

# THE MAKING OF A NATION

## Weekly Torah Video Series: Parshas Beshalach

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

**Featured Video:** The Strategist-in-Chief Orchestrates the Monumental

### The Roadmap For The Ascent

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

### The Uncontested Spokesman of G-d

1. The 10th plague, the killing of the first born, took place exactly at midnight.
2. Moshe communicated the plague would take place at "about" midnight.
3. G-d had said – "exactly" at midnight.
4. Moshe used ambiguous context so not to be accused of being a liar.
5. The soothsayers of Egypt would say it did not happen as Moshe had said– but rather, a moment before or after midnight.
6. If the firstborn were killed does it matter if it was a moment before or after?
7. Rambam: Moshe, being a prophet, is not based on miracles– but rather the Jewish People heard G-d say to Moshe, "Go say to them" such and such, etc.
8. G-d wanted the plagues to display His dominion in the world.
9. Had the sorcerers of Egypt believed that Moshe made a mistake they would attribute all the plagues to witchcraft.

### The Making of a Family

1. Moshe located Yosef's remains to take them out of Egypt.
2. Yosef had adjured his brothers to do this before they leave Egypt.
3. Each tribe's remains were removed by their descendants; why not Yosef's?
4. Yosef adjuring his brothers added the word "Zeh" meaning, from this. Why?
5. Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh: The numerical value of Zeh is 12, the number of tribes.
6. When Yosef was sold into slavery the unity of 12 was broken.
7. Twelve had to be restored to a unified entity.
8. The brothers assumed responsibility for the removal of Yosef's remains to restore the unity.
9. Moshe, as leader and king, was the equivalent of the Jews engaging in the reunification.
10. When the sea split on behalf of the Jews it was in the merit of Yosef.
11. Midrash: "What did the sea see and split, the remains of Yosef."

## Weekly Torah Commentaries Series: Parshas Beshalach



### **The Ten Plagues, a Revelation of G-d's Dominion in Existence**

The Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers states, "With Ten Utterances the world was created." The world came into being through the Ten Utterances of G-d.

We find that the number "ten" manifests itself a number of times throughout the developmental period of the Jewish people.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains in the Portion of Bereishis that since existence came about through the Ten Utterances of G-d, everything that addresses the purpose of Creation manifests itself within the context of "ten."

For example, the ten plagues, which came upon Egypt, are directly related to the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. The value of their redemption from Egypt is so that the Jewish people should accept the Torah at Sinai, which is quantified through the Ten Commandments. Thus, the initial ten expressions of G-d are directly linked to the ten plagues of Egypt and the Ten Commandments at Sinai.

The Torah begins, "**Bereishis bara Elokim- In the beginning G-d created ...**" Chazal explain that the opening words of the Torah allude to the objective of Creation.

Chazal state, "For the sake of Torah, which is "**reishis** (first/choicest)," G-d created heaven and earth." All existence came into being only for the specific purpose to facilitate the fulfillment of Torah.

Another interpretation of Chazal is that G-d created the world for the sake of the Jewish people who are referred to as "**reishis** (the chosen)." Thus, the world was created for the fulfillment of the Torah and the Jewish people who are the only nation worthy and qualified to fulfill it. Rabeinu Hai Gaon explains that the Ten Commandments allude to and encompass the entire Torah.

In order for the Jewish people to develop and evolve into G-d's holy nation, they needed to be exposed to the ten plagues which came upon Egypt. It was necessary for the Jewish people to witness the ten plagues in order to extricate themselves from idolatry and be purged of its influence. The ten plagues were thus a prerequisite for the Jewish people to be qualified to come to Sinai where they would receive the Ten Commandments.

Sfas Emes explains that when G-d brought about existence through His Ten Utterances, it was obvious and revealed how each of G-d's Utterances was manifest in Creation. However, after the sin of Adam through the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, the obviousness between the Holy Utterance of G-d and its manifestation in Creation became concealed.

This concealment came about because Adam transgressed the word of G-d. He putrefied himself and all of existence by introducing impurity into the world, which covered and concealed the obviousness of G-d's holiness in all aspects of existence.

The impurity that conceals the holiness of the Utterances is referred to as kleepah (covering/husk, just as the husk covers the kernel of wheat.) Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, based on a Zohar, that initially Adam was created without a foreskin. It was only as a result of his sin that the foreskin developed as an outgrowth of the impurity that Adam had brought upon himself.

The revealed miracles of the ten plagues which came upon Egypt demonstrated G-d's presence in existence to such a degree that it removed the concealment that had come upon existence due to the sin of Adam. That revelation of G-d affected the Jewish people in the most positive manner so that they could extricate themselves from the impurity in which they were entombed.

Thus, the manifestation of G-d's Holy Utterances which brought about existence began to become revealed through the ten plagues and culminated in the ultimate level through the receiving of the Ten Commandments when G-d openly spoke to the Jewish people.

The Midrash states regarding Creation, "G-d gazed into the Torah and created existence." The blueprint of existence is the Torah itself. Existence was created to address every level of spiritual advancement of the Jewish people.

Chazal tell us that at the time of the receiving of the Ten Commandments, the Jewish people were able to actually see the words that were uttered by G-d with their own eyes; the linkage between the Utterances of G-d and the holiness in existence once again became revealed and obvious.

### **Making Spirituality Primary in One's Life**

The Torah states in the Portion of Beshalach, **"It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people, that G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, because it was near."**

There are several interpretations in the Midrash of the verse "because it was near." One Midrash states, "Because it was too soon for the Jewish people to enter into the Land and remove the Canaanites from it. As it is written in the verse, 'It is only the fourth generation (of the Jewish people) that will return to the Land.' Since the fourth generation had not yet come about, they needed to be encompassed by the clouds of glory for forty years in the desert (until the fourth generation came about)."

It is interesting to note that the Torah tells us at the Covenant between the Parts that after a certain period of time the Jewish people would be taken out of Egypt with great wealth and enter into the Land. Seemingly, from the Covenant, the Jewish people were supposed to enter immediately into the Land. If so, why did they need to wait until the fourth generation in order to enter into the Land?

The Torah tells us that Avraham made a covenant with Avimelech the Philistine king that the Jewish people would only return to the Land in the fourth generation. If Avraham had not made this covenant, seemingly the Jewish people would have been able to immediately enter into the Land after they were taken out of Egypt.

The Jewish people needed to leave Egypt exactly when they did because spiritually they could not remain there for a moment longer. Chazal tell us that they had fallen to the forty-ninth level of spiritual contamination, and if they were to remain longer, they would have gone into spiritual oblivion with no hope of recovery.

We recite in the Ezras prayer, "We were redeemed from Egypt and taken out of the house of bondage...." Malbim explains that there were two

levels of redemption from Egypt: the physical redemption and the spiritual redemption. Although they were taken out of Egypt exactly when they needed to be, the Jewish people did not need to enter immediately into the Land in order to remain spiritually viable.

In fact, the Midrash tells us that it was better for the Jewish people to wander the desert for forty years rather than entering immediately into the Land. The pasuk states, "G-d said, 'If I allow them to immediately enter into the Promised Land by taking them along the shortest path, each person would take possession of his field and be preoccupied with it. They will thus not be engaged in Torah study. Therefore, I will take them through the desert where they will partake of the manna and drink from the living wellspring and the Torah will become settled in their innards.'"

While the spiritually insulated environment of the desert was necessary for the development of the Jewish people, when they would later enter into the Land, why would they not be engaged and preoccupied with their fields and neglect the Torah then? Why did remaining in the desert for forty years assist in overcoming this issue?

After their wandering in the desert, the Jewish people entered into the Land. Each one took possession of their field and became preoccupied with agricultural endeavors. However, after the forty years of wandering the desert and partaking of the manna, which was the spiritual food of the angels, the Jewish people were able to internalize the value of the Torah to such a degree that it would affect them even when they entered into the Land and engaged in the material.

The Torah states, **"If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments and perform them; then I will provide for your rains in their time...."** Chazal explain this to mean that if the Jew toils in Torah study, then he will merit G-d's abundant blessing.

When the Jewish people left Egypt, they were not sufficiently spiritualized to be able to value Torah as it should be valued. It was only after partaking of the manna and the wellspring for forty years, that they were they able to enter into the Land, work their fields, and simultaneously engage and toil in Torah study. They now understood that it was only if they were to do so, would G-d bring blessing upon them.

### **There are Times for Prayer and Times for Action**

The Torah states when the Jewish people found themselves caught between the Sea and the advancing Egyptian army, they began complaining, **"Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us out to die in the wilderness?"** The Torah continues, **"G-d said to Moshe, 'Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel and let them journey forth!'"**

Sforno explains that when Moshe cried out, he did not do so because he was fearful of Pharaoh and his army because G-d had already assured him that the Egyptians would be destroyed, but rather his crying out was because he was concerned that the Jewish people had demonstrated a lack of faith when they said, **'Were there no graves in Egypt...?'**

Moshe was concerned that the Jewish people would not have sufficient faith in G-d to enter into the Sea, thus meriting the miracle of its splitting. To this, G-d responded to him by saying that he need not pray. His concern for the Jewish people's spiritual viability was unfounded. Moshe was thus considered to be one who was suspecting of an innocent party, and therefore there was no need for prayer.

The verse states, **"G-d said to Moshe, 'Why do you cry out to Me?'"** Rashi cites Chazal, "We learn from G-d's statement that Moshe was



praying on behalf of the Jewish people. G-d said to him, "This is not the time to be lengthily involved in prayer because it is a moment of trouble for the Jewish people. You should tell them to journey forth."

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, "One would think that the most appropriate time to engage in prayer is when one is in a state of great difficulty. If so, why did G-d tell Moshe not to continue praying?"

There is a discussion in the Gemara regarding the reason the Men of the Great Assembly legislated the three silent prayer services that are to be recited every day: Shachris (morning), Mincha (afternoon), and Arvis (evening). One opinion is that since there were three communal offerings that were brought in the Temple, the Rabbis legislated three prayer services to correspond to each of the communal offerings.

Another opinion is that it is because each of the three Holy Patriarchs initiated and established each prayer service that the Jewish people should pray three times a day. Avraham legislated Shachris, Yitzchak legislated Mincha, and Yaakov legislated Arvis. The Gemara concludes that the three prayer services were legislated to correspond to the three communal offerings that were brought every day.

Chazal tell us that the concept of "offerings" has relevance to G-d's Attribute of Mercy. As we see throughout the Torah when an offering is mentioned, the Torah uses the expression, "an offering for Hashem (YKVK) – Korban l'Shem."

The appellation YKVK (Hashem) of G-d connotes His Attribute of Mercy. Without the Attribute of Mercy, there is no basis for offerings. It is only when one reflects on his failings and repents, could he be worthy of the Attribute of Mercy.

If offerings/prayer has relevance to the Attribute of Mercy of G-d, perhaps Moshe believed that because of the lack of faith that the Jewish people demonstrated at the Sea, they were no longer worthy of the Attribute of Mercy.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that after the Jewish people witnessed the ten plagues of Egypt, which were all revealed miracles, and they found themselves confronted with the Egyptian army, they exclaimed, "Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert?"

Their expression of complaint to Moshe was an indication of their lack of belief and faith in G-d. They believed that He had put their existence in jeopardy and they would possibly die. This inappropriate statement evoked an intense level of prosecution from the Attribute of Justice that was so severe that supplication would be totally ineffective.

Since it is only within the context of the Attribute of Mercy that prayer can be effective, the Jewish people needed to take an initiative that would demonstrate a level of belief and trust in G-d that would quell the Attribute of Justice to allow the Attribute of Mercy to come into effect. Thus, G-d told them to journey forth into the Sea.

If they would travel directly into the Sea without concern for their safety, it would indicate their absolute belief and faith in G-d. This would rectify their failing. Only then would they merit the reinstatement of the Attribute of Mercy to be saved.

## **G-d's Kingship, a Precursor to Sinai**

After the Sea had closed upon Pharaoh and the Egyptian army, Moshe and the Jewish people sang the song of the Sea. The splitting of the Sea presented the greatest revelation of G-d's Presence.

In the song that was sung by the Jewish people it states "**Behold, this is my G-d I will glorify Him!**" Rashi cites Chazal (Machilta) who state that G-d's Presence was so palpable that one could point at it with his finger. Chazal tell us that what the maidservant at the Sea had seen, Yechezkel the prophet did not see.

Although what the maidservant had witnessed was greater than what Yechezkel had experienced, nevertheless, the maidservant remained limited while Yechezkel's classification was a prophet. What did the maidservant at the Sea witness that was not seen by Yechezkel the prophet?

The Torah tells us that G-d Himself entered into Egypt to kill the firstborn of the Egyptians. The Jewish people had all witnessed this revealed miracle. The Torah states, "**It was at midnight that Hashem smote every firstborn...**"

Although the Torah tells us that G-d Himself was present in Egypt in the tenth plague and the Jewish people had witnessed the effectiveness of His Presence, the dimension of revelation at the splitting of the Sea was so palpable that they were able to point to Him and declare, "**This is my G-d!**"

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

The dimension of revelation that was witnessed at the time of the splitting of the Sea was an expression of G-d's Kingship as the Supreme Being Who reigns over all existence. Regardless of the awesomeness of the miracles that the Jewish people witnessed in Egypt, they were not privy to His Kingship.

It was because G-d had shown them His Kingship that they exclaimed, "**This is my G-d.... Hashem shall reign for all eternity.**" No prophet had ever witnessed (other than Moshe) the Kingship of G-d.

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

Vilna Gaon zt"l explains that there is a difference between a king and a ruler. A king understands and appreciates that his viability as king is dependent upon having dedicated subjects. Thus, he is concerned for the welfare of his subjects.

In contrast, a ruler rules and dictates regardless of the condition of the masses. Within the revelation of G-d's Kingship at the Sea, the Jewish people understood His love and concern for them. This understanding evoked the expression, "**This is my G-d and I will build Him a Sanctuary...**"

The "Sanctuary" mentioned in the verse refers to the Mishkan (and ultimately the Temple) that the Jewish people would later build to accommodate His Presence. The degree of understanding of G-d's Kingship will determine the degree of praise and love of the Jewish

people for Him. Thus, the experience at the Sea was a precursor for the Jewish people to be taken as G-d's people at Sinai.

## The Covenant with Avraham (Parshas Bo)

The Torah states at the Covenant between the Parts, **"G-d said to Avraham, 'You shall know that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not their own. There, they will be enslaved... The nation that will enslave them will be judged and then they will go out with great wealth.'**" This was the covenant that G-d made with Avraham regarding the Jewish people's bondage in Egypt and their ultimate redemption.

Ramban explains that a covenant is different from an oath (shvuah) because an oath is something that is contingent on certain criteria being fulfilled; however, a covenant is a guarantee that something will come to be without any contingencies. A covenant can never be revoked, while an oath may be revoked if the criteria are not met.

However, we see from Chazal that the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt was not only based on the covenant that G-d had made with Avraham, but rather on several contingencies which needed to be fulfilled.

Chazal tell us that the Jewish people merited redemption because they did not change their Hebrew names, their language (the holy tongue, Hebrew), and their attire (Jewish dress) despite the fact that they were slaves in Egypt and had become pagans.

Evidently, the promise that Avraham received at the Covenant between the Parts was not sufficient to redeem the Jewish people from Egypt. They needed to maintain their Jewish identity throughout their 210 year enslavement in order to merit redemption.

Another opinion offered by Chazal why the Jewish people merited redemption from Egypt is due to the righteous Jewish women. Despite the bleakness and hopelessness of the long bondage in Egypt, the Jewish women never despaired. They maintained their belief that G-d would ultimately redeem the Jewish people. Once again, the Jewish people leaving Egypt seems to be attributed to something other than the covenant that G-d made with Avraham.

It is stated in the verse in Yechezkel regarding the spiritual condition of the Jewish people before their redemption in Egypt, "And you are naked and devoid (of mitzvos)."

The Torah tells us that G-d gave the Jewish people the mitzvah of circumcision and the mitzvah of the Pascal offering as a prerequisite for their redemption. The verse in Yechezkel states, "I saw you wallowing in your bloods. Through your blood, you shall live. Through your blood you shall live."

Chazal tell us that the "bloods" refers to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Pascal sacrifice. Since the Jewish people were devoid of spirituality in Egypt (they were pagan), they needed spiritual merit to be worthy of redemption. G-d therefore presented them with the mitzvos of circumcision and the Pascal sacrifice so that they should be worthy of redemption.

Once again Chazal attribute the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt to something other than the covenant that G-d had made with Avraham. We see that although there was a guarantee from G-d that the Jewish people would be taken out of Egypt, it was also contingent on their own initiatives. How do we reconcile this with the concept of a covenant which is an unconditional guarantee?

G-d made a covenant with Avraham that guaranteed that his offspring would go out of Egypt with great wealth. In order for someone to qualify as being the offspring of Avraham, one must have relevance to Avraham not only as a genetic descendant but also a spiritual descendant.

Avraham introduced G-d into existence. He was the father of the Jewish people who were to come into existence to receive and fulfill the Torah, which is the objective of Creation.

By not changing their names, language, and attire, the Jewish people maintained their Jewish identity which gave them relevance to Avraham and G-d. Despite the fact they had become pagans in Egypt, they did not identify themselves as such.

In addition to this, the righteous Jewish women maintained their faith in G-d that He would redeem the Jewish people. This level of faith in G-d which transcends reason is something that is an inherited trait from Avraham and the holy Patriarchs.

In order for the Jewish people to have further relevance to G-d, He gave them the mitzvah of circumcision in Egypt so that they could have the capacity for holiness. Just as Avraham was commanded to circumcise himself to advance his spirituality, so too must his offspring be circumcised.

The mitzvah of the Pascal sacrifice was necessary because it was an open demonstration of the rejection of paganism. By sacrificing the sheep, which was the deity of Egypt, the Jewish people severed their relationship with idolatry. Thus, with all of these initiatives, the Jewish people qualified to be considered as the offspring of Avraham and thus had relevance to the covenant that G-d had made with him.

