's first lesson addressed their concept of deities.

BLOOD: The 1st Plague

The 10 Plagues

Moving past our astonishment at these miracles, many lessons await to be discovered...

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

EXOD. 7:1-5: "AND GOD SAID TO MOSES, 'RECOGNIZE, I HAVE POSITIONED YOU AS A JUDGE TO PHARAOH, AND AARON YOUR BROTHER WILL BE YOUR PROPHET. YOU SPEAK ALL THAT I COMMAND YOU, AND AARON YOUR BROTHER WILL SPEAK TO PHARAOH TO SEND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FROM HIS LAND. AND I WILL HARDEN PHARAOH'S HEART, [1] AND I WILL INCREASE MY SIGNS AND MY WONDERS IN THE LAND OF EGYPT. AND PHARAOH WILL NOT LISTEN TO YOU, AND I WILL PLACE MY HAND TO EGYPT AND I WILL TAKE OUT MY HOSTS, MY PEOPLE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FROM THE LAND OF EGYPT WITH [2] GREAT JUDGMENTS. AND EGYPT WILL KNOW THAT I AM GOD WHEN I STRETCH FORTH MY HAND ON EGYPT AND I TAKE OUT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FROM THEIR MIDST."

God instructs Moses to speak to Pharaoh that he should free the Jews. God tells Moses that he knows Pharaoh will not free them, as He will harden Pharaoh's heart. God states the goal of hardening Pharaoh is to create wonders in Egypt, that Egypt will know God. One goal is for [1] Egypt's edification and hopefully, repentance. The verse also indicates that there is another goal, [2] "great judgments". What are these "judgments"?

(An important principle is spelled out by the Sforno on Exod. 7:3. He states that God's plagues are to allow Egypt to "recognize His greatness and goodness and repent in a truthful repentance". We must recognize God's kindness in such an act: Man sins, and is justly punished. However, before meting out punishments, God educates the Egyptians to their sin via the plagues. He does one more act to afford the sinners a path to repentance, and to circumvent any punishment. We learn that God works

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FROGS: The 2nd Plague

additional kindness and gives man opportunities to correct his ways, before receiving punishment, or the loss of his soul.)

Just prior to the eighth plague, the Plague of Locusts, the Torah reiterates these two goals:

EXOD. 10:1-2: “GOD SAID TO MOSES, ‘COME TO PHARAOH BECAUSE I HAVE HARDENED HIS HEART AND THE HEART OF HIS SERVANTS IN ORDER [1] THAT I PLACE THESE SIGNS OF MINE IN HIS MIDST. AND IN ORDER TO SPEAK IN THE EARS OF YOUR SON AND YOUR GRANDSON THAT WHICH I HAVE [2] MOCKED EGYPT, AND MY SIGNS WHICH I HAVE PLACED IN THEM, AND THEY SHALL KNOW THAT I AM GOD.’”

(Before proceeding, I wish to clarify the term “mock”. When applied to, or used by God, we cannot understand it as God expressing human characteristics of derision. To “laugh at”, or to “mock”, in connection with God, means He is assured of the sinner’s downfall. So “certain” is God, it is as if He laughs, like a human would when he warns another of a negative result, yet the other person does not heed the warning, and inevitably suffers. The one who warned will say, “I told you so”, as if to laugh at the ignorance of the other. God is said to “mock” Egypt, as their downfall is inevitable. God’s warnings and knowledge are absolute, so one is wise to follow God exactly. Egypt didn’t, so their devastation was certain.)

Here we see a new point, a “mocking” of Egypt, explained as God’s withholding Pharaoh from repenting - the hardening his heart. Rashi says this means a laughing of sorts. Ramban says, “I (God) laugh at him (Pharaoh) that I harden his heart, and do vengeance in him...” From these two verses, we learn two distinct purposes in the 10 plagues: Verse 10:1 teaches: [1] that God multiply His wonders for Egypt to learn of Him, and verse

10:2 teaches: [2] that the Jews repeat this to their descendants that God removes Pharaoh’s (man’s) ability to repent, and that He and His miracles are made known. Clearly, Moses continuously approaches Pharaoh, knowing all too well that Pharaoh will not free the Jews. But Moses is commanded by God to do so, as God’s purpose is to [1] publicize His name and [2] demonstrate His justice as meted out in Pharaoh’s inability to repent.

This 2nd point is not too well known. The plagues’ spectacular nature attracts our emotions to the visual phenomena. However, as 10:2 states, God also wished to “mock” Egypt. He desired that this principle of withholding repentance become clear. The Torah commentaries state, (paraphrased) “...it is unusual that a man can face such plagues of Hail, Locusts, and the like, and still remain obstinate. Man’s nature is to be terrified, not to maintain his stubbornness.” Such a steadfast attitude, even after receiving blow upon blow, is not natural for man, and must be by God’s word. Pharaoh’s resistance is to be a prime focus of the plagues. Moses’ mission is to bring out into the open this aspect of God’s justice: when man is too far-gone, God will restrain him from repenting. The plagues are to demonstrate how God does not allow a terribly corrupt person to repent. Intuitively, we would think that any man who sins, should be afforded the ability to repent. Why then in such a deviant person, does God withhold repentance? What is the justice in this restraint?

Questions on the Loss of Repentance

- 1) In his laws of Repentance, chapter 5, Maimonides teaches that man is always the cause of his free will. If so, what did God do to Pharaoh that prevented him from freeing the Jews and from repenting? How does God “harden” Pharaoh’s heart?
- 2) If God hardens Pharaoh’s heart, and therefore, Pharaoh does not free the Jews, is it just that God punish Pharaoh?
- 3) In his Laws of Repentance, chapter 6, Maimonides states that a person may sin a very evil sin, or sin many times, until the sentence from God will be to remove his ability to repent, and that the sinner die in his sin which he did knowingly with his will at the outset. Maimonides states that Pharaoh’s stubbornness is an example of this principle. What is the justice in this principle of “removal of repentance”?
- 4) In law 6:3 of his Laws on Repentance, Maimonides repeats eight times that the sinner sinned “on his own”. What is Maimonides driving at? Ramban too states in Exod 7:3 that Pharaoh was punished with the loss of his repenting ability, as

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he initially sinned with his "own free will". How does this help us understand God's justice?

5) Ramban offers two reasons for the justice of Pharaoh's inability to repent. One reason given is that Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, but merely a tactic to remove the ever increasing pain of each successive plague. As the plagues progressed, Ramban teaches that Pharaoh became more inclined to free the Jews, and he would have, after the fifth plague. However, God removed his ability to repent, and he did not free them. We must ask: If Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, then what is the difference if he does or doesn't verbalize his repentance? Why does God deem it necessary that Pharaoh not utter his repentance, if it would be meaningless, as Ramban states?

6) In law 6:2, Maimonides says that repentance acts as a "shield" against punishment. Does Maimonides' statement have bearing on this Ramban above? Is repentance an absolute protection against punishment, and therefore God "had" to prevent Pharaoh from uttering even ungentle words?

The Plagues' Purpose: A Point of No Return

Despite Pharaoh's inability to concede to Moses' demand, Maimonides states that Moses' repeated approach to Pharaoh is to teach an important lesson: "In order to make known to those who enter the world, that when God holds back repentance from the sinner, he is not able to repent, but [rather] he dies in his evil that he initially committed with his own will." We are taught a crucial lesson: Man can sin to the point of no return.

Part of our human design - our free will - allows us to steep ourselves in corruption, to the point that we can no longer extricate ourselves. This was God's lesson to the world through restraining Pharaoh from repenting. He is the prime example of man's ability to reach a point with no hope for repentance. God publicized Pharaoh's corruption as an act of kindness to "all others who enter the world", as Maimonides states. God teaches an invaluable lesson. If we forfeit this lesson, tragically, we can lose our eternal life.

Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

There are a few ways to understand God's restraint on man's ability to repent: Man reaches the point of no return, so God merely "reflects" man's own corruption by withholding an ungentle repentance. Rabbi Mann suggested a second theory: that man can do some form of repentance, but God does not allow him, as God's mercy grants repentance to man, but only up to a point, and no further. Accordingly, man is punished for

the sins he initially committed on his own. God is kind to allow man repentance, but God determines for how long repentance remains available. So we must look at God's ultimate restraint on repentance in an opposite light: It is not a cruelty that He removes repentance, but a kindness that He tolerates sinners for so long. According to theory #1, man sins to the point where he is completely and irrevocably corrupt. He has the ability to go through the motions of repenting to avoid pain, but God does not allow him this right. In this case, God mirrors the sinner's exact corruption - he cannot truly repent, so God does not allow the act of a useless repentance.

Ramban: Preventing Ungentle Repentance

Ramban indicates that repentance is a shield against punishments - the question is how. To reiterate, Ramban's second answer for God restraining Pharaoh from repenting is as follows: "Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, but merely a tactic to remove the ever increasing pain of each successive plague." Therefore, he was not allowed to repent. Had he repented - even for this wrong reason - Ramban indicates it would have been effective in some manner. Thus, God prevented his repentance. How may we explain this Ramban?

Discussing this issue with Rabbi Mann, we agreed as follows: Had God allowed Pharaoh to repent an ungentle repentance, Pharaoh would justly deserve continued plagues, as the plagues' purpose of Pharaoh recognizing God would not be realized. However, Egypt would see Pharaoh "repenting" and would have a gripe against God's justice. They would not know that Pharaoh repented a false repentance, and would feel God is unjust to continue plaguing Egypt. We may suggest this explanation for the Ramban: for this reason, God did not allow Pharaoh's false impression of repentance. Such repentance would be of no use to Pharaoh's perfection, but it mattered to others, to Egypt. Rabbi Mann stated that Moses too was concerned that if God justly killed the Jews when they sinned with the Golden Calf, Egypt would say that God failed and smote his people in the desert. Due to the concern that all mankind recognize God as just, Moses asked God, "Why should Egypt say, 'with evil He took them out of Egypt to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from off the face of Earth...'" (Exod. 32:12) Moses did not desire Egypt to possess a false impression of God. What perfection Moses displays...even after hundreds of years of bondage, Moses has concern for God's reputation in his oppressors' eyes. Moses teaches that we must be concerned that God's reputation be completely just. We care that all mankind obtain the truth.

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Maimonides: Free Will and a Hardened Heart - a Contradiction?

Maimonides states in his Laws of Repentance, chapter 5, God never removes one's free will. He calls this a "great fundamental". This makes sense, as the Torah is a system where 'reward and punishment' is a cornerstone. Thus, man must always be the sole cause of his actions. How then do we understand Maimonides' theory on God hardening Pharaoh's heart? In his Laws of Repentance 6:3, Maimonides writes, "And it is possible that man sin a great sin, or many sins, until the judgment is given before the True Judge that the punishment for this sinner on these sins that he did with his will and his knowledge, is that repentance is prevented from him, and he is not allowed permission to return from his evil so that he should die and expire in his sin that he did...Therefore it is written in the Torah, 'and I will harden Pharaoh's heart.' Since he sinned initially by himself, and did evil to the Jews living in his land, as it says, 'come, let us be wise', Judgment was passed to prevent repentance from him, until punishment was exacted from him. Therefore, God hardened his heart."

If free will is a fundamental, how can God seemingly violate this principle by preventing Pharaoh from repenting?

Free will is always under man's control. But free will "to do what"? This is the key point: it is the free will to "select evil or good" that God places in man's hand unconditionally. However, God will - in extreme cases - remove our free will to decide another matter: repentance. Eight times Maimonides stresses that man chooses to do good or evil, of "his own will." He wished to clarify this point that free will is never taken away from man in this single area of choosing good or evil. Man will always be the sole cause of this choice. The Torah says this openly, (Deut. 30:15, 19) "See I place before you today, life and good, death an evil...and choose life." Moses tells the people that they may choose between good and evil. This is the area where man is always in control. But in the area of repenting, if man already selected evil, and corrupts himself so grievously, God will prevent his free will from selecting repentance, "so he may die and expire in the sin that he did."

There is no contradiction in Maimonides' words. God gives man free will to do good and evil, and never removes this freedom. In one area however, God does compromise man's free will: the area of repentance. Restricting Pharaoh from repenting does not equate to God making him sin. Pharaoh sinned of his own free will, and so grievously, that God's justice demands he be removed from the system of repentance. Had Pharaoh been free to repent, he would avoid punishment he truly deserved. Maimonides argues with Ramban and Sforno on this point.



LICE: The 3rd Plague

Maimonides holds Pharaoh's repentance would have been genuine. This brings us to our next question.

If Pharaoh's repentance would be a genuine, why did God not allow him to repent? God allows others to repent! Perhaps it is possible that man sin with so much evil, that the normal repentance does not outweigh the evil. Let me explain: In normal cases, man sins, but then it is possible that his remorse for his evil is so genuine, that he is in fact not the same person who sinned. He has complete regret, and resigns himself to never sin this sin again. This is true repentance, when the new state of good in man completely erases any taint of the evil formerly held on to. As man learns the fault of his crimes, and sees clearly how hurtful his action was to himself or others, he now regrets his actions. In such a case, God completely forgives man, and "none of his sins will be remembered." (Ezekiel 18) But it can also happen, that a person sins, and repents, but any repentance does not completely correct his evil. Repentance can only correct a person up to a point. Repentance can be an injustice, if someone sins so harshly, and would be let off. Just as free will to select good or evil is an institution that God never compromises, so too repentance is always accepted before God. Maimonides states this in law 6:2. This being so, the only solution is to remove repentance so Pharaoh and those like him pay for their crimes. It would be unjust to allow Pharaoh to escape punishment through repentance. How odd it may sound, repentance is not just in this case. The basic concept is that God forgives man, but only up to a certain level of corruption. Man may exceed forgiveness - a point of no return.

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Sforno

Sforno is of another opinion. He states that had Pharaoh desired to, he could have repented, as “there is nothing preventing him.” If this is so, how does Sforno understand the verse that God “hardened Pharaoh’s heart”? Sforno explains this as God giving Pharaoh the ability to ‘tolerate the plagues’. As Sforno states, if God did not harden his heart, Pharaoh would have freed the Jews, but not out of a desire to subject his will to God, performing a true, complete repentance. Pharaoh would have freed the Jews only to avoid any further pain, “and this is not repentance at all” as Sforno says. Sforno differs from Maimonides and Ramban, in that he contests that God ever inhibits one’s path back to God via repentance. Sforno quotes Ezekiel 18:23, “Do I really desire the death of the wicked, so says God? Is it not in his repenting from his path and that he live?” Sforno proves from this verse that God always desires, and makes available, one’s repentance. God did not remove repentance from Pharaoh, as suggested by Ramban and Maimonides.

In summary, Moses’ mission was twofold: He was to assist in delivering the Plagues so Egypt and the Jews would recognize God. An idolatrous culture would be shown false, and God’s system of reward and punishment would be made clear. Additionally, some of our Rabbis teach that Pharaoh’s reluctance was publicized to teach mankind that we have the ability to sink into sin, so far, that we have no way of removing ourselves.

It is then so crucial that we all examine our ways, and not forfeit a true, eternal life, due to temporal emotional satisfaction, or false ideas. ■

For further reading of the original sources, see Maimonides’ “Laws of Repentance”, chapters V and VI; Maimonides’ introduction to Ethics of the Fathers, the “Shmoneh Perakim”, Chapter VIII, and sources noted herein.

IF WE CALL, HE WILL ANSWER... AND ANSWER ALL

RABBI REUVEN MANN

“AND THE EGYPTIANS DEALT ILL WITH US, AND AFFLICTED US, AND LAID UPON US HARD BONDAGE. AND WE CRIED UNTO THE LORD, THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS, AND THE LORD HEARD OUR VOICE, AND SAW OUR AFFLICTION, AND OUR TOIL, AND OUR OPPRESSION.”

According to the above passage, Hashem’s involvement in helping us, the Jewish people was initiated once we cried out to Him. As God is omniscient, He already knows our suffering. So why did we first have to cry? This teaches that man’s cry to God is a significant factor in triggering God’s intervention. As long as a person chooses to rely on himself alone, and does not cry out or recognize God, God may not help. It is when man’s suffering brings him to recognize God that the intervention is merited.

The above passage also records that the Lord hear our voice, saw our affliction, and our toil. This teaches that although we cried out from the hard labor, once Hashem “heard our voice” or decided to intervene, He took notice of the entire situation - not just the cause of our crying out, but all of the factors that embittered our lives. ■



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Idolatry

Animated gods, Egypt's next lesson detached them from the species they felt favored them.



MIXTURE: The 4th Plague

*A mixture of dangerous species...why a mixture?
What is lost if a single species attacks?*

When studying the 10 Plagues, it is quite easy to get “distracted” by their miraculous features, thereby losing sight of the verses’ subtleties. More than anything, the Torah is intended to reveal God’s wisdom. To this end, millennia of Torah students, Sages and Rabbis have toiled in Talmud, Mishna and Scripture, training their minds, and as they learned the same areas year after year, they unlocked arrived at greater depths of God’s wisdom. We must be sensitive to what at first seems like unimportant data, and ask ourselves why God deemed “this” verse or idea to be included: “What is its lesson?” Let us take the plague of the mixture of wild beasts from last week’s Parsha Vaeyrah as an example (Exod. 8:16-28):

“AND GOD SAID TO MOSES, ‘ARISE IN THE MORNING AND STAND BEFORE PHARAOH AS HE GOES TO THE RIVER AND AY TO HIM, ‘SEND MY PEOPLE THAT THEY WILL SERVE ME. FOR IF YOU DO NOT SEND MY PEOPLE, BEHOLD, I WILL SEND UNTO YOU, UNTO YOUR SERVANTS, AND UNTO YOUR PEOPLE AND INTO YOUR HOMES THE MIXTURE [OF WILD ANIMALS] AND THE MIXTURE WILL FILL THE HOUSES OF EGYPT AND ALSO THE LAND THAT THEY ARE ON. AND I WILL DISTINGUISH ON THAT DAY THE LAND OF GOSHEN ON WHICH MY PEOPLE STAND, THAT THERE WILL BE NO MIXTURE, IN ORDER THAT YOU SHALL KNOW THAT I AM GOD

IN THE MIDST OF THE LAND. AND I WILL PLACE A SALVATION BETWEEN MY PEOPLE AND BETWEEN YOUR PEOPLE: TOMORROW THIS SIGN SHALL OCCUR.’ AND GOD DID SO, AND THE MIXTURE CAME HEAVY [ON] PHARAOH’S HOUSE AND HIS SERVANTS’ HOMES, AND [IN] THE ENTIRE LAND OF EGYPT THE LAND WAS DESTROYED DUE TO THE MIXTURE. AND PHARAOH CALLED MOSES AND AARON AND SAID, ‘GO SACRIFICE TO YOUR GOD IN THE LAND’. AND MOSES SAID, ‘THIS IS NOT PROPER TO DO SO, FOR IT IS AN ABOMINATION TO EGYPT TO SACRIFICE TO GOD OUR GOD; FOR BEHOLD, IF WE SACRIFICE THE ABOMINATION OF EGYPT IN FRONT OF THEIR EYES, WILL THEY NOT STONE US? A JOURNEY OF THREE DAYS WE WILL TRAVEL IN THE DESERT AND WE WILL SACRIFICE TO GOD OUR GOD AS HE HAS TOLD US.’ AND PHARAOH SAID, ‘I WILL SEND YOU AND YOU WILL SACRIFICE TO GOD YOUR GOD IN THE DESERT, HOWEVER, DO NOT TRAVEL TOO FAR, PRAY FOR MY SAKE.’ AND MOSES SAID, ‘BEHOLD I WILL EXIT FROM YOU, AND I WILL PRAY TO GOD TO REMOVE THE MIXTURE FROM PHARAOH, FROM HIS SERVANTS AND FROM HIS PEOPLE TOMORROW, HOWEVER, LET PHARAOH NOT LIE, NOT SENDING THE PEOPLE TO SACRIFICE TO GOD.’ AND MOSES WENT OUT FROM PHARAOH AND PRAYED TO GOD. AND GOD DID AS MOSES’ WORD, AND HE REMOVED THE MIXTURE FROM PHARAOH, FROM HIS SERVANTS, AND FROM HIS PEOPLE...NOT ONE WAS LEFT. AND PHARAOH HARDENED HIS HEART ALSO THIS TIME, AND HE DID NOT SEND THE PEOPLE.”

A number of questions arise:

- 1) Why did God deem the Mixture as one of the 10 Plagues? What is specific to this plague that it was perfectly appropriate for afflicting Pharaoh and Egypt? What were its lessons?
- 2) Unlike other plagues, here alone we see an emphasis of “sacrificing” to God, mentioned six times. Is this significant, and if so, how?
- 3) Why does God refer to this plague as (Arove) “Mixture”? Is this title significant?
 - 4a) Pharaoh says, “Go sacrifice to your God in the land”. Moses said, “This is not proper to do so, for it is an abomination to Egypt to sacrifice to God our God: for behold, if we sacrifice the abomination of Egypt in front of their eyes, will they not stone us?” Besides the practical ramifications of shielding the Jews from Egypt’s attack, is there another idea Moses instills in Pharaoh, with his “own” address?
 - 4b) In general, aside from God’s administering of the Plagues, we find Moses addressing Pharaoh in his own words. Was Moses instructed to do so? We certainly do not see so in the text. And if he was not instructed, why did he address Pharaoh? Another instance is Exodus 9:31 and 9:32, where Moses is about to pray to God to halt the Hail. But before he does so, he tells Pharaoh, “the stiff plants broke from the hail, while the softer plants survived”(paraphrased). Why this interruption, and again, why was Moses addressing Pharaoh? We do

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not read that God commanded Moses to address him, other than the announcement of the plagues, and their description as per God's words. Why the additional address by Moses?

5) When commanding Moses to warn Pharaoh, God instructs him to say the following: "And I will distinguish on that day the land of Goshen on which My people stand, that there will be no Mixture, in order that you shall know that I am God in the midst of the land." We wonder what is this rarely seen objective of "distinguishing" Israel from Egypt. Is this God's primary goal with this Mixture of beasts, and that is why it is stated? If so, what is the underlying message? "Distinguishing" cannot be a lesson in itself. "Distinction", by its very definition, is concerning some 'area' of distinction; as in a distinguished scholar, where his 'knowledge' is distinct from others. So we must ask, in what area did God distinguish the Jews via this plague? This question is compounded by the next verse where God states He will render a salvation for the Jews, not to be harmed by the Mixture. The distinction is made again. Why?

Moses' Role

I believe Moses address to Pharaoh teaches us a number of ideas. One idea stated by a Rabbi, is that Moses was necessary for the plagues, but not that God could not perform them without Moses. The Rabbi taught that Moses was necessary, so as to communicate the deeper ideas contained in each Plague. God did not merely plague Egypt with arbitrary miracles, but with signs and wonders which addressed certain flaws in Pharaoh and the Egyptian culture. They were intended to reveal insights necessary for the potential repentance and perfection. Without someone as wise as Moses, the perception of the plagues' underlying ideas would be missed.

Purpose of Prophets

This also teaches that God desired that Pharaoh realize another concept: there is immense wisdom out there, and it can only be arrived at with use of the mind. God needs no emissary, but God sent Moses as a primary lesson to Pharaoh that man (Moses) arrives at true knowledge only when using the mind...as Moses portrayed to Pharaoh. This is quite a fascinating idea to me. We are so ready to accept Moses' leadership and role as emissary, but we overlook the very basic question: Why did God desire to send Moses, or send prophets in general? God could have accomplished the plagues on His own. This is a Torah and Maimonidean fundamental: Prophets were sent, not because God needs anyone or anything, but because God wishes to teach man at every turn. And with the sending of prophets, man must realize that a great level of wisdom is required to understand our reality...God's created reality. The prophet is being sent, for he - to the exclusion of others - is fit to understand God, and teach man. This was a primary lesson to Pharaoh: "Your life of idolatry is based on the absence of reasoning, and you require education, through Moses." The most basic lesson to Egypt, and to all cultures today that are idolatrous, is that the mind is not being engaged. If people did use their minds, even to a small degree, they

would wonder why they are bowing to stone gods, and deifying men like Jesus.

Animal Behavior

Moses too understood this; he understood his role and that is why he addressed Pharaoh: to explain the underlying messages, and have the effect on Pharaoh and Egypt desired by God. In the plague of the Mixture of beasts, Moses tells Pharaoh that sacrificing to God in Egypt will get the Jews stoned to death. Moses means to address the very concept of animal worship. I believe this explains why God - in this plague alone - mentions the word "sacrifice" six times, for it is this plague that was sent to address the very problem of animal worship: sacrifice is the antithesis of animal worship! So the repetition of "sacrifice" in this plague alone indicates that sacrifice is central to the purpose of the plague of the Mixture. (God uses word repetitions in other Torah instances too, as subtle suggestions of an underlying Torah theme.)

Now, as Egypt deified animals, Moses directed Pharaoh to recognize this flaw. He told Pharaoh the Egyptians could not stand idly by as animals were sacrificed. For this reason, the Jews were required to offer the Paschal lamb to earn God's salvation: they had to demonstrate their disregard for animal deification, and their trust in God's salvation from any stoning, and His deliverance of the nation to Israel. But how did this plague attempt to correct Egypt's animal deification? It was through psychology. God sent multiple species of beasts that destroyed Egypt, included snakes and scorpions as Rashi stated, the very beasts we find on Pharaoh's headdresses. Thus, the Egyptians should no longer deify that which causes them much grief. When a person is alarmed at some phenomenon, he tends to no longer gravitate towards it, and this I believe was one of the objectives in this plague: to sever ties between man and animal.

Why were a "mixture" sent, and not a single species? A mixture was used as it generates a feeling of disdain toward animals "in general", not just a single class, which would allow the Egyptians to retain their deification feelings for all other beasts. This explains why this plague was called "Mixture" (Arove). For the Mixture targeted this concept of diluting the Egyptian deification of elevated species, by generating disdain for animals in general.

One last question is why God desired to distinguish the Jews in this plague, in the "land of Goshen". The Rabbis answer (Ibn Ezra 9:1) that God displayed His control over all creation: Earth, the heavens...and all that occurs in between, such as man's actions. Blood, Frogs, and Lice emanated from the Earth. The Mixture, Animal Deaths and Boils occurred "on" the Earth. And Hail, Locusts and Darkness occurred in the air or the heavens. God successfully displayed His control over all creation, by categorizing the plagues in this manner. (Nothing else exists but Earth, heaven, and all events) Of course, God also wished to smite the Egyptians' god, the Nile River with Blood, and there are many other facets to these plagues that we have not begun to detect or examine. As we stated at the very outset, God's wisdom is never ending. But man's is. ■

Demoted

Unwarranted status received by astrologers required reversal.



BOILS: The 6th Plague

What element in skin boils incapacitated the astrologers from standing before Moses? Boils don't affect muscles...

“AND THE ASTROLOGERS COULD NOT STAND BEFORE MOSES BECAUSE OF THE BOILS; FOR THE BOILS WERE ON THE ASTROLOGERS AND ALL OF EGYPT.” (EXODUS 9:11)

What is problematic with that statement? It says the astrologers couldn't stand before Moses. Now I wonder: if the issue is that the boils crippled them – which itself sounds odd – of what relevance are the boils on "other" Egyptians? Why mention that "all Egyptians" had boils, if the verse's message concerns only the "astrologers" inability to stand? Furthermore, of what significance is the astrologers' inability to stand before Moses? Let them sit! But "stand" has another meaning...

I believe we are being taught many lessons here. The primary lesson is not concerning the posture of lying mystics...this adds no great wisdom to God's Torah. The real lesson must address the basic theme of the Ten Plagues, as the plague of boils was delivered together with the other nine.

Standing also means to "present" one's self...to appear before others. The astrologers attempted to reproduce the plagues,

only to expose their inability to do so. This is significant, since God records their feeble attempts. So significant is this point, that it appears from the very few words concerning boils, that the objective of this plague was precisely to disarm their claims to superiority through astrology and magic. Torah verses are selective in their messages, not merely recounting every single historical occurrence. Our verse means to teach that boils purposefully targeted the astrologers.

"And the astrologers could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt." This refers not to posture, but to their ability to sustain their dignity...they could not "appear" before Moses who outperformed them. They were ashamed. But why were they any more ashamed during the plague of boils? The answer is the second part of the verse: "...for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt". Here, God hints to us...

Let the Words Talk

What might we derive from this latter half of the verse? These words appear to make a comparison. Both, the astrologers and the Egyptians possessed boils. We must now ask this: what about this comparison prevented the astrologers from appearing before Moses? Why was their "equal" status with all other Egyptians an embarrassment to them? We see the answer quire readily! It was the very equality of their condition to that of all other Egyptians that disarmed their claims to greatness. They were no better! They could not defend themselves from boils. What type of powerful astrologer allows painful blisters to afflict them over days? It is the liar who allows this to happen, since in fact, he has no more defense from boils than any other Egyptian.

It was this diminution of status that was their embarrassment, and why they could not "appear" before Moses.

How God Teaches Us

As a wise Rabbi said, and as I have quoted numerous time, the Torah's words are carefully selected. Our verse is just one example of hundreds of thousands. With His meticulously crafted texts, God provides us with just enough information to discern a problem, and that hint being the very opening to the answer. "Its answer is by its side" is a Rabbinic statement describing this very phenomenon.

Knowledge is endless, but written words are limited. How then can God direct all generations to continuously uncover new truths? If knowledge was limited to the written word, when

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we concluded any text, we would have nothing more to gain. This is only true of human works. But Divinely inspired works are different. The Torah's and Rabbis "apparent" inconsistencies, exaggerations and contradictions force the mind into the world of induction and deduction, and other forms of reasoning. Wisdom has a design. It has layers and curtains...where truths are only unveiled with the method of questioning.

We must appreciate the "Chocmas haKasuv", the "wisdom of the written words", and search for God's intended teaching by listening to the words with a great deal of sensitivity and awe. "For God gives wisdom, from His lips [come] knowledge and understanding". (Proverbs 2:6) This verse teaches two matters: 1) to be cognizant that God is the "source" of all wisdom, and 2) that His "lips" offer an additional benefit. "Lips" refer to the written word - that which has been articulated. These articulations or Pasukim can reveal great insights if we spend the necessary time considering the problems in each verse.

God's messages embedded in the Ten Plagues are numerous. Clearly, the act of unveiling the astrologers' lies through boils was precise. For only with a plague that attacks the "body" would all others derive the lesson that one person is equal to another. This explains our previous question why boils caused the astrologers' shame, as opposed to any other plague. For it was boils alone that made a comparison between all Egyptians, exposing the astrologers as no different. The very fact that God chose to include this comparison as the exclusive effect of this plague, indicates the very purpose of this plague.

But why was the demotion of astrologers so essential that a separate plague was required to address it?

Leaders: For Study, not Deification

From their inability to reproduce the Plague of Lice and from their silence regarding all subsequent plagues, we realize God's primary lesson is, as He said, "There is none like Me in all the land". God wished to educate the Egyptians away from idolatry and astrology. And He did so by showing His exclusive reign over the universe and all of its laws.

We must then ask what more was achieved when demoting the astrologers' status via boils. We already know that astrology is false, since from the Plague of Lice and onwards, the astrologers could not reproduce any miracle brought by Moses. What more was added in boils?

The verse says the astrologers could not stand before Moses. Again, we see a comparison: the astrologers are contrasted against Moses. I believe this lesson is to force us to consider what we must value, and what we must disregard.

Although in a much higher social status than Moses, the astrologers realized their lowly state. It matters none that they were in positions of power, and that Moses and his people were slaves.

Roles must not play any role.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians - as well as all other human beings - attribute more credence to a person in a higher status, simply because he or she possesses that status. Even the empowered person dupes himself into accepting his "greater" abilities. The lesson here is to ignore reputations, and view one's actions or ideas alone. The Torah says "do not fear man", and "do not respect the rich or the poor". In all cases, human emotions of favoritism will lead to corruption, not God's justice.

Moses was unaffected by the boils that reached the astrologers. This directed the Egyptians to the realization that although in high office, a person can be a fake. It is clear from all civilizations, that man enjoys subjugation to a director - people want a leader. But we must be so careful and accept as a leader, only he who is guided by reason and Torah truths. We must be sensitive to this human frailty of insecurity and the desire for a father figure. We are to abandon that need, and mature into intelligent people. In no way should we respect a leader's words or actions alone: they must pass the litmus test of reason and Torah. The leader too must not fall prey to seeking popularity. That must not be his objective. He must lead only with the desire to educate others towards a life of reason, Torah, and ultimately a love of God...not a love of himself. Rabbi Reuven Mann once mentioned the Talmudic portion that says "Any leader whose subjects like him, is doing a poor job". This means, that a true leader admonishes his followers and risks losing his post. He cares more for truth, than for money or fame.

Summary

We conclude that the Torah teaches in a very subtle style. It takes time to master this style, but it can afford us great insights. We learn that every plague offered deeper lessons than meet the eye. And we learn that we are not to follow the leader, but we must use reason to determine truths. Moses, although of a slave population, spoke truth, while the astrologers attested to their lies by their inability to stand before him.

Don't follow the leader. Follow the truth. ■

The Heavens

As Rabbi Israel Chait taught, Egypt also deified the skies and was in terror of eclipses and heavenly phenomenon. God therefore displayed His exclusive control over the heavens.



HAIL: The 7th Plague

Moses enlightens Pharaoh that God designed Hail around Pharaoh's personality flaw... "learn and live Pharaoh"

In Parshas Vau-Ayra, at the end of the ninth chapter, we find Moses (Moses) not only responding to Pharaoh's plea to halt the plague of hail, but also giving Pharaoh rebuke: Exod. 9:30, "And you and your servants, I know that you have yet to fear God." Why, during the plague of hail, unlike other plagues, does Moses suddenly rebuke Pharaoh? Is there something we may derive from this story that may explain Moses' behavior? It

doesn't appear that God instructed Moses to rebuke Pharaoh, so Moses' words here could be his own. What did Moses see in this plague, and what was his purpose in this dialogue?

We must understand that each plague was not randomly selected, but God carefully designed each one. Each one contained some unique idea. Moses understood better than

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any man, the depth that can be discovered by studying God's creations, including these plagues. I am certain Moses pondered each plague, but saw something unique in hail.

After Moses says "And you and your servants, I know that you have yet to fear God", these two verses follow, "The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk. And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later." There is a question as to who said these two verses. Ramban says Moses spoke these words. I agree, and would like to offer my own interpretation, based on Ramban.

God intended to awaken the Egyptians and Pharaoh to His unique distinction as the Creator of heaven and Earth, Exod 9:16, (God instructing Moses what to tell Pharaoh) "However because of this have I sustained you, on account that I shall show you My strength, and that you shall declare My name throughout the land." God desired not only to show His might, but also to counter obstacles in this society's corrupt nature so they may arrive at the truth.

What obstacle did Pharaoh have? Moses said, "You and your servants have yet to fear God". Pharaoh's obstacle was obstinacy. Moses was first telling Pharaoh his exact flaw in recognizing God. Moses then viewed the hail, and pondered the different affects it had on various crops. Moses saw that stiff plants broke, while flexible ones survived. He then thought to himself why God created a plague with such a characteristic of affecting plants in two manners. Perhaps Moses gained insight into this specific plague and into God's approach in reprimanding the Egyptians. God designed the specifics of each plague. But we may question whether these specific plagues were pre-designed from the outset, or did God design each plague in line with what was needed at each juncture, depending on Pharaoh's current response.

Pharaoh was now being obstinate, as Moses pointed out to him "you have yet to fear God". Obstinacy had to be pointed out to Pharaoh if he was to understand Moses' next statement, which was in direct response to his character. Stripping Pharaoh of his defenses would be the best method for him to finally recognize God. Perhaps God included other messages in the plagues for Moses to derive through his own keen analysis of their unique properties. Moses therefore intimated to Pharaoh his character flaw via a parallel: "The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk." Meaning, "you Pharaoh are going to be broken" as you are stiff like the flax and barley. "And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later." Again a parallel, "you

Pharaoh would be spared if you were flexible", as are the wheat and spelt.

Moses attempted to teach Pharaoh this: "this current plague was designed as a parallel to you". The goal being that Pharaoh repent and follow God, as God wishes this for all mankind, "For I do not desire the death of the dead (the wicked) says God, but (in his) repentance and in his living." Moses was teaching Pharaoh that there is in fact a God Who knows all man's thoughts. Hopefully Pharaoh would be impressed and acknowledge the Creator.

This taught Pharaoh an essential lesson about God: He not only recognizes man's thoughts and actions, but He "interacts" with man. How else could God design a plague to address a single man's (Pharaoh) specific nature? This is a great lesson.

The proof that this was a central theme in God's plagues is Moses' and Aaron's initial address to Pharaoh. In Exodus 5:1-3, Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh for the first time: 1) "So says God, the God of Israel, send My people that they may celebrate Me in the desert. 2) And Pharaoh said, 'Who is God that I should listen to His voice, to send Israel, I do not know God, and Israel I will not send.' 3) And they (Moses and Aaron) said, 'The God of the Hebrews called unto us, let us go a journey of three days in the desert and we will sacrifice to God our God, lest we be afflicted with plague or the sword.'" Pharaoh responds in verse 2, and then in verse 3, Moses and Aaron attempt to clarify something to Pharaoh. What point is repeated in verse 3? They now state "The God of the Hebrews called unto us..." This reiterates their initial address of "So says God, the God of Israel..." Moses and Aaron wished to communicate a new idea to Pharaoh: the Jewish God "calls" to man. He is unique, and far above the lifeless Egyptian gods. However, Moses and Aaron saw that their initial attempt to deliver this novel concept to Pharaoh was ignored. They repeated their words, but now with more clarity, "God called to us". This time, in verse 3, they did not use the passive "God said" as in verse 1, but the active "(God) called to us". The God of Israel actually communicates with man. This was what Moses and Aaron wished to impress on the leader of a culture, whose idols were lifeless stone and metal. A "knowing" and "powerful" God was Moses and Aaron's message. Thus, if they disobeyed, this "powerful" God would bring plague or death (sword). Moses and Aaron wished to teach Pharaoh the two most primary concepts that distinguish God from all other deities: He is omniscient and omnipotent, all-knowing and all-powerful. God's system of reward and punishment is also based on this idea, and Pharaoh was taught reward and punishment through

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God's distinction between the Jewish and Egyptian livestock. Only the latter were plagued. We see a theme permeating the plagues.

Returning to the metaphor used by Moses about the stiff and soft crops, why did Moses tell Pharaoh this through metaphor, and not directly? When someone is faced with a self-realization that conflicts with his ego, he will not be able to tolerate such a stark reality, and he will deny it in defense. To allow Pharaoh a path to accept this idea, Moses used a method, which does not evoke a strong, defensive response, but one wherein the listener may ponder. Moses used a metaphor, which can, after time, appeal to the person more casually, thereby avoiding a direct onslaught of the person's self image. A direct approach would only result in Pharaoh's reluctance to hear God's message, and the loss of any good for Pharaoh.

We see a clear proof against those self-righteous Jews who falsely assume they have more purpose than Gentiles. If this were so, God would not be so concerned with Pharaoh and the Egyptians, that they obtain knowledge of God. God told Moses at the very outset that Pharaoh will not hearken to him. Yet, God instructs Moses to perform the plagues, "on account that I shall show you My strength, and that you shall declare My name throughout the land." God is concerned that all nations recognize the truth of His existence.■

HAIL: MY People, MY Land

*How God addresses man's
last line of defense*

God tells Moses to address Pharaoh concerning the plague of hail:

"IF YOU CONTINUE TO SUBJUGATE MY PEOPLE AND DO NOT SEND THEM, I WILL CAUSE IT TO RAIN AT THIS TIME TOMORROW, AN EXCEEDINGLY GREAT HAIL THAT THERE WAS NEVER LIKE IT IN EGYPT FROM THE DAY IT WAS ESTABLISHED, UNTIL NOW." (EXOD. 9:17,18)

And when the hail commences, we read the following:

"AND THE HAIL WAS FIRE MIXED INSIDE THE HAIL, EXCEEDINGLY GREAT, THERE WAS NEVER LIKE IT IN ALL

THE LAND OF EGYPT, FROM THE TIME IT BECAME A PEOPLE." (EXOD. 9:24)

Perspective

Let's start with a basic question: what was a major objective in God's Ten Plagues? Clearly, it is as God says Himself concerning hail: "...for you shall know there is none like Me in all the land" (Exod. 9:14)

God desired to educate the Egyptians away from their false beliefs in astrology, idolatry, the occult, and mysticism, et al. God's method, is how it has been from literally Day One: creation of the Earth was God's kindness to a planned creature later called man, enabling him to uncover tremendous knowledge by studying all that God created before his arrival on the world's stage. As the Rabbis taught, "God set the table (created Earth) and then invited man." (Paraphrased) Man arrives only after all is ready for his intelligent ponderings. We learn from this that God desires man to use his unique gift of intelligence, granted to him, and no other creation. What this in turn teaches is that God wishes this act of intellectual observation and reasoning, to be man's exclusive means of determining truth. Had God wanted man to live without proofs, and follow anything he felt in his heart, intelligence would not be necessary.

Astrology for example is a belief in matters not observed. All that is observed are objects, not the claimed relationship: heavenly spheres and man's personalities are seen, but not any relationship between the two. Foolish people then attempt to correlate similar personality types with similar months, saying, "all born in August are type A personalities." But their error lies in their ignoring God's intentional gift of intelligence: there is no observable relationship between stars, and human personality. Astrology is an assumed notion, without basis. It is unlike the proven and observable laws of friction, which produce heat. We clearly see how one objects relates through contact and motion with another, generating sparks or flames. We would not say friction exists when we separate two objects from contact. If for example, my friend stands 20 feet away from me attempting to light a match by moving it 'towards' the direction of the matchbook cover, but never touches the strip, the match never ignites. Astrologers will agree to this truth. Why then do they say that stars that are much more distant, can 'ignite' a personality on Earth with certain traits? The contradiction is clear; astrologers are exposed as in error.

It is this method that God used to correct the flaws of Egyptian astrologers, Pharaoh, and their nation. God delivered proofs - observable in nature - that clearly demonstrated that

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Moses was in contact with Earth's Creator – the only One who could suspend the very laws at work. Moses predicted with exact precision “what” would occur, and “when” it would commence and end. There was no parallel in the Ten Plagues to astrology. Astrology offers no evidence of its claims, whereas every plague God sent was observable. Intelligence demanded the Egyptians agree that Moses spoke on behalf of He who controls nature...they saw nature change. No belief was required, just simple observation.

Why did God record in His Torah the failed attempt of the astrologers to reproduce lice? This was to teach that the human hand couldn't control something too small. As Saadia Gaon says, the way the Egyptians reproduced blood was with dies. They reproduced frogs by spilling chemicals into the water that frogs repel, so the frogs leaped from the river, appearing as a plague duplication. But since lice are too small for tactile dexterity, the astrologers admitted it was “the finger of God”. This was recorded – in my opinion – for one reason, to expose to us what Saadia Gaon taught: man manipulates only by sleight of hand...and even this is only up to a point. However, magic does not exist. That is Saadia Gaon's lesson.

Magic and astrology are “beliefs in physical relationships, without physical contact”. This violates natural law, and natural law is observable and proved. Therefore, we reject astrology, magic, talking to the dead, mysticism, and all notions that are not observable. It's easy – and for many comforting – to accept mystical beliefs. It requires no thought or proof, it can be done quickly, and it comforts one with pleasant lies. One who follows Torah now understands why all these practices are forbidden, as Ibn Ezra says, “The Torah prohibits lies, not truths”.

So we conclude: God gave man intelligence precisely so man uses intelligence “alone” to determine what to accept as truth. Anything not proven through observation and/or reason must not be accepted. This must be clear to you.

But this was only one aspect of the Ten Plagues. Why did I commence with those three verses above at the start of this article? Read them once more. Then return to this paragraph.

External & Internal Worlds

Besides making undeniable displays of God's control of nature, there existed an obstacle that required God's address.

As a wise Rabbi taught, at first, God exposed the false nature of the idols and astrologers. He did this by displaying His exclusive control over “all” parts of existence: He controls all “in” Earth: blood, frogs and lice were created from the substance of the Earth's soil and water. He controls all that

occurs “on” Earth: mixture of wild beasts, animal deaths, and boils. And finally, He controls all “above” Earth, in the heavens: hail, locusts and darkness all occurred in the skies. This is one lesson. But what might impede the success of God's plan?

The internal world of man works to incubate foolish fantasies and wishes. For many people, reality is not tolerable. They don't want to work to make the necessary changes in their personalities and actions so as to remove their problems. They want quick fixes in the forms of astrology, Kabbalistic nonsense, and mysticism. But again: God gave us only one thing – intelligence – as the “only” means of determining what is true and false. And since the observable world does not support all these mentioned practices, God does not desire we dupe ourselves. But the internal world also includes psychology...

The Psyche

The Egyptians – and all peoples – have two lines of defense that produce a false security: their land, and their people. These two elements forge a strong national identification that can bind them, and blind them from reality.

God says he will bring hail to the “land” of Egypt. Then, when the hail commences to rain down, God describes the hail as unmatched for as long as Egypt was a “people”.

With hail, God desired to remove additional, internal obstacles from the Egyptians' acceptance of His Ten Lessons. Although the plagues were amazing, the Egyptians may have bonded together by feeling a sense of unity as both a “people”, and as a “land”. They sensed that they can “overcome God together”. Their ego emotions made them feel they, and their land, were greater than all else. Therefore, to preempt this failure to His plagues, God expressed in His Torah verses how hail undermined these two lines of defense: hail was greater than anything they experienced as a “people”, or as a “land”. Greater than these two elements, was God's control. Thereby, God eliminated what psychological factors might impede the plagues' success.

Reading the plagues, year after years and on Passover, we lose the novelty of the story. However, if we can take the time to “let the words speak to us” as a Rabbi stated, God's Torah contains clues to His infinite wisdom. I read this story many times, and never once saw these ideas before this week. I hope this one example of the required sensitivity to the Torah's words will act as an instruction for your future pondering of the generous nuances God has embedded in the Torah's words...helping you arrive at a great enjoyment in Torah study as I have. ■



HAGGADAH

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by a student

Rabbi Chait commenced citing the Ran (in the Rif's pages, 25b): the Ran states that the correct manner of reading the Haggadah is that a "reader" recites it, while all others listen. The implication is that all present fulfill their obligation to 'read' the Haggadah, through the halachik mechanism of "Shomaya K'Oneh", "One who listens is as one who answers (recited)."

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In his Mishneh Torah, “Laws of Chametz and Matza” 7:4, Maimonides states, “And these matters are all called Haggadah.” The question is; to what does he refer - what is subsumed under “these matters”? Maimonides had already stated numerous ideas from the beginning of this chapter. Is he referring to all that he stated, or a smaller portion? Rabbi Chait first stated that “these matters” (are Haggadah) refers only to his fourth and fifth laws in this chapter, and not to anything mentioned earlier. Let us review Maimonides’ laws:

Law 1: Maimonides records the obligation to transmit the miracles to our sons, when we must recite, and that no one is exempt regardless of age. Law 2: He continues to discuss ‘how’ we must relate the information, based on our sons’ understanding. Law 3: Maimonides discusses the obligation to act in a manner that will evoke interest and questions from the child. A “question” format is required, and questions are so vital, that were someone alone, he must verbally ask himself questions.

But in law 4, Maimonides describes the obligation that one must commence with the degraded state of the Jews, and conclude with our elevated status. Maimonides gives examples: we were first idolaters in Abraham’s day, but God eventually drew us close to His worship, teaching us his Unity, that he alone is the exclusive Creator. (One must say, “God brought us to the correct idea of God’s oneness”. Starting with our degraded state and concluding with our ‘elevated status’ refers to our realization of the ultimate truth: God is One.) He continues that we must also describe our Egyptian bondage under Pharaoh, and our freedom delivered by God’s miracles and wonders, provided that one explains the entire section commencing with Laban’s desire to annihilate Jacob and the tribes. In law 5, Maimonides discusses the obligation to discuss the Paschal Lamb, Matza, and Bitter Herbs, and their significances, as essential to fulfilling the command retelling the Exodus (Haggadah). He concludes as we mentioned at the outset, “And these matters are all called Haggadah.” So what is it to which Maimonides refers when he makes this conclusion, “And these matters are all called Haggadah”? What matters?

Two Forms of Haggadah

Rabbi Chait suggested that there are two forms of Haggadah. There is an informal retelling, and a formal retelling. This latter, formal retelling of the Exodus is what Maimonides refers to as “Haggadah.” The first 3 laws describe an informal guideline as to what “elements” must be incorporated, however, there is no set format. We simply must insure that the miracles are discussed, and done so on a level where our sons may comprehend. But in laws 4 and 5, Maimonides clearly describes texts, which must be read. And it is only in regards to a text, that the concept of listening and fulfilling makes sense. This complies with the Ran, that

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one reads for all others present. If one merely retells the story in his own words, he lacks in a complete retell of the Exodus. This is called an "Incomplete Mitzvah". Therefore, one must also refer to texts to fulfill his "formal retell" of the Exodus. Thus, only in a formalized text may one achieve "listening is as if reciting". This is because there is a discreet and precise "entity" - a formal text - there is a "prescribed vehicle" of fulfillment. But regarding an informal retelling of the Exodus, where one uses his own words, the concept of "listening is as if reciting", or "Shomaya K'Oneh" cannot apply. For in this case, there is no universal "entity" of text prescribed by the Torah to fulfill one's obligation. By definition, a subjective recital cannot function universally: that which is subjective is not universal.

This idea of a formal text, expresses the philosophy of the Torah; it is not a loose, subjective system, but a system that is well formulated with precision. A fixed text comprises the retelling of the Exodus for this reason.

What are the ingredients in the formal text?

It includes the following: 1) commencing with degradation and conclusion with praise; 2) explaining from Laban's attempt to annihilate us; and 3) Mitzvah's of the night, i.e., Paschal lamb, Matza and Biter Herbs.

There are two forms of "commencing with degradation and conclusion with praise": A) discussion of the elements, and B) studying at text. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik said that the very study of the commands is found in the Haggadah, as they contribute to the retelling of the Exodus. The command of retelling, itself, has its nature tied to the 'reasons' of the command. Thus, the laws of retelling actually form part of the command.

Why must we commence with our degradation? It is because if it is omitted, our retelling lacks in praise for God. The contrast created by discussing man's lowly nature unveils greater praise, as God is that much more praiseworthy. This is the first "commencing with degradation and conclusion with praise". However, we must note that we cannot praise God, that is a foolish idea, as man has no concept of God. This is why our praise surrounds "our" change in status, and not God.

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The Mah Nishtanah

Rabbi Chait now asked on Maimonides' formulation in law 3: "And it is required that one make (behavioral) changes in this night, in order that sons may see, and ask, and say, 'why is this night different than all other nights?'" Rabbi Chait asked why Maimonides added the phrase "and say". Isn't it sufficient that Maimonides writes, "and ask"? Why does Maimonides add the phrase "and ask, and say"? Additionally, if the child "says" the Mah Nishtanah, why must the reader recite it as well?

Rabbi Chait said that the night must commence with an idea: "this night is different". Now, if there were a fixed answer, then one may simply state it. But here, there is no fixed answer; it is an "infinite" answer. Some questions have a single answer...but not so here. Here, the question about the difference of this night opens new worlds of answers of how different Passover is. The child must reach the point that he 'says'... "How different is this night?!" This is not a question, but an exclamation. It is as if a child attends a circus for the first time, and says, "How great is this?!" The child is overawed. Here too during our retelling of the Exodus, the miracles, and God's mercy in elevating us from idolatry and slavery to true monotheism and freedom, the child senses there is something different on Passover, something so grand that the child realizes it is incomparable. "Mah Nishtanah!", "How Different?!" Similarly, Jacob said the word "mah": "Mah norah hamakome hazeh", "How great is this place?!" when he awoke from the famous dream of the ladder and the angels. This must be the opening statement of the Haggadah – both the informal and formal retelling. This explains why the reader also states "Mah Nishtanah"...as he too is about to enter the infinite answer of how different this night is.

A child commences life with an attachment to pleasure. What we desire in relation to the Haggadah is to attract and allow expression of the child's pleasure seeking nature – his pleasure should find expression and increase in the Haggadah. We desire this "What a difference" response. In general, we must not dissuade a child from enjoying pleasures, as this will retard his ability to experience pleasure in connection with Torah. ■



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BREAD

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

When studying Passover in chapter XII in Exodus, we note its distinction from the other holidays. Passover was celebrated in Egypt - there were 'commands' even prior to the giving of the Torah. Today, we reenact those commands in the form of the shank bone, the matza, the bitter herbs, and other laws. Succos and Shavuos are commemorations of God's kindness to us. Passover is as well, but it differs from the other holidays with our pre-Torah, Passover observance in Egypt. Additionally, our adherence to God's commands in Egypt contributed to the holiday's structure.

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There is only one Succos holiday and one Shavuos. But there are two Passovers; the Passover of Egypt, and all subsequent Passovers. What may we learn from its distinction from the other two holidays? What differences exist between these the Passover of Egypt, and our Passover?

Reading the Haggadah, we note a conflict in the identity of the matza. The Haggadah commences by describing the matza as "lachma anya", poor man's bread. The Jews were fed this during their Egyptian bondage. However, later on, the Haggadah, quoting the Talmud (Pesachim 116b) says that matza is commanded in memory of the dough which did not rise due to the Egyptians swift, panic-stricken oust of the Jews. We are obligated by Torah law to recall God's swift salvation by eating the matza. The Jews were ousted from the Egyptian city Raamses, and arrived at Succot. When the Jews arrived, they were only able to bake that dough into matza, not bread. The matza serves as a barometer of the speed by which God freed the Jews. Was this matza part of God's orchestrated events? Did God desire this barometer in the form of matza?

We should note at this point that the Jews in Egypt observed only one day of Passover, according to Rabbi Yossi HaGalili in the Jerusalem Talmud 14a. The Torah

laws describing those Jews' obligation also appear to exclude any restriction of eating leaven. Certainly on the morrow of the Paschal Lamb the Jews were permitted in leaven. Rabbeinu Nissim comments that it was only due to the rush of the Egyptians that their loaves were retarded in their leavening process. Had the Egyptians not rushed them, the Jews would have created bread. There was no law not to have bread at that point.

But for which reason are we "commanded" in matza? The Haggada text clearly states it is based on the dough, which did not rise during the Exodus. This matza demonstrates salvation, the focus of the Passover holiday. This poses this serious problem: not only do later generations have the command of eating matza, but the Jews in Egypt were also commanded in eating the Lamb with matza, (and maror). If while still in Egypt, when there was yet no 'swift salvation', why were those Jews commanded in this matza? How can Jews in Egypt, not yet redeemed, commemorate a Redemption, which did not yet happen? (It is true; the Jews ate matza while slaves. However, the Haggada says the "command" of eating matza was only due to the speedy salvation. This implies the Jews in Egypt who also had the command of matza, were obligated for the same reason, which is incomprehensible.)

The Torah spends much time discussing the dough, and oddly, also refers to it in the singular, (Exod., 12:34), "And the people lifted up HIS loaf before it had risen..." "And they baked THE loaf..." (Exod., 12:39) Why this 'singular' reference to numerous loaves? Why so much discussion about the loaf?

Lastly, Rashi praises the Jews for not taking any provisions when they left: (Exod., 12:39) "And they baked the loaf they took out of Egypt into cakes of matza, because it did not leaven, because they were driven from Egypt, and they could not tarry, and also provisions they did not make for themselves." Rashi says the fact they did not take provisions demonstrated their trust that God would provide. If so, why in the very same verse, did the Jews bake the dough? This implies the exact opposite of Rashi's intent, that the Jews did in fact distrust God. It is startling that a contradiction to Rashi is derived from the every same verse. Rabbi Reuven Mann suggested very simply: the Jews correctly did not rely on miracles, so they took the dough as food. Their act of following Moses into the desert also displays their trust in God, but this trust does not mean they should not take what they can for now.

In order to answer these questions, I feel it is essential to get some background. The Egyptians originated bread.

Certainly, as they tortured the Jews, the Egyptian taskmasters ate their bread, as their Jewish slaves gaped with open mouths, breaking their teeth on dry matza, or "poor man's bread". The title of "poor man's bread" is a relative term - "poor" is always in comparison to something richer. "Poor man's bread" teaches that there was a "richer bread" in Egypt - real bread. The Egyptians enjoyed real bread, while they fed their Jewish slaves matza.

Let us now understand Rashi's comment. He said the Jews were praiseworthy, as they did not take food with them upon their exodus, thereby displaying a trust in God's ability to provide them with food. But we noted that in the very same verse where Rashi derives praise for the Jews who Rashi said took no food, it clearly states they in fact took the loaves! Rashi's source seems internally contradictory.

I would suggest that a new attitude prevailed among the Jews. I do not feel the Jews took that loaf from Egypt for the purpose of consumption alone. This is Rashi's point. The Jews took the loaf because of what it represented - 'freedom'. They were fed matza for the duration of their bondage. They were now free. They cherished this freedom and longed to embody it in expression. Making bread - instead of dry, poor man's matza - was this expression of freedom.

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They now wished to be like their previous taskmasters, 'bread eaters'. A free people. Baking and eating bread was the very distinction between slave and master in Egypt. The Jews wished to shed their identity as slaves and don an image of a free people. Baking and eating bread would achieve this. To further prove that the Jews valued such identification with the free Egyptians, Rashi comments that when the Jews despoiled the Egyptians of their silver, gold and clothing, at Moses command, they valued the Egyptian clothing over the silver and gold. (Exodus 12:35)

However, the Jews had the wrong idea. Their newfound freedom was not unrestricted. They were freed - but for a new purpose; following God. Had they been allowed to indulge freedom unrestrained, expressed by eating leavened bread, this would corrupt God's plan that they serve Him. Freedom, and servitude to God, is mutually exclusive. God therefore did not allow the dough to rise. They trusted God, they saw all the miracles. They needed no food for their journey, as God would provide. But they took the dough in hopes of making that "free man's food", leavened bread. The cakes of dough were not taken for subsistence alone, but to symbolize their freedom. They hoped upon reaching their destination, to bake bread, expressing their own



idea of freedom. But the verse says the dough only became matza, not their intended end-product. Matza was a mere result of a hurried exodus. Matza was so significant, that the Torah recorded this "event" of their failed bread making. They planned to bake bread, but it ended up matza. The Torah teaches that matza was not the Jews' plan. It points out through inference that they desired leavened bread. It also teaches that bread was not desired so much for subsistence, as they verse ends, (Exod., 12:39) "and provisions they made not for themselves." They did not prepare food, as they relied on God for that. This is Rashi's point. The dough they took was not for provisions alone; it was to express unrestricted freedom. This unrestricted freedom is a direct contradiction to God's plan that they serve Him.

Bread!

The Jews were now excited at the prospect of complete freedom. God's plan could not tolerate the Jews' wish. God desired the Jews to go from Egyptian servitude, to another servitude - adherence to God. He did not wish the Jews' to experience or express unrestricted freedom, as the Jews wished. To demonstrate this, God retarded the dough from leavening. The matza they baked at Succot was not an accident, but God's purposeful plan, that any expression of unrestricted freedom be thwarted.

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Matza does not only recall God's swift salvation, but its also represents Egyptian servitude. In the precise activity that the Jews wished to express unrestricted freedom by baking bread, God stepped in with one action serving two major objectives: 1) By causing a swift ousting of the Jews, God did not allow the dough to rise. God did not allow the Jews to enjoy leavened bread, which would embody unrestricted freedom. 2) But even more amazing is that with one action of a speedy redemption, God not only restricted the dough's process, but He also "saved" the Jews - God became the Jews' savior. He replaced the Jews' intended, unrestricted freedom with the correct purpose of their salvation; to be indebted to God. The one act - God's swift Exodus - prevented the wrong idea of freedom from being realized, and also instilled in the Jews the right idea - they were now indebted to God, their Savior. They were not left to unrestricted freedom, but were now bound to God by His new act of kindness. An astonishing point.

We return to the command to eat matza in Egypt. This command could not be to commemorate an event, which did not yet happen. This makes no sense. I feel God commanded them to eat the matza for what it did represent - servitude. While in Egypt, why did God wish them to be mindful of servitude? Here I feel we arrive at

another basic theme of the Passover holiday; contrast between servitude and freedom. In Pesachim 116a, the Talmud records a Mishna, which states that our transmission of the Haggadah must commence with our degradation, and conclude with praise. We therefore discuss our servitude or our ancestor's idolatrous practices, and conclude with our salvation and praise for God. We do this; as such a contrast engenders a true appreciation for God's salvation. Perhaps also the two Passover holidays - in Egypt and today - embody this concept of our salvation. A central goal of Passover is the resultant appreciation for God's kindness. A contrast between our Egyptian Passover and today's Passover will best engender such appreciation. It compares our previous 'bondage' to our current 'freedom'. Perhaps for this reason we are also commanded to view each of ourselves as if we left Egypt.

So in Egypt, we ate matza representing Egyptian servitude. Today we eat it as the Haggadah says, to recall the swift salvation, which retarded the leavening process, creating matza. We end up with a comparison between Passover of Egypt, and today's Passover: Servitude versus salvation. The emergence of the Jewish people was on Passover. We have two Passovers, displaying the concept of a transition, a before and an after.

An interesting and subtle point is that God mimicked the matza of servitude. He orchestrated the salvation around matza. Why? Perhaps, since matza in its original form in Egypt embodied servitude, God wished that servitude be the continued theme of Passover. He therefore centered the salvation on the dough, which eventuated in matza; thereby teaching that we are to be slaves to God. "You are my slaves, and not slaves to man", is God's sentiment addressing a Jewish slave who wishes to remain eternally subservient to his mortal master. The Torah clearly views man's relationship to God as a servant.

With this understanding of the significance of leavened bread, we understand why the Torah refers to all the Jews' loaves in the singular. The Jews shared one common desire; to express their freedom by eating what their oppressors ate. However, contrary to human feelings, "freedom" is an evil...odd as it sounds. God's plan in creating man was to direct us all in understanding and delighting in the truth of God, His role as the exclusive Creator, the One who manages man's affairs, and Who is omnipotent. (Ramban, Exod. 13:16) We have a purpose in being created, and it is not to be free and live as we wish. Our purpose is to engage the one faculty granted to us - our intellect. And the primary use of the intellect is forfeited

when we do not recognize God, as the Egyptians faulted. Therefore, God freed us so we may enter a new servitude according to His will: serving Him. But this service of God should not be viewed as a negative, as in serving man. Serving God is achieved by studying Him, His Torah and creation - a truly happy and beautiful life. We could equate the enjoyment and benefit in serving God, to serving a human master who gives us gold if we simply look for it. We need not physically "dig" for it, just the act of seeking the gold would be rewarded with this master giving us abundant treasures. So too is the service of God. If we merely learn and seek new ideas, He will open new doors of wisdom. I am always amazed that we are so fortunate.

Finally, what is the significance of chametz, leaven? Perhaps, once leavened bread took on the role of freedom, exclusive of any connection with God, leaven thereby took on a character that opposes the very salvation, demonstrated by the matza. This now explains that leaven was not mentioned in connection with the instructions pertaining to the original Paschal lamb. The Jews had not yet displayed any attachment to bread. Only subsequent to the first Passover celebration do we see the Jews' problematic tie to leavened bread. Therefore, only afterwards is there any prohibition on bread. ■

Pesach, Ritual Blood & Nation



Written by Ariel Levi

The lifestyle of a Torah Jew is without doubt most stimulating. A God given text and world, studied with the most elevated and refined aspects of his humanity, express and polish this effect. It is an amazing experience, connecting a lowly being with eternal truths.

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Learning Torah, we feel as though we are part of something more, something greater, something eternal. However, contrast mitzvah observance with philosophy. Included in the Torah is a system that incorporates some of the most obviously animalistic aspects of our nature. The Torah is filled with mitzvot force us to live in the moment; to be passionate and alive. It is an amazing duality, moment and eternity, who's absence from other religions only underscores its uniqueness.

This duality also forces us to ask: what is the purpose of my mitzvot? The same physical mitzvot, the actions that force us to experience and ground us in the moment, make us wonder: is this moment all that there is? Is there anything more? Am I part of something greater, and if I am, then how? How will shaking a lulav change the world; does my eating unleavened bread on Pesach do anything? What are the mitzvot and what do they do?

Many Christians and others deal with this question by dogmatizing a feel good formula. Our world is flawed and therefore we devote our lives and our actions to bringing to this world a more perfect and very different universe. The kingdom of heaven is there, somewhere else. Our deeds are to bring a form of "Moshiach" an old concept re-invented to provide for our fantasy; to create in our minds a more real universe, and through this to make our illusions believable. This will be accomplished by making the kingdom in heaven the kingdom on earth. Of course this results in the seeing of our world as an accursed place, doomed to misery and suffering, a place submerged under the burden of original sin, until a second coming that will magically change everything.

The Buddhists and others propose another interesting and evidently, by numbers, a compelling worldview. This world is in fact not real, but instead...an illusion. By sitting next to the unknowable river of time, by leaving this world for "that" other place, man fulfills his purpose, man has gone somewhere else, far away, man has attained Nirvana. And in this process he has essentially vanished, which was the point.

However the Torah forces us away from this approach, this escapism[1]. The intensity of our rituals, the consequences of the most minute details force us to acknowledge that our actions are important, not merely in bringing about some other kingdom, some other world, some other escape. Our Torah, the very book that contains profound truths, also contains very clear imperatives for action. The physicality of the mitzvot forces us to abandon our fantasies and speculations, and to act; to focus on the present, the real, but more, to value the here and now.

But even a quick glance at the Torah makes the practitioner concede that life is not all about action; for while the Torah is more than a storybook teaching morals, it is also not merely a book of law. The philosophic nature of the Torah implies that commandments are more than just actions for the purpose of

ringing up brownie points. But if they are more than simply actions, what are they? What do they accomplish, what do they create, why do we have them?

Now; where can we look for a key? Are there any mitzvot where the Torah in its description expresses this duality of action and thought, of mind and body? Does it contain and develop a motif to the degree so that we can understand the place of mitzvot?

In addressing this question there is one other element that is very relevant. This is element of nation. For meaning is not a result of the mitzvot alone, meaning is a result of a man's being a part of a nation, being a part of the Jewish people. It is difficult to understand why the two must go hand in hand. Why must I belong to a nation, can't I just do the right thing?

As our exploration will include nationality and its significance, we will focus on the redemption of Israelites from Egypt. A mindset, an experience, a metamorphosis, that is on one hand meaningful, immediate and personal; and on the other hand, seems so impersonal, almost as though we are playacting the redemption, as we shall see.

Part I: Passover: the Covenant of our Youth

Ezekiel 16 [2] speaks about a child, a baby girl that grows up alone, and without love, cast out into an open field because of the loathsomeness of her being. Then a man, the narrator passes by:

"then I passed you by and saw you wallowing in your blood and I said to you 'in your blood you shall live', I said to you 'in your blood shall live'[3]."

The narrator seems to help her grow up and she becomes a graphically mature young woman. She is naked and bare (and still wallowing in her blood). The narrator does not leave her in this state

"I passed by you and saw you and behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread the hems of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; and I took an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you ... and you became mine[4]."

This prophecy is in the form of a story is a chronicle spanning over a thousand years; we have only quoted a small part. The prophet is speaking to the Jewish people and by means of this parable, reminding them of their story. He is describing how God took them, this young, lost, immature people and

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brought them under his wing. Having done that he then dresses them in finery:

“I covered you with silk, I decked you with ornaments, I put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your necks.[5]”

And by now the people, symbolized by this maiden, have taken on the wearing of regal dress and learnt to carry the mantle.

“You decked yourself with gold and silver, and your garments were linen, silk, and embroidery; you ate fine flour, honey and oil.[6]”

And this young girl unloved and uncared for, has become beautiful and royal:

“You became exceedingly beautiful and you became fit for royalty. Your fame went forth among the nations for your beauty, for it was perfect, through My splendor which I placed upon you –the word of the Lord Hashem Elohim[7]”

The prophet goes on to describe how the Jewish people stray to other gods and this girl, trusting in her beauty becomes licentious and strays. The adultery represents the Jews slaughtering their children to idols:

“Then you took your sons and your daughters whom you begot for Me, and these you slaughtered them to devour. Was your harlotry so trivial that you slew My children and gave them away by passing them over before [your idols]?[8]”

The prophet tells us why this has happened:

“And with all of your abominations and your harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare.[9]”

It is a powerful story, a tale filled with themes of love and tenderness. It is also filled with jealousy, punishment and suffering.

“Then, behold I stretched out My hand against you, and diminished your allotment; Then I delivered you to the whim of those who hate you, the daughters of the philistines who were ashamed of your lewd ways.[10]”

“...They will bring up an assemblage against you, they will pelt you with stone & pierce you with their swords; they will burn down your houses in fire and they will execute judgments against you before the eyes of many women.[11]”

But even in these times of vengeance and pain, we see God looking after us from afar, and even when we stray, God reminds us of the love of our youth and the covenant he made with us

“But I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant... and you will know that I am Hashem[12]”

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Powerful, moving, graphic, and immediate, this story moves us in a roller coaster ride of emotions; from love and tenderness and then to anger and fury. It then returns to covenant and forgiveness. And of course this story more than just a fairy tale, it is the story of the Exile, the Exodus and the Redemption. It tells us how our people were conceived and where we began. It describes our horrid state in Egypt and how God redeemed us, clothed us in splendor and made us royalty.

The Rambam^[13] tells us that these verses are the Haftora for Parashas Shemos. Implicit within this designation is that these verses parallel in an elucidating way, the essence of exile and redemption.

Many elements of this story require a tremendous amount of clarification. Our ability to feel the power expressed poignantly in this imagery does not mean that we understand its content and by extension its message. In the upcoming weeks we will see this story played out in the context of the Egyptian exile. We will explore the themes of Redemption and Freedom. We will explore our covenant with God, the covenant of our youth. We will ask the purpose of the exile and the emphasis of the blood in our freedom.

It is important to understand the significance of this blood. Rashi and the Midrash focus on a specific phrase:

“then I passed you by and saw you wallowing in your blood and I said to you ‘in your blood you shall live’, I said to you ‘in your blood shall live’.”

They tell us that the blood in this verse is symbolic. It describing two very specific types of blood: the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Passover lamb. This blood will allow us to somehow overcome the Egyptian exile and become worthy of redemption. In the merit of these two “sacrifices” God took us out, we were now worthy.

But if these bloods are so central and necessary, then how do we explain the following:

“I bathed you with water and I washed away your blood[14]”

If this is the blood that enabled our redemption, if it is the blood that allowed us to separate from the idolatry within which we were immersed, if this blood of the paschal lamb is still an integral part of the Passover experience, then why does God wash it off?

And this story will be our gateway to return to our opening question. How does the immediacy of the present exist together with meaning; how do our actions have a place in a world of eternity?

Questions to think about:

If the Rambam by placing this verse as the Haftora of Shemos implies that this is the theme, then why is it mentioned only in passing during the Hagaddah?

Why are the Jewish people described as a girl?

Rashi understands verse 3 to be describing our lineage in the worst of terms “your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite” as referring to Abraham and Sara. It sounds derogatory and the reference to Sara and a Hittite refers to her burial; why does Rashi (or perhaps the pasuk) do this?

What is the significance of the specific stages (birth, maturity, clothing) mentioned in her development?

Why is blood so central to the redemption?

What is the connection between Korban Pesach and Bris Milah?

Why does God wash off of us the blood of the mitzvos?

The Rambam stops the Haftora at verse 14, at this point in the parable, where are the Jewish people? ■

[1] For the Torah approach to Moshiach see Maimonides Laws of Kings Chapters 11 and 12 (The fact that these final two chapters seal his Restatement of the Oral Law implies that ones vision of a Messianic Age is fundamentally linked with ones view of both the Torah and existence.)

[2] I highly recommend reading this whole chapter, especially till verse 22

[3] Ezekiel 16:6

[4] Ibid 16:8

[5] Ibid 16:11

[6] Ibid 16:13

[7] Ibid 16:13, 14

[8] Ibid 16:20, 21

[9] Ibid 16:22

[10] Ibid 16:27, 16:

[11] Ibid 16: 40, 41

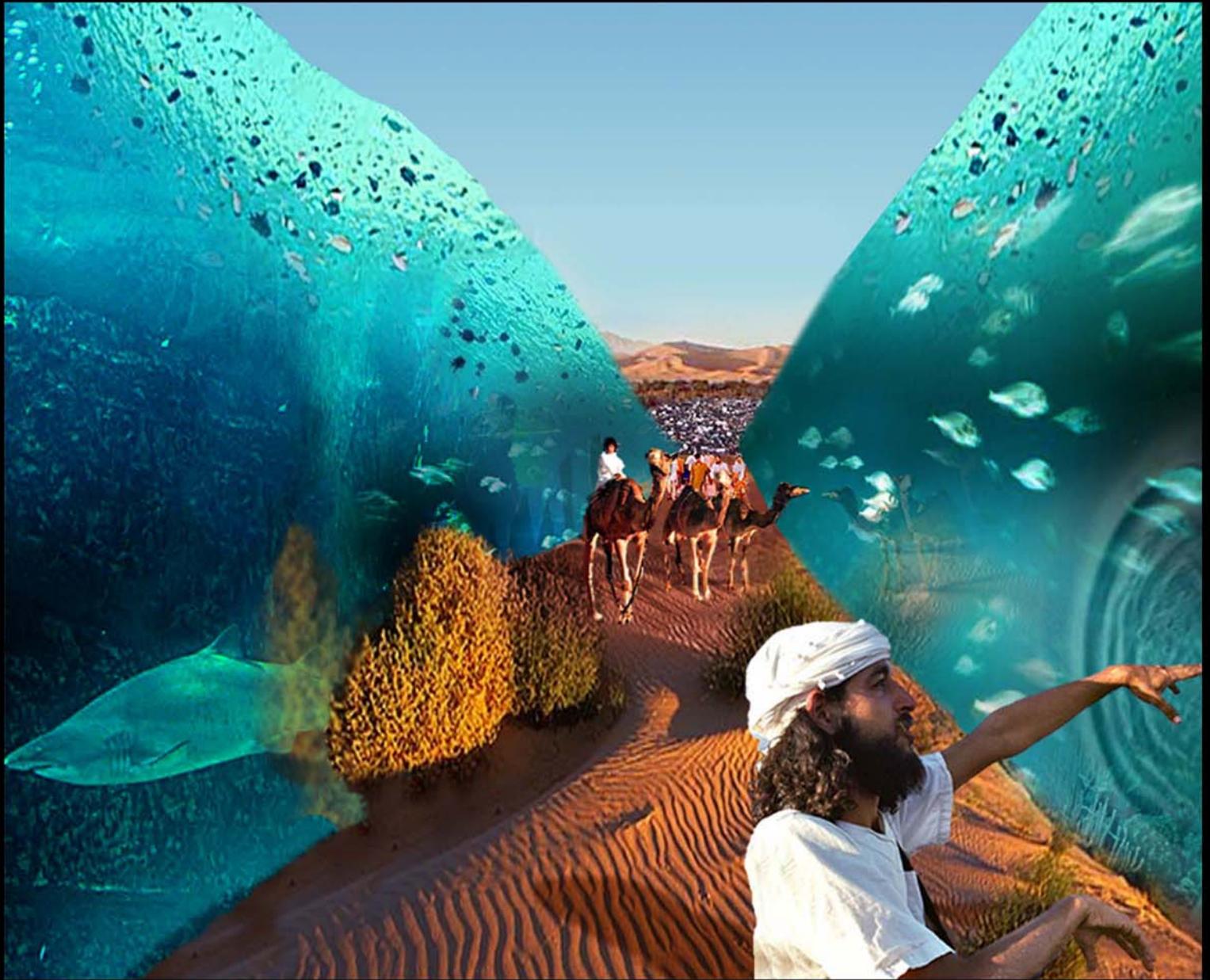
[12] Ibid 16:60, 16:62

[13] Seder Hatefila 57, The haftora includes verses 16:1-14

[14] Ibid 16:9

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