

Evoking The Narrative Of The Past To Live It In The Future



Pesach Video Series

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Halachos of the Seder - Part 1

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A People Evolve: From Bondage To Freedom



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Why Did G-d Wait?

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

Why The Bondage?

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

What About Choice?

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

The Significance of 10

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

The Plagues: Nature or Miracle

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

Were We Worthy Enough?

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

Full Participation

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

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Unleashing the Forces Of Creation Through the Seder

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

Tracing Our DNA To Our Most Special Patriarchs

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

The Power of **PRAYER**

A New Series by
Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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The Power of Prayer - Part 63

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The Power of Prayer - Part 64

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The Power of Prayer - Part 66

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Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Pesach



Evoking The Narrative Of The Past To Live It In The Future

Love of Your Fellow Man is the Determining Factor

Torah at the beginning of *Sefer Shemos*: “Yosef died, and all his brothers and that entire generation. The Children of *Yisroel* were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong – very, very much so; and the land became filled with them. A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef. He said to his people, “Behold! The people, the Children of *Yisroel*, are more numerous and stronger than we. Come, let us outsmart it lest it become numerous and it may be that if a war will occur, it too may join our enemies, and wage war against us...”

Rashi citing an argument between *Rav* and *Shmuel*: The argument is whether or not the “new king” in Egypt was the same Pharaoh who knew Yosef, but who instituted a new mandate and acted as if he did not know him. Or, in fact, the Pharaoh was indeed a “new king” who did not know Yosef. In any case, this Pharaoh told his people that they must be “wisened” to the Jewish people because

they had become numerous and that they may join with its enemies against Egypt.

It is difficult to understand how Pharaoh or the Egyptian people would actually believe this. It was Yosef, the Viceroy, who actually saved Egypt from extinction during the time of the great famine. It was Yosef’s plan and control over the grain that caused Egypt to become the wealthiest nation in the world because everyone turned to Egypt to purchase grain. The Nile would rise in the presence of the Pharaoh only because of the special blessing given to him by *Yaakov*. After all of the contributions *Yaakov* and Yosef made to Egypt how is it possible that Pharaoh would make a decree against the Jewish people and suspect that the same people who saved Egypt would join with its enemies against it?

There is a Positive Commandment in the *Torah* that one must love his fellow as he loves himself. *Chofetz Chaim* in *Shmiras HaLoshon* (*Guarding One’s Tongue*):

If one truly loved his fellow man, he would not speak negatively about him. In addition, there is a *mitzvah* to give someone the benefit of the doubt. If a Jew truly loved another Jew, he would try in every possible way to put him in the most positive light. If one speaks negatively about his fellow Jew or does not give him the benefit of the doubt, it is a clear indication that he does not love him as he loves himself. All difficulties between man and man stem from the failure to observe this Positive Commandment.

Given everything that Yosef and his family had done for Egypt, one would expect that the Egyptians would be beholden and have an exceptional love for the Jewish people. The fact that Pharaoh and the Egyptian people could suspect the Jews would join their enemies is only an indication that they truly lacked the proper love and appreciation for the Jewish people. The Egyptians did not have the capacity to appreciate what the Jews had done for them. We see that this is inherent in the character of the Egyptian.

After Yosef had interpreted the dream of the wine steward while in prison, the man was subsequently released. Yosef had asked that he “remember” him and “mention” him to Pharaoh so that he too would be released from prison. The *Torah* tells us that the moment the wine steward was released, “he forgot Yosef”.

Rashi citing *Tehillim (Psalms)*: “Fortunate is the man who puts his faith in *Hashem* and does not turn to the arrogant.”

Midrash: “The arrogant” is referring to the Egyptian. The Egyptian does not have the capacity to appreciate the kindness that was done to him and thus cannot be relied upon to reciprocate. Even if the Pharaoh was truly a “new king” who did not personally know Yosef, there is no way that he could have ignored the historical recording that Yosef and Yaakov had saved Egypt. It is obvious again that he did not have the capacity to appreciate what the Jewish people had done for Egypt. Thus, he was able to enact new and harsh decrees against the Jews and impose upon them an overbearing bondage.

The reason a person chooses to behave as a *rasha* (evil person) is that he does not appreciate the goodness that is bestowed upon him by *Hashem*. If one truly appreciated that he was the beneficiary of G-d’s Kindness, he would be completely beholden and would behave differently. If *Hashem* continuously provides us with life and all other amenities, then how is it possible to have difficulty in carrying out His Will. The answer is obvious – it is only

due to a lack of appreciation that causes one to fall short of serving *Hashem* selflessly.

What Guarantees the Survival of the Jewish People

Torah: After Yosef and that entire generation passed away, the Jewish people “were fruitful, teemed (*va’yishretzu*), increased and became strong”. The *Torah* continues to tell us that a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef. The increase of the number of Jews in a short period caused Pharaoh to be concerned that they may align with Egypt’s enemies and drive them from the land. On a literal level, we could see that what fueled Pharaoh’s concern was the increase in the number of Jews in the land. However, we can understand it differently. The extreme change in the status of the Jewish people only occurred after Yosef and that entire generation passed away.

Torah: Seemingly it was only after the Jews began *va’yishretzu* (teeming) that Pharaoh became concerned. We find that after Yosef was sold into slavery and ultimately was purchased by *Potiphar*, he quickly ascended to become the head of his master’s household. At that time, the *Torah* states, “Now Yosef was handsome of form and handsome of appearance. After these things, his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Yosef and she said, “Lie with me.” Simply one could say that the reason his mistress took notice of him was because of his beauty and handsome appearance. However, *Rashi* explains it differently based on the *Midrash*.

Midrash: When Yosef became the head of his master’s household he began to focus on his looks by beautifying his eyes and grooming his hair.

Chazal: *Hashem* said that Yosef’s behavior at that moment was inappropriate because he was paying attention to his beauty when his father Yaakov was grieving over his loss. *Hashem* said, “Because you were insensitive to your father’s pain, I will set your master’s wife upon you.” The *Torah* is telling us that if it were not for the inappropriateness of Yosef’s behavior (despite his beauty), his mistress would not have taken any interest in him. It was only because of his spiritual failing that *Hashem* allowed her to take notice.

In a similar vein, one can now understand Pharaoh’s concern with the increase in the Jewish population.

Pharaoh had a sense of insecurity because *Hashem* allowed him to perceive the Jewish people in a suspicious manner.

Sforno: “*Va’yishretzu*” means that after the generation of *Yosef* had passed away, the Jewish people began to behave inappropriately – similar to rodents (pejorative term for improper behavior).

Midrash: The bondage of the Jewish people started only after they stopped circumcising themselves. As long as the Jewish people circumcised themselves, they were not subject to slavery. However, when the generation of *Yosef* passed away, the Jewish people in Egypt no longer wished to value their spirituality, which is represented through the circumcision (sign of the Holy Covenant). It was at this time that they were subjected to bondage.

Under normal circumstances, Pharaoh would not have felt threatened by the sudden increase in the Jewish population. However, because the Jews began to abandon their spirituality, Pharaoh began to take notice. The justification for Pharaoh’s behavior was that the spirituality of the Jew had eroded to such a degree that he no longer identified them with their forbearers. Because Pharaoh could no longer recognize the spiritual influence of *Yosef* and that generation, he was able to justify the bondage.

Gemara in Tractate *Chulin*: The only time an animal attacks a human being is when the animal sees the person as an animal (commonality with itself). However as long as the animal is able to sense the “*tzelem Elokeem* – the Image of G-d” (the spirituality) of the person, the animal will not attack. It is only when the human being is put on the same level as the animal will he be subject to attack.

Similarly, the non-Jew becomes insecure when he perceives the Jew on his level. If the Jew retains his spirituality, then he does not have commonality with the non-Jew and therefore *Hashem* will not allow him to be despised. However, if the Jew should abandon his Judaism and attempt to assimilate with the non-Jew (even culturally), he will eventually become despised and rejected by the non-Jew. This is why Pharaoh became concerned with the increase in the Jewish population and thus instituted the bondage to subordinate and control the Jew. This unfortunate reality has repeated itself many times throughout history.

One’s Basic Purpose

Torah: Pharaoh decreed that all the Jewish newborn males should be thrown into the Nile. When *Moshe* was born, his mother *Yocheved* hid him until she could no longer conceal her son. In an attempt to save him from the Egyptians, the *Torah* states, “...she (*Yocheved*) took for him (*Moshe*) a box fashioned of balsa wood *gomeh* and smeared it with clay and pitch; she placed the child into it and placed it among the reeds at the bank of the River.” It is interesting to note that the *Torah* is very specific about the material from which the box was made. Regarding *Noach*, the *Torah* tells us specifically that gopher wood was used to build the Ark.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The reason the *Torah* tells us this is because it is an allusion to the fact that the world will be destroyed by the sulfuric (*gufris*) water. However, regarding *Moshe*’s box, what is the significance of identifying the material from which it is made?

Midrash citing the opinion of *Reb Elazar*: The reason the *Torah* specifies the wood of the box is to tell us that it is of inferior quality. This teaches us that a *tzaddik* values his money to a great degree. *Yocheved* chose to purchase the most inferior quality wood because of the degree to which she valued *Hashem*’s blessing, i.e. her personal assets. The question is how do we understand this? How is it possible that she was concerned with cost of the wood when it was a question of saving the life of her child? The answer is that *Yocheved* was convinced that *Moshe* would survive the water regardless of the quality of the wood that was used, since he was to be the Redeemer of Israel. *Miriam*, *Moshe*’s sister, had shared a prophecy with her father that *Yocheved* would give birth to the Redeemer.

Chazal: When *Moshe* was born, the house was illuminated by his presence and he was able to speak although he was only a newborn. It was evident to his parents that he was destined to be The Redeemer. *Yocheved* understood that *Moshe* would have survived even if she had placed him directly into the water because she knew that *Hashem* would perform the miracle necessary to ensure *Moshe*’s survival. If this is the case, then why place *Moshe* in a box at all, regardless of its minimal cost?

Ramban: *Noach* did not necessarily need to build an ark to survive the Great Flood because *Hashem* could have performed a miracle by suspending him and all the

other creatures above the waters. The reason *Noach* was instructed to build an ark was so that *Hashem* could bring about the miracle of his survival (and all that had accompanied him) in a concealed manner. If all of existence had survived through a revealed miracle, it would have been difficult to deny G-d's existence and thus free choice would have been diminished.

Yocheved understood that she had to conceal the miracle of *Moshe's* survival. Thus, it was necessary to fashion a box in order to cloak the miracle. Therefore, inferior wood was sufficient and spending more than what was absolutely necessary would have been considered wasteful. The *Torah* tells us that the basket was made of *gomeh* in order to inform us that *Yocheved* was aware of the destiny of her child.

Torah: From the time of his birth, *Moshe* understood that he was the Redeemer. When *Moshe* became an adult in the house of Pharaoh, he went out of the palace to see the suffering of his brothers (the Jewish people) and he came upon an Egyptian beating a Jew. *Moshe* first looked around, then killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. The reason *Moshe* killed the Egyptian was because he had raped the wife of the Jew who he was beating. How could *Moshe* kill the Egyptian without taking into consideration the consequences of his actions? If it were found out that he had killed the Egyptian, he would be forced to flee Egypt or even be killed. The answer is – *Moshe* knew that the Egyptians could not kill him. He knew that *Hashem* would protect him because he was destined to take the Jewish people out of Egypt.

Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) in *Koheles*: The day of one's death is greater than the day of one's birth. This is because when one dies, his life has shown its purpose (if he has succeeded). However, at the time of birth, one does not know how life will evolve and unfold. The fact is, unlike *Moshe*, most people do not know their mission in life. Although one's future is unknown because the course of our lives is dictated by our free choice, we do know that there is a baseline within which every Jew must operate. Regardless of who we are as individuals, we know that we are all obligated in the study of *Torah* and the observance of *mitzvos*. The *Torah* establishes the guidelines for every aspect of our lives and in that respect we know who we are as *Moshe* understood who he was. Therefore, we too should not compromise in our behavior.

The Far-Reaching Effects of a Good Deed

Torah: *Yocheved* (referred to as *Shifrah*) and *Miriam* (referred to as *Puah*) were the head midwives supervising the delivery of all Jewish children. "The King of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was *Shifrah* and the name of the second was *Puah*– and he said, 'in your assisting the Hebrew women at childbirth and you see on the birth stool, if it is a son you are to kill him, and if it is a daughter, she shall live.' But the midwives feared G-d and they did not do as the King of Egypt spoke to them ... G-d did good to the midwives - and the people increased and became very strong. And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made houses for them."

Torah: "G-d did good to the midwives – and the people increased and became very strong. And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made houses for them."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The "*batim* – houses" which are referred to in the *pasuk* are the houses of the *Kehunah* (priesthood) and *Leviyah* (tribe of *Levi*), which emanated from *Yocheved*, and the house of *Malchus* (kingship/royalty), which emanated from *Miriam*. However, the *pasuk* also interjects here that the Jewish people increased and became strong. Seemingly, this phrase is a digression from what the *Torah* is telling us about the good that G-d had done for the midwives. How do we understand this?

The worth of a good deed is based on the far-reaching effects that it has. For example, if one performs a good deed but it has limited impact then its value is also limited. However, in the case of the midwives, since *Yocheved* and *Miriam* feared *Hashem*, He wanted their sacrifice to have the greatest impact and therefore He wanted to maximize the value of their good deed.

Because the midwives did not follow the orders of Pharaoh (which was considered a sacrifice since their lives could have been taken for defying his directive), the children that they saved increased in number and became strong. The result of the midwives not killing the children thus became unlimited since the increase in the Jewish people was unlimited. Therefore, the reward which they received, namely the "*batim* – houses" of the *Kehunah* (priesthood), *Leviyah* (tribe of *Levi*), and *Malchus* (kingship), was unending.

Hashem did "good" for the midwives by imbuing their actions with even greater value. *Yocheved* and *Miriam*

merited such special families because their sacrifice, demonstrated by their fear of G-d, brought about far-reaching effects. In order for the Jewish people to be able to receive the *Torah* at Sinai, there needed to be 600,000 Jewish males above the age of 20. Without this minimum, the *Torah* would not have been given at Sinai. It is because of the sacrifice of the midwives that the population increased to the necessary number and the Jewish people were able to receive the *Torah* – which is the purpose of the redemption from Egypt (to become G-d's people). It is because of these incalculable and valuable effects that *Hashem* rewarded the good deeds of *Yocheved* and *Miriam* with such special families.

Greatness Lies in What is not Obvious

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

Rashi citing *Chazal*: When *Yisro* said, “let him eat bread” he meant that *Moshe* should be considered as a candidate for marriage to one of his daughters. The question is why did *Yisro* feel that *Moshe* was worthy to be a prospective husband for one of his daughters? Were there no other available men for marriage in the *Midian* community?

Yisro, the sheik of *Midian*, was not a person of ordinary ability. He was an individual with exceptional understanding and ability and was therefore sensitive to many events and issues that most were not. As we see, *Yisro* heard (as the entire world had) that G-d had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt. *Yisro* was affected by this information differently than the rest of the world. He was compelled to leave his glory to join the Jewish people in the desert. When *Yisro* heard what “the Egyptian man” (*Moshe*) had done for his daughters he immediately appreciated the specialness of *Moshe* and understood that he was a person of unique character.

Although *Moshe* went out of his way to assist *Yisro*'s daughters, he nevertheless did not seek any remuneration or acknowledgment. This level of behavior was something out of the ordinary.

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

Midrash Tanchuma: “*Hashem* does not give greatness to a person unless he has been checked and tested in an insignificant area. It is only then that *Hashem* causes him to ascend to greatness.”

Midrash: There is an example of two world-renowned individuals: *Dovid HaMelech* (King David) and *Moshe Rabbeinu*. *Dovid* as a shepherd would take his flock into the desert to graze, because he was concerned that if they would graze closer to the community they may graze on lands that were not his and thus he would be in violation of stealing. Even if *Dovid* had not taken his flock into the desert he would have been careful and vigilant not to allow them to graze in a location that was not his. Nevertheless, *Dovid* conducted himself in a manner that was above reproach. Even if it were remotely possible for the sheep to steal, this was not acceptable to him. Therefore *Dovid* was chosen to be the king of Israel. The *Midrash* is teaching us that through one's actions, which seem to be insignificant, one is chosen for greatness by *Hashem*.

Similarly, *Moshe* also led the flocks of his father-in-law into the desert to graze out of the same concern. *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, “Since you were so faithful in your responsibility to your flock, because you wanted your behavior to be above reproach, you shall lead My flock (the Jewish people).” *Yisro* understood from something that seemed to be unnoticed and insignificant to others, that *Moshe* was a person who was very special and unique. It is through one's behavior that is normally unnoticed that one reveals his true character.

Gemara in Tractate *Shevuos*: A judge must value a case that is worth one cent as much as another case worth an enormous amount of money. The judge is not permitted to even switch the order of adjudicating the case of minimal value with the case of greater monetary value

Both cases are of equal importance. Thus, the judge must be a person of such caliber that he does not differentiate between the inconsequential amount of money (the penny) and an enormous amount of money.

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

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

The Power Behind Yaakov

Torah: "Then *Yisroel* said to *Yosef*, "Behold! – I am about to die... And as for me, I have given you *Shechem* – one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow."

Rashi: "With my sword and with my bow" means "with my *chochmah* (wisdom) and with my *tefillah* (prayer)." *Yaakov* is not referring to a physical sword and bow but rather to wisdom and prayer.

Targum Unkelos: "With my sword and with my bow" means "*b'tzlusee* (with my *tefillah*/prayer) and *u'viusee* (with my *bakashah* /request)".

Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law): If one knows he will not be able to have proper intent when he says any one of the three obligatory *Amidos* (Silent Prayers), his *tefillah* is nevertheless still considered valid. However, if one wishes to recite a *tefillas nedavah* (optional silent prayer for additional requests from *Hashem*), one must feel that he will have the proper concentration from the beginning of the *tefillah* to the end. Otherwise, it is considered that the person is praying in vain.

Reb Meir Simcha: Based on its own weight, the sword has the ability to cut and pierce; so too, the obligatory *tefillah* has inherent value, even though the person may be lacking in concentration. However, just as the effectiveness of the bow (which propels the arrow) is the result of the archer's power, so too, the *tefillas nedavah* is effective only when one infuses it with the proper concentration. This is what *Yaakov* meant when he said to *Yosef*, "...which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow."

Sforno offers yet another interpretation of this *pasuk* based on the *Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: "With my sword and with my bow" means "with my *chachmah* (wisdom) and with my *binah* (understanding)".

Gemara: This pertains to the study of *Torah*. *Chachmah* refers to the knowledge of *Torah*, while *binah* refers to the delving and application of concepts that come about through the study of *Torah*.

Midrash: The difference between *chachmah* and *binah* can be illuminated by discussing two types of people, a *chacham* and a *navon*, respectively. The *chacham* is likened to the person who possesses many coins and all he does is repeatedly count his money. The *navon*, an individual with *binah*, can be compared to a person who understands the value of those coins and thus invests them in order to greatly multiply their value. The question is what is the relationship of the sword to *chachmah* and the bow to *binah*?

Just as the sword has the natural ability to cut because of its weight and sharpness, so too, the wisdom of *Torah* has innate value. Just as the bow's ability to propel the arrow is solely based on the power of the archer, so too the only thing that can give one the ability to delve into concepts and apply them to situations (that are not so obvious) is to dedicate oneself to the study of *Torah*. One is only able to comprehend the *Torah* to the degree that one applies himself to it.

Gemara in Tractate *Megillah*: “If one toils in the study of *Torah* and comes upon its Truth it should be believed (*yagata matzasa taamin*).” *Yaakov* was the Patriarch who represents *Torah*; He devoted his entire life to its study. His dedication was to such a degree that for the fourteen years that he spent at the *Yeshivah* of *Shem V’Aver*, he did not lie down to sleep. Through his dedication, he achieved *chachmah* and *binah*. As a result, he merited the portion (*Shechem*) which he gave over to *Yosef*. We learn from this that the degree to which one dedicates himself to the study of *Torah* will determine what he will derive from it.

The Inherent Spiritual Capacity of the Jew

Torah: *Moshe* was initially reticent about assuming the role as the Redeemer of the Jewish people when *Hashem* asked him to do so. *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, “So shall you say to the Children of *Yisroel*, ‘*Hashem* the G-d of your forefathers, the G-d of *Avraham*, the G-d of *Yitzchak*, and the G-d of *Yaakov* has dispatched me to you. This is My Name forever, and this is My remembrance from generation to generation.’” *Hashem* told *Moshe* to communicate to the Jewish people “My Name is forever (*le’olam*)...” The word *le’olam* is stated in a deleted form, which means that the word is usually spelled with a “*vav*” before the “*lamed*”; however, in this instance the “*vav*” is deleted.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The deleted version of *le’olam* can be read *le’aleim*, which means to conceal. The four-letter Name of G-d – *Yud Kay Vav Kay* should not be pronounced as it is written, but rather as the Name of *Hashem* – *Adni* (which alludes to *Hashem* as “Master – *Adon*”). Thus, by not pronouncing it as it is written, the Name of *Hashem* is concealed. The difficulty is that *Moshe* was addressing the Jewish people, who were idol worshipers and very much removed from spirituality. So why was it important to tell them that he is representing the One whose Name should be concealed?

The Name *Yud Kay Vav Kay* signifies that *Hashem* is the Infinite G-d with no beginning and no end. G-d was, is, and will be (past, present, future). Initially when *Moshe* presented himself to Pharaoh as G-d’s agent, he referred to the Name of *Hashem* as *Yud Kay Vav Kay* and Pharaoh immediately rejected him. The concept of *Yud Kay Vav Kay* implied that there is a power that is boundless, exists outside of the realm of nature and is unrestricted by its laws – a Being who is unlimited. Pharaoh could not accept this. When he attempted to find the Name *Yud*

Kay Vav Kay in his encyclopedia of deities, it was not to be found. All the deities that Pharaoh knew were limited, finite, and bound to physical existence.

Although the Jewish people were idolaters, like the Egyptians, *Hashem* commanded *Moshe* to tell them that the Being that is *Yud Kay Vav Kay* sent him to be their Redeemer. At the same time, *Moshe* would tell them that the pronunciation of this Name is forbidden. Why is this communication also necessary at this moment? Under normal circumstances when one wishes to impart a concept and impress a belief upon another, one would think that he would initially communicate it on a level that is within that individual’s grasp.

However, in this particular context, *Hashem* wanted *Moshe* to communicate His Essence to the Jewish people through the Name *Yud Kay Vav Kay*, although the infinite is something that is incomprehensible. *Hashem* was telling *Moshe* that when he communicates His incomprehensible Essence to the Jewish people, he must simultaneously inform them of this aspect of *le’aleim* (concealment). Although it is something that is beyond their grasp, they will indeed have the capacity to accept that *Hashem* is the omnipotent Being. We see that *Hashem*’s initial introduction to *Klal Yisroel* (Jewish People) had to be in a context of *le’aleim* – concealment. The Jewish people would accept *Hashem*’s existence at this level even though it was not within a human being’s capacity to comprehend.

Similarly, at Sinai, when *Hashem* offered *Klal Yisroel* His *Torah*, they accepted it within an identical context of *le’aleim*. “*Naaseh V’ Nishmah* – we will do and then we will listen.” *Klal Yisroel* accepted the *Torah* unequivocally, although at that moment they did not know or understand the extent of its obligation. In contrast, G-d first offered the *Torah* to the rest of the nations of the world and they asked, “What is written in it?” This meant that they did not have the capacity to accept what is hidden. They did not have the trust and the faith necessary to become the *Am Hashem* (the Nation of G-d).

The angels were astounded that mere mortals achieved the level that was attained by the Jews. The Jewish people began their ascent because of *le’aleim*. *Moshe* represented himself as the agent of the Omnipotent Being who is *Yud Kay Vav Kay*. This was accepted in an unquestioned and unequivocal manner, which thereby established us as our Patriarchs (*Avraham*, *Yitzchak*

and *Yaakov*) had done, i.e. that we have the capacity to accept what is beyond comprehension because that is the spiritual make-up of the Jew. Every Jew has inherited a spirituality that can be awakened. Therefore, a Jew can be brought back to Judaism not necessarily through understanding, but through igniting the spark of spirituality that is inherent within him.

The Significance of a Name

Torah: Bas Pharaoh (the daughter of Pharaoh) gave the name “*Moshe*” to him. “*Moshe*” means “to draw out” as explained by *Rashi* in his commentary, it alludes to the event when he was “drawn out” of the water.

Midrash: Moshe was given seven names (*Tov, Tuvia, Tuvi*, etc.) by his parents *Amram* and *Yocheved*. *Amram* was the leading Sage of his generation and a man who never sinned in his life. *Yocheved*, the daughter of *Levi*, was a woman who was recognized for her “fear of *Hashem*” and who risked her life for *Hashem*.

Kesav Sofer z’tl: Given the greatness of *Moshe*’s parents, why would the *Torah* refer to *Moshe* by the name given by the daughter of Pharaoh and not by one of the names given to him by his parents? The *Torah* refers to *Moshe* as the “most humble man who ever walked the face of the earth.” This is the all-encompassing characteristic, which epitomizes *Moshe*’s greatness. One could become humble in one of two ways: either through experiencing difficulties in life (where one is conditioned through circumstance to assume a posture of humility), or through recognizing G-d’s omnipotence.

Kesav Sofer z’tl: The *Torah* wants to give us an appreciation for *Moshe*’s greatness by referring to him by the name given to him by the princess, the daughter of Pharaoh. *Moshe* was the adopted grandchild of Pharaoh and was raised in the palace with all of its opulence and affluence. Despite his upbringing as royalty and being recognized as being part of the “upper echelon” of society, he was still the most humble man who ever lived. The name *Moshe* is a testament to the man, whose humility was one of a kind.

Sforno: There is another interpretation of why the *Torah* refers to *Moshe* by the name given to him by *Bas Pharaoh*. *Bas Pharaoh* called him “*Moshe*” which means “to help others” because he has the innate ability to extricate others out of difficult situations. This is why it was deemed by G-d that *Moshe* be drawn out (saved)

from the water and not drowned. According to *Sforno*’s interpretation, *Moshe*’s existence was for the purpose of saving others. This was proven to be the case because *Moshe* was chosen by *Hashem* to be the Redeemer of the Jewish people.

Torah: Shifrah (*Yocheved*) and *Puah* (*Miriam*) were the head Jewish midwives who supervised the delivery of all Jewish children. *Yocheved* was called *Shifrah* because her role was to cleanse and beautify the newborn children, while *Miriam* was called *Puah* because she was the one who calmed and quieted the newborns. The question is why is it so important for the *Torah* to identify *Yocheved* and *Miriam* by their specific roles as midwives?

The *Torah* is revealing to us that the innate character of *Yocheved* was to beautify the Jewish children and that of *Miriam* was to calm them. One would think that when Pharaoh ordered *Yocheved* and *Miriam* to kill the newborn males on the birth stool the reason they defied his order was that it was contrary to their nature. However, the *Torah* reveals to us that although each of them is identified by their inner characteristic – as we discussed – the reason they did not kill the newborn male children was their “fear of *Hashem*”. *Yocheved* and *Miriam*’s selfless sacrifice in saving the Jewish children was unrelated to their dedication as midwives, but because of their “fear of *Hashem*.”

Torah: When *Hashem* told *Moshe* to go to Pharaoh and tell him, “Release my firstborn son, *Yisroel*.” The Jewish people are the children of *Yaakov*. If this is the case then why does *Hashem* refer to them here as the Children of *Yisroel*?

Sforno: “*Yisroel*” connotes the eternal nature of the Jewish people. The Jewish people have the inherent ability to survive all circumstances, just as *Yaakov* survived both man (*Esav*) and angel (archangel of *Esav*) and thus became identified as “*Yisroel*.” Because we are the Children of *Yaakov* (*Yisroel*), we have that same characteristic of *Yisroel*. Therefore, when *Moshe* refers to the Jewish people *Hashem* told him that he must say, “My (*Hashem*’s) firstborn son, *Yisroel*.” They are no longer identified as Hebrews but as the eternal people “*B’nai Yisroel*.”

The name identifies the essence of the individual. The appellation “*Yisroel*” identifies the essence of the Jew. Regardless of the insurmountable conflicts throughout history, the Jewish people continue as the eternal people.

Similarly, the name “*Moshe*” reveals his essence – the ability to save others from difficulty. The *Torah* refers to *Yocheved* and *Miriam* as *Shifrah* and *Puah* to demonstrate that despite the fact that their nature was to be caring for the Jewish children, they saved them only because they “feared *Hashem*.” Even though as individuals we may be confronted with situations in which we give our lives in order to sanctify the Name of *Hashem*, nonetheless, the Jewish people as a whole are eternal because we are the *B’nai Yisroel*.

How Does Torah Study Impact on Our Lives as Jews?

Torah: *Hashem* told *Moshe* to inform the Jewish people that G-d was going to free them from their enslavement in Egypt. Using the four expressions of redemption *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, “Say to the Children of Israel: ‘I am *Hashem*, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall be a G-d to you..’”

Moshe addressed the *Klal Yisroel* as he was commanded by *Hashem*, “So *Moshe* spoke accordingly to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to *Moshe* because of shortness of wind (*kotzer ruach*) and hard work.” Despite the fact that *Moshe* had proven to the Jews that he was the Redeemer of Israel and the agent of G-d, the Jews had no capacity to absorb the significance of *Moshe*’s words because they were overwhelmed with their bondage. Although *Bnai Yisroel* believed what *Moshe* had told them, they were incapable of processing and internalizing *Moshe*’s words.

Ohr Ha’Chaim Ha’Kadosh: The term *kotzer ruach* means “of limited spirit.” The Jews in Egypt did not study or adhere to *Torah* principles. They were pagans and idolaters as the Egyptians were. He suggests that the “limited spirit” means that the Jewish people did not have the capacity to put things into perspective because of the overwhelming bondage.

Ohr Ha’Chaim: The reason the Jewish people had such limitations was that they did not study *Torah*. If they had studied *Torah*, they would have been able to internalize *Moshe*’s words, because *Torah* broadens the heart. This means that *Torah* gives a person the breadth and depth of understanding as well as the capacity to effectively deal with difficulties and issues. If one does not study

Torah, then his capacity for being able to cope with difficult situations is limited. Since the Jewish people were slaves and not involved in the study or observance of *Torah*, they had a limited capacity and depth of heart to be receptive to *Moshe*’s words.

Gemara in Tractate *Taanis*: If one sees a *Torah* sage becoming agitated (when the *Torah* is being violated), it is the *Torah* that is “burning within him” that causes this agitation. As the verse states, “My (*Hashem*) words (*Torah*) are like fire.”

Rashi: Because of his *Torah* study, the *Torah* sage has a broadness of heart – and thus a depth of understanding and sensitivity to the wrong that is being committed. This causes him to react differently than the ordinary person. Therefore, one must give the benefit of the doubt to the *Torah* Sage if one sees him agitated because he processes reality differently than others.

Because the *Talmid Chacham* does not have a “limited spirit,” he has the capacity to deal with situations differently than others. There may be situations that seem to be hopeless and bleak yet the *Torah* sage may put it in a completely different perspective because of the broadness of heart that he has gained through *Torah* study. The *Torah* sage’s special perspective is not based solely on an intellectual understanding of reality, but rather, it is something that relates to the essence of who he is.

We conclude the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer): “May it be Your Will...that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days. Grant us our share in Your *Torah*, and may we serve You there with reverence as days of old...” Seemingly, the request should have been made that the *Bais HaMikdash* (Holy Temple) should be rebuilt so that we can serve Him there.

However, we interject (before we conclude with the service) that *Hashem* should give us our portion in His *Torah*. Why does the receiving of our portion of *Torah* precede serving *Hashem*? The answer is that it is only through the *Torah* that one can have the broadness and depth of heart to be able to internalize *Hashem* and thus serve Him properly. His internalization of reality and spirituality is completely different from one who is not engaged in *Torah*. Therefore, after we have the portion of the *Torah* as requested, we will be able to serve *Hashem* as in “days of old.”

Why is it So Difficult to Have Clarity?

Torah: Moshe and Aaron approached Pharaoh to request that he release the Jewish people. In order to communicate to Pharaoh that Hashem had sent them as His agents, Moshe and Aaron were told to perform a miracle. Aaron took his staff, threw it on the ground, and it was transformed into a serpent. In response to this, the sorcerers of Pharaoh also threw their staffs on the ground and were transformed into serpents. After Aaron's staff reverted to its original state it devoured those of the sorcerers.

Torah: "Pharaoh hardened his heart and he did not heed them..." Seemingly, Pharaoh was not impressed with the miracle performed by Aaron because the *Torah* tells us "he did not heed them." Pharaoh's sorcerers were able to perform a similar miracle and therefore Aaron proved nothing. If Pharaoh dismissed Aaron's miracle as sorcery, then why was it necessary to harden his heart? Evidently, Pharaoh recognized that there was a difference between Aaron's action and that of his sorcerers, otherwise why was it necessary for him to enter a state of denial by hardening his heart.

We see that Aaron's miracle was fundamentally different from the magic performed by the sorcerers. The sorcerers were only able to create an illusion in which the staff appeared to be a snake. However, after their staffs and Aaron's staff reverted to the original state, Aaron's staff swallowed theirs - which was not an illusion but reality. Thus, Pharaoh could not dismiss Aaron's feat as sorcery. It was clearly a supernatural feat. Therefore, the only way Pharaoh was able to deal with this reality was to harden his heart and not heed them at all.

Witchcraft and sorcery have the ability to create visual illusions, which even take on some of the physical properties of what they are mimicking. However, the essence or the chemical composition does not change. For example, when Aaron struck the Nile with his staff and transformed all the water in Egypt into blood, it not only took on the physical appearance of blood but also its chemical composition; it was no longer H₂O. This can be seen clearly from Moshe's forewarning to Pharaoh "the Nile will turn to blood and the fish in the Nile will die." If in fact sorcery could transform something in appearance and in chemical make-up, then why was it necessary for Moshe to say that the fish in the Nile will die? Since we know that fish cannot survive in blood, it is clear from his statement that the survival of the fish,

or not, would be the obvious discernment between sorcery and miracle.

Torah: Regarding the plague of blood, "Pharaoh hardened his heart and he did not heed them." Evidently, the miracle of blood was also something difficult for Pharaoh to dismiss outright as sorcery. He needed to harden his heart to deny what was obvious. Pharaoh believed that there was no Omnipotent and All-Encompassing Universal Being. He believed, as other pagans, that the various deities that exist are limited and can only function within the context of nature. The miracle of Aaron's staff devouring those of the sorcerers, and the waters of the Nile being transformed into blood (and killing the fish) were clearly caused by a Power that dictates and determines existence. In order for Pharaoh to deny the existence of G-d – the Omnipotent Being – he needed to harden his heart.

Mishna: During the First Temple Period there were ten revealed miracles that occurred daily in the *Bais HaMikdash* (the Holy Temple). These miracles did not happen anywhere else in the world. Although they existed for a period of over 400 years, the vast majority of the Jewish people were idolaters. How do we understand this? How is it possible for someone to witness a revealed miracle that cannot be understood in any other context and still adhere to paganism? The answer is when something is not continually seen and noticed, it can easily be dismissed. If something is obvious and happens persistently then one cannot escape its reality and simply dismiss it. Therefore, he needs to continually harden his heart against it.

Gemara in Tractate *Chagigah*: "Poverty to the Jewish people is like the beautification of a white stallion with a red kerchief." Meaning, if one is in an impoverished state, he cannot deny his reality and therefore is forced to recognize the Hand of Hashem in his life. Just as the red kerchief brings out the beauty of the stallion, poverty brings out the spirituality of the Jew.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z'tl citing *Chazal*: Pharaoh was not personally affected by the plague of blood.

Reb Meir Simcha: The reason Pharaoh was spared this plague was that it was in the context of measure for measure. Pharaoh raised Moshe in his palace, as his adopted grandson and accommodated him with all his physical needs. Therefore, measure for measure, during the plague, Pharaoh was given water to accommodate

his needs. Because of this, Pharaoh was able to dismiss the plague of blood with the mere hardening of his heart.

Torah in the Portion of the *Tochachah* (the Reproaches): If one dismisses the sufferings brought upon them by *Hashem* as mere happenstance, they will only intensify and become more severe until they can no longer be ignored. The purpose of the persistent suffering is to bring a person to acknowledge that he has done wrong and must repent. If he chooses to be obstinate, he will be destroyed. We ask *Hashem* in our daily *tefillah* (prayer service) that he should “open our hearts with His *Torah*.” We request that our hearts be opened, not only for the moment, but also on a continuous basis. We are constantly denying many issues around us because of the cost of recognizing them i.e. our conflicts of interest. The only way one can overcome this natural state of denial is through the study of *Torah*.

There is Nothing Inconsequential in the Eyes of G-d

Torah: Regarding the plague of wild beasts, “*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, ‘...you shall say to him (Pharaoh) So said *Hashem*: Send out My people...For if you do not send out My people, behold, I shall incite against you... the swarm of wild beasts...And on that day I shall set apart the land of *Goshen* upon which My people stands, that there shall be no swarm there; so that you will know that I am *Hashem* (YKVK) in the midst of the land.’”

This means that Pharaoh will understand through the plague of the wild beasts that *Hashem* (YKVK) is “in the midst of the land.” Seemingly, the significance of the plague should have been for Pharaoh to believe that there is an Omnipotent Being. Therefore, what is the significance of Pharaoh believing that *Hashem* is “in the midst of the land”?

Initially when *Moshe* addressed Pharaoh as *Hashem* commanded him. *Moshe* told him that he was sent by, “*Hashem* (YKVK) the G-d of *Yisroel*. Send out My people so that they may celebrate for Me in the desert.” Pharaoh responded, “Who is *Hashem* (YKVK) that I should heed His voice...? I do not know *Hashem*, nor will I send out *Yisroel*.” *Moshe* and *Aaron* replied to Pharaoh, “The G-d (*Elokei*) of the Hebrews happened upon us. Let us now go...” It is understandable that after Pharaoh said, “I do not know *Hashem* (YKVK)” that *Moshe* responds with being the agent of *Elokei* (the Power). The question is why did *Moshe* need to

change the manner in which he refers to the Jewish people from *Yisroel* to the Hebrews (*Ivrim*)?

Moshe and *Aaron* changed the manner in which they referred to *Hashem* from YKVK (The Four Letter Name of G-d) to *Elokei* (the Power) because Pharaoh rejected the concept of YKVK, which connotes that *Hashem* is an Unlimited and Universal Being. Thus, they referred to G-d as “*Elokei*,” meaning “a Power,” since this would be acceptable to Pharaoh. However, why did *Moshe* and *Aaron* change the manner in which they referred to the Jewish people from “*Yisroel*” to “*Ivrim*”?

The appellation of “*Yisroel*,” which we inherited from our Patriarch *Yaakov*, identifies the Jewish people as the eternal and unlimited people. Our existence defies the natural order. The Jews throughout history survived the most untenable and insurmountable situations. The fundamental belief of Pharaoh and the Egyptian culture was that everything is bound to the natural order. They could not accept the fact that there is an Omnipotent Being. If the concept of Omnipotence did not exist for the Egyptians, then a nation such as “*Yisroel*” (which represents the unbound) cannot exist. Thus, when *Moshe* referred to *Hashem* as *Elokei*, he referred to the Jewish people as “*Ivrim*” because “*Yisroel*” is only an extension of YKVK.

Even if the Egyptians could accept the concept of YKVK, an Omnipotent Being, the belief that this Universal Being is associated with a limited existence is something that they could not accept. Therefore, *Hashem* says that through the plague of wild beasts, it will teach the Egyptians, “I am *Hashem*, although I am the Unlimited Being, I dictate and Am involved in the most limited situations.” This is the meaning of “I am *Hashem* in the midst of the land.”

The verse, “...so that you will know that I am *Hashem* in the midst of the land” is teaching us that despite the fact that *Hashem* (YKVK) is Unlimited, Unbound, and Universal, He is involved and concerned with every aspect of existence – even though it is limited and physical. *Hashem* is involved in the most minuscule and insignificant aspects of existence. This is the lesson taught by the plague of the wild beasts.

One of the Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith is that there is reward and punishment. All of our actions are considered significant and therefore we are deserving of the positive and liable for the negative. One may think,

since *Hashem* is Unlimited and Omnipotent, that our actions would have no value or significance vis-à-vis existence and that since Existence is Willed by *Hashem*, it is unrelated to our actions. However, the reality of reward and punishment indicates the contrary. There is no such thing as an insignificant or inconsequential act. Therefore, there is liability or reward for every aspect of our behavior.

Torah: When *Moshe* was initially told by *Hashem* to build the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) as it is stated, “Make for Me a Sanctuary, so that I may dwell in your midst,” he was taken aback. *Moshe* could not understand how was it possible that G-d’s Presence be contained in such a limited location when the world itself is not sufficient to contain His Presence. *Hashem* responded to *Moshe*, “You do yours and I will do Mine.” Many aspects of *Hashem* are unfathomable because He is the Unlimited and Omnipotent Being. However, it is fundamental to our belief and reality that *Hashem* does concern Himself with our actions although they are limited and finite. This is clearly communicated through the verse “I am *Hashem* (YKVK) in the midst of the land.”

The Importance of Putting Things in Perspective

Torah: “*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, “Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the hearts of his servants stubborn so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst; and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I made a mockery of Egypt and My signs that I placed among them – that you may know that I am *Hashem*.” *Hashem* says to *Moshe* that one of the reasons He brought the plagues upon Egypt is so the Jewish people should communicate to their children and their grandchildren that *Hashem* made a “mockery” of Egypt. What is the significance of relating this? Seemingly the significance of the miracles was, “so that you may know that I am *Hashem*.” The *Torah* is saying that unless one appreciates the consequence of the miracle, that G-d made a “mockery” of Egypt, one is not able to know that G-d is the Omnipotent Power. The question is why?

There is a Negative Commandment in the *Torah* that a judge is not permitted to be intimidated by anyone when he is adjudicating a case. Regardless of the status of individuals involved (wealthy or powerful), a judge must maintain his objectivity and remain unbiased. If a judge is influenced, intimidated, or affected to the point that he

feels restrained to any degree vis-à-vis his function, then he is in violation of this negative commandment.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: Greater is a person who benefits from the toil of his hands than one who fears *Hashem*. Is it possible to say that a menial laborer is greater than a man who fears G-d? It is obvious that the “laborer who benefits from the toil of his hands” is a person who fears G-d. The *Gemara* is saying that a man who fears G-d and is supported by his own toil is greater than a person who fears G-d and is sustained by others. The reason for this is that the one who relies on others is bound to be swayed and affected by them. He makes decisions consciously or unconsciously based on how he believes others will react or perceive him and not the way *Hashem* sees him. Thus the individual who benefits from the toil of his own hands and fears G-d, will be directed by the Will of *Hashem* alone and be impervious to the opinions of others.

People are impressed and awed by status and power. The *Torah* tells us that Egypt, the most advanced and powerful civilization in the world was devastated by G-d because it subjugated the Jewish people. Pharaoh, the most significant monarch in existence, was significantly diminished because he did not release the Jewish people from bondage. Although one would think that Pharaoh was a person who was invincible, it was proven that he was a mere mortal.

The reason it is important to communicate to our children and grandchildren the “mockery” *Hashem* made of Pharaoh and his people, is to give them the understanding that although a person is in an exalted and elevated position, he is only there because it is Willed by *Hashem*. Only when one sees the unimaginable (such as the downfall of Egypt), can he appreciate what the basis is for every person’s predicament. If one understands and is able to internalize this, he will know the meaning of “I am *Hashem*.” If one believes for a moment that achievement and success is attributed to oneself, then he will be impressed with the one who achieves that success, thus, diminishing *Hashem*’s role in existence.

The *Rambam* and the *Ramban* argue whether the obligation of prayer is a *Torah* obligation or only a *Rabbinical* dictate. The *Rambam* is of the opinion that *tefillah* (daily prayer) is a *Torah* obligation; as the *Talmud* explains, *tefillah* is the “service of the heart.” One would

think that *tefillah* is simply the acknowledgment of *Hashem* – that He is great, powerful, sustains the living, resurrects the dead, supports the fallen, and heals the sick etc.

Rambam: However, if one only acknowledges *Hashem* for what He is and does not make subsequent requests of Him, one does not fulfill the *Torah* obligation of *tefillah*. The question is why? The answer is that if in fact *Hashem* is the all-powerful, awesome, and omnipotent Being, then how is it possible that one does not beseech him for his needs. When one beseeches *Hashem* for his needs it is a confirmation of all the attributes he has been citing in his prayer. If however, one acknowledges *Hashem* as being everything and does not make requests from Him, then it is an indication that he truly does not believe that *Hashem* is what he had acknowledged Him to be. The value of his statement is purely “lip service.”

What Determines One’s Classification?

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The reason *Hashem* caused the plague of darkness was to eliminate the *reshaim* (those who were evil) from the Jewish people. They had no interest in leaving Egypt. They perished during the days of darkness so that the Egyptians would not be aware of their demise because they would say, “not only are we dying, but the Jews are also dying.”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The reason G-d brought the plague of darkness was to enable the Jews to inspect the homes of the Egyptians for their valuables. G-d promised *Avraham* at the time of the covenant between the parts that after the Jewish people were enslaved and afflicted in a land that was not theirs, they would go out with great riches; locating the valuables of the Egyptians during the days of darkness allowed that promise to come to fruition. Thereafter, the Egyptians were not able to say that they did not possess valuables such as gold and silver vessels.

Rashi citing *Chazal* in *Beshalach*: The word “*chamushim*” means that only one fifth of the Jewish people actually left Egypt. (Another *Midrash* states that only one fiftieth of the Jews left Egypt.) This would mean that four fifths of the Jewish population was classified as *reshaim* (evil) and therefore perished during the plague of darkness. Everyone in Egypt witnessed the revealed miracles of *Hashem*, who caused the most powerful empire to be reduced to rubble.

If this is the case, why would any Jew not want to leave Egypt when the opportunity was at hand, especially after all those years of bondage and suffering? Additionally, what is even more astounding is that unlike Pharaoh and the Egyptians, *Hashem* did not “harden the heart” of the Jewish people. Therefore, they had the ability to internalize the miracles of which they were the beneficiaries.

In *Zichronos* of *Musaf* on *Rosh Hashanah* we cite a verse to remind *Hashem* of our relationship with Him. *Hashem* says, “I remember for your sake the kindness of your youth...how you followed Me into an unplanted desert.” This verse seems difficult to understand. Since we had already witnessed the ten revealed miracles – events that were unprecedented in the history of the world, why would *Hashem* consider it a “kindness” that we followed Him into the desert?

Evidently, despite all that had transpired in Egypt it was difficult for the Jews to leave. On the one hand, Jews who did not wish to leave Egypt are referred to as *reshaim*. On the other hand, *Hashem* will always remember the kindness of the Jews who did leave. This seems to indicate that leaving Egypt and following Him into an “unplanted desert” was a commendable feat. If in fact it was so difficult to leave Egypt, as it is indicated from this verse, then why are those who chose to remain in Egypt considered *reshaim*? The answer is that not being a *rasha* (evil person) is in fact an accomplishment; however, it does not change the reality that an evil person is evil.

Rambam in *Hilchos Taanias* (the Laws of Fasting): If difficult times come upon the Jewish people, G-d forbid, and one does not pray, he is considered “cruel.” If other Jews are suffering and one does not pray it is evident that he does not feel their pain and this indicates that there is a degree of cruelty in that person. The one who does pray has sensitivity to the suffering of his fellow Jew because he feels their pain. This is an example of how two people relate differently to the identical situation.

Despite the fact that all the Jews witnessed the same revealed miracles in Egypt, there were many who did not wish to leave. These Jews were considered *reshaim* because they did not believe that they were going to survive in the desert. Despite the revealed miracles which were performed for them, they did not have faith in *Hashem* and thus did not trust that He would provide for them in the desert.

The minority of Jews who merited leaving Egypt did have the faith and therefore did not succumb to the insecurities of the others. Because they had faith, they were able to see things clearly. However not succumbing to the doubts and questions that surrounded them and thus following *Hashem* into the “unplanted desert” was truly an accomplishment. It was only because of that special level of faith and trust that they were able to go into the desert. This is why *Hashem* will always remember the “kindness” of our youth. The Jews who died during the plague of darkness were considered *reshaim*, while those who left Egypt and entered into the desert were highly regarded and rewarded by *Hashem*. We see that depending on a person’s faith and outlook on life, he is classified in one group or the other.

When we hear about tragedies that befall our brothers in Israel or any place in the world, do they affect us? Do we feel the pain and suffering of our fellow Jew and thus increase our *tefillos* (prayers)? If one remains unaffected by these events, then he needs to understand why. If one truly has the sensitivity, he surely would feel the pain. According to this evaluation, one must reflect on his own classification. Is it one of cruelty? Or is it one of compassion and sensitivity?

The Hidden Message in the Sanctification of the New Moon

Torah: “*Hashem* said to *Moshe* and *Aaron* in the land of Egypt, saying, “This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year...” Before the Jewish people left Egypt, they were given the *mitzvah* of the Sanctification of the New Moon. This was the first *mitzvah* given to them as a Jewish people. The *mitzvah* of sanctifying the new moon enables the Jewish people to determine when the month actually begins thus determining time. It is through the ruling of the *Sanhedrin* (the High Court of Israel) that the beginning of the month is established (based on the testimony of two witnesses observing the new moon.)

The ramifications of being able to determine time in this manner are far reaching. Through the sanctification of the new moon, the *Sanhedrin* determines the beginning of the month thus establishing each festival in its time. Although each festival such as *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukkos*, have an innate spiritual value and are commanded by G-d, the days of their observance are established through the *Sanhedrin*’s pronouncement

of the beginning of the new month. In fact, the blessing, which we recite during the festivals, concludes: “*Hashem* has sanctified the Jewish people who in turn sanctify time.” Why was this *Mitzvah* the first one to be given to us as a Jewish People?

On a practical level, the sanctification of time was necessary at that moment to establish the day of the month on which the Pascal Offering was to be brought. G-d commanded the Jews to bring the *Korban Pesach* on the 14th of *Nissan*; however, the beginning of *Nissan* had to be established to determine when the fourteenth would be. However, G-d could have designated the beginning of *Nissan* Himself, and thus everything would have followed.

Gemara: if the witnesses did not testify before the *Sanhedrin* by a certain date then the month is sanctified by Heaven. If this is the case, why was the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the new moon the first commandment given to the Jewish people? Time is a reality of existence. Man lives within the boundary of time and it dictates his existence. Time is continuously moving forward with or without our involvement. If this is the case then how does a mere mortal affect and determine time? How could the decision of the court determine the beginning of the month and thus establish when *Pesach* begins?

The ramification of this is the sanctification of the month. The same is true with the Day of Judgment (*Rosh Hashanah*) and *Yom Kippur* (The Day of Atonement). The court’s decision determines when G-d will judge the world and which day will have the inherent effect to rehabilitate the penitent. How is this possible? *Hashem* gave the Jewish people the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the new moon to indicate to them that they are not mere mortals and their significance is spiritual. Thus, Jews are not necessarily bound by time, but rather they affect time.

At the time of the exodus when the Jews were leaving Egypt, they were ascending from the lowest level of spirituality. They were pagans just like their Egyptian masters. The Jews knew they had a special ancestry, but they believed that there was no difference between themselves and the Egyptians. G-d wanted them to understand that they were not at all like the Egyptians or any other people in the world. He demonstrated this reality to them by giving them the ability to sanctify and affect the reality of time. This gave them an understanding of their essence – which is innately spiritual. Therefore,

the first *mitzvah* that *Hashem* gave the Jews was the sanctification of the New Moon.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: G-d needed to show *Moshe* the exact moment when the moon could be sanctified since *Moshe* had difficulty making this determination. They tell us that *Moshe* only had difficulty in three areas: knowing exactly when the new moon could be sanctified, understanding the *machtzis ha'shekel* (the half-shekel coin given by all Jewish males above the age of twenty to be used to purchase communal offerings in the Temple), and the making of the *Menorah*. These were the only areas in which *Moshe* had difficulty understanding how to fulfill *Hashem's* Will. How do we understand this?

Gemara in Tractate *Bava Basra*: The *Menorah* signifies the Oral Law, which is unlimited in its depth and breadth. *Moshe* was commanded to cast it. However, being a finite and limited being, he found it difficult to understand how to cast something that signified the infinite. He had trouble understanding how something that is limited to a physical context could affect something that is infinite. *Hashem* Himself cast the *Menorah*. Only the Infinite was able to cast something that affects the infinite.

Every male of the age twenty and above was required to give half a silver coin (*machtzis ha'shekel*). *Moshe* found it difficult to understand this process even though it seems to be a simple task of collecting the *machtzis ha'shekel*. Since the *machtzis ha'shekel's* purpose was used to purchase offerings, it had relevance to *kaparah* (atonement) and *teshuvah* (repentance), which are spiritual processes and realities. Thus, the *machtzis ha'shekel*, which is something finite, represents something of an unlimited nature.

Chazal: *Hashem* created *teshuvah* many generations before the world was created. It is therefore understandable why *Moshe* had difficulty with *machtzis ha'shekel*. Spirituality is something out of the realm of existence.

Midrash: *Hashem* showed him a coin made of fire to give him some degree of understanding. We can now explain why *Moshe* had difficulty understanding the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the new moon. The calendar of the nations of the world is the solar calendar. However, the Jew determines time through the lunar cycle. The moon represents the Jewish people because throughout history there were times that we were hardly noticed and there were times that we were in full view to the world (as the phases of the moon). Therefore, the moon

represents something spiritual – which is beyond the human capacity, that is limited and finite. Therefore, *Moshe* had difficulty determining the exact moment the moon was large enough to be sanctified.

The three areas of *Moshe's* difficulty involved a physical entity representing the spiritual, which is unlimited. Each Jew must give the *machtzis ha'shekel* (the half coin and not the whole coin). The question is why does one give a half coin if he could give a whole one. The half coin represents a fraction of the whole, just as when we contemplate the Jew, we can never comprehend his totality; we only see a fraction of his value and cannot appreciate or understand his significance even on an individualized basis.

Mishna: "Whoever saves the life of a Jew it is considered as if he had saved the entire world." One Jew alone is the equivalent of the entire world in terms of inherent worth. Therefore, it is something that is not comprehensible. This is the same reason why *Hashem* gave the Jewish people the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the new moon so that we should understand that although we are physical beings our significance is spiritual and therefore we are able to affect time.

Understanding the Value of Circumcision

Torah: "Pharaoh said to *Moshe* and *Aaron*, "Go and serve *Hashem*, your Gd; which ones are going?" *Moshe* said, "With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go; with our sons and with our daughters, with our flock and with our cattle shall we go..."Pharaoh said to him, "...Look – the evil (*raah*) intent is opposite your faces. Not so; let the men go now..."

Torah: Pharaoh did not want to allow all the Jews to leave Egypt because "the evil (*raah*) intent is opposite your faces."

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: The verse means that Pharaoh, through his stargazing ability, saw that there is a star called "*Raah*" which indicated "bloodshed" – meaning that the Jews would be killed in the desert. Therefore, Pharaoh refused to allow the Jews to leave.

Midrash: Because of the *chet ha'aigel* (sin of the golden calf) *Hashem* wanted to destroy the Jewish people. However, *Moshe's* *tefillah* (prayer) averted the destruction and the Jews were forgiven. This is what Pharaoh actually had seen in the stars. *Hashem* said that the "bloodshed"

which is being foretold through the stars will not be the destruction of the Jewish people, but will be the circumcision of the Jews at the time of *Yehoshua* (the successor of *Moshe*).

During the forty years of wandering in the desert, the Jews did not circumcise themselves. This only occurred when the mantle of leadership was passed from *Moshe* to *Yehoshua* (his disciple) when they were about to enter into the Land of Canaan. This blood was exchanged for the blood which represented the destruction of the Jewish people that Pharaoh had seen. Pharaoh's stargazers told him that they saw in the stars that the demise of the Redeemer of Israel would come about through water. They interpreted this to mean that the Redeemer would die through drowning.

As a result, Pharaoh decreed that all the Jewish newborn males should be thrown into the Nile. In that instance, the demise of *Moshe* through water was correctly interpreted; however, the manner in which it would come about was misunderstood. Their expertise as astrologers was at the most advanced level. Therefore, the only mistake that can be made was the application of the reading.

When Pharaoh saw the star named *Raah*, which represents "bloodshed" indicating that the lives of the Jews will be taken, how was it possible that this reading of "bloodshed" should be converted into the blood of circumcision? Bloodshed is associated with the taking of a life. The person who existed no longer exists. However, circumcision entails bleeding because of the removal of the foreskin, but it has no relevance to the demise of a human being. If this is the case, then how was the bloodshed represented by the star *Raah* changed to mean "circumcision"?

Midrash: Just as when one's life is taken, the person who existed before, no longer exists, similarly, the person who is circumcised is not the same person that existed before the circumcision – that former person no longer exists. This is the profound impact that circumcision has on a person. It is a metamorphosis that transforms the person into a different being. Therefore, the blood of circumcision is compared to the "bloodshed" which causes the person who existed "to exist no longer."

Why is circumcision which is referred to as "the sign of the Holy Covenant" so effective that it transforms the individual to another dimension of person that did not previously exist?

Olalos Ephraim: Just as there is an outer covering (the foreskin), there is also an inner (spiritual) covering over the heart. When the outer covering is removed (the foreskin), simultaneously the inner covering of the heart is also removed. This inner covering prevents a Jew from having any relevance to the wellsprings of *Torah* and his spirituality. The wellsprings of *Torah* are sealed until one is circumcised. Before the circumcision is performed, the Jew has no relevance to internalizing and experiencing spirituality through the *Torah*. The Jew is merely a physical being who exists as a Jew.

However, after the circumcision, he gains the capacity to internalize the spirituality of the *Torah* and relate to concepts and realities that were not available to him before circumcision. He becomes a new being whose function and significance becomes his spirituality. His significance within existence takes on another dimension of value. Therefore, circumcision, which entails blood, is the procedure that causes the person to become a different being that has not existed before. Thus, his previous "self" no longer exists. Therefore, what Pharaoh understood to be "bloodshed" is identical to the blood of circumcision.

Gemara: The Jewish people did not circumcise themselves during the 40-year period that they were in the desert. The reason for this was that during their years of wandering, the northerly wind "*ruach tsefonis*" did not blow. This northerly wind is essential for the clotting factor in the blood that causes wounds to heal. Therefore, it would have been life threatening for the Jews to circumcise themselves during this period because there was a concern that they could bleed to death.

It is interesting to note that in addition to the Jews wandering an additional 39 years in the desert, because of the *chet ha'meraglim* (the sin of the spies/ the slandering of the Land), *Hashem* caused the northerly wind not to blow. The question is although *Hashem* decreed that the Jews should wander as a punishment for their lack of faith, why did He withhold the northerly wind. We understand that the only value of withholding this wind was to deny the Jews the opportunity to circumcise themselves.

Midrash: The star of *Raah* forecasted the destruction of the Jewish people because of the golden calf. However, *Moshe's tefillah* brought about forgiveness. *Hashem* changed the "bloodshed" of the destruction of the Jewish people to the blood of circumcision.

It was actually a *chesed* (kindness) of *Hashem* that He withheld the northerly wind making circumcision not possible. If *Hashem* had allowed the northerly wind to blow, there would not have been an interruption in performing the *mitzvah* of circumcision. In that case, the bloodshed indicated by the star *Raah* could not have been converted into the blood of circumcision because they would have already been circumcised. Therefore, it was a *chesed* of *Hashem* to *Klal Yisroel* that He denied them the *mitzvah* of circumcision during their stay in the desert.

We must say that the sin of the golden calf was a precursor to the sin of the spies. Just as the golden calf only came about because the Jews did not have sufficient faith in G-d, believing the false reports of the spies was also due to their lack of faith in *Hashem*. Therefore, it was inevitable that after the sin of the golden calf the Jews would fail with the sin of the spies. Because of this, *Hashem* was able to alter the blood of the destruction to the blood of circumcision.

The Importance of Communication

Torah: The plague of killing the first-born included those who were taken captive and the non-Jewish slave class of Egypt. The question is why is the captive (who is not an Egyptian) deserving of the tenth plague? Why did *Hashem* need to also kill their first-born?

Rashi citing *Chazal*: *Hashem* killed the first born of the captives so that when the firstborn of Egypt died it would not be attributed to the pagan deity of the under class punishing the Egyptian oppressors. Furthermore, the first-born of the slave class was killed in the plague because they participated in the enslavement of the Jew as well, rejoicing when they witnessed the Jews being enslaved by others. Thus, they deserved punishment. When *Moshe* informed Pharaoh of the time that the plague would come upon Egypt, he said it would happen, “about midnight.” Is it possible that *Moshe* said “about midnight” rather than “exactly at midnight” because he did not know precisely when midnight was?

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: *Moshe* certainly knew when midnight was. However, the reason he told Pharaoh that the plague would take place at “about midnight” is because he was concerned that the Egyptian astrologers may not be accurate in their calculation of time and would believe that it did not occur “exactly midnight” but rather before or after. If that happened, they would say that *Moshe* had

deceived them. Thus, *Moshe* said “about midnight” so as not to be accused of deception.

All the plagues up until this point happened exactly as *Moshe* had said they would. The plague of the first-born was the climax of the ten plagues. As the *Torah* tells us, at the time of this plague the screams were at a level never before heard in Egypt. This tells us the enormous dimension of the plague. Yet, if *Moshe* had said that the plague was to come “exactly at midnight” and the Egyptians did not perceive it to occur at exactly that moment, then they would have accused him of lying to them. The real question is – even if the onset of the plague was off by a moment – what difference would this make when they are experiencing a tragedy that had never been experienced in this world. How do we understand this?

Torah: When the plague happened, the Egyptians saw that multiple members of the same family died. Because of this they said, “we are all dying.” This means that the plague was actually worse than *Moshe* had foretold.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The reason more than one member in a household died was because the women committed adultery with multiple men. Those who died in the plague were the first-born of each of those adulterous men. Thus, Egyptians perceived the plague as being more severe than had been predicted by *Moshe*. They thought that they were all dying, when in fact it was actually only the first-born. We ask if the plague was more severe than had been originally foretold by *Moshe*, why are we not concerned that he will be accused of being a liar about this as well.

The answer is the Egyptian women who committed adultery with several men knew that many of their children were in actuality the first-born to their fathers. Even though the men themselves may not have known it, the truth was attainable and the reality was verifiable. Therefore, it could be proven that only the first-born were dying.

However, only *Hashem* knows exactly when midnight comes, therefore, if the Egyptian astrologer should mistakenly miscalculate the moment, there was no way to verify it. Since *Moshe* was forewarning Pharaoh for the explicit purpose of making him understand that *Hashem* is the Omnipotent Being and All Encompassing G-d, he needed to express himself in a manner that would be accepted and believed.

It is clear that if a person has the ability to deny or deflect something that he does not want to acknowledge, he will use even something that is absurd for that denial. Therefore, it was important for *Moshe* to remove any distraction from the Egyptians so that they could have full recognition of what was taking place. A person is forced to accept the reality of G-d when there is no escape route. *Hashem* did not want there to be any escape route for the Egyptians. Therefore, it was an imperative that there should be no issues that could detract from the purpose of this plague, which was that everyone should recognize G-d as the all powerful and omnipotent Being.

Understanding One's Purpose

Torah: When *Hashem* brought the plague of pestilence upon the Egyptians, only their livestock perished; they were not affected. The livestock belonging to the Jewish people was also unaffected. *Hashem* tells *Moshe* to go before Pharaoh and explain to him why the Egyptian people were spared from the pestilence.

Torah: "For Now I (*Hashem*) could have sent My hand and stricken you and your people with the pestilence and you would have been obliterated from the earth. However, for this I have let you endure, in order to show you My strength and so that My Name may be declared throughout the world."

Chazal: The name "*Shakai*" (which is one of the unpronounceable Names of *Hashem*) means that although His Power is unlimited, *Hashem* has the ability to harness and limit it to the degree that He wishes.

Ramban on *Bereishis*: Since the Power of *Hashem* is unlimited, at the time of Creation when He said, "It should be..." the energy created should have evolved and continued to manifest itself without end. However, *Hashem* (*Shakai*) said, "*Daai* (enough)," thus the energy was restrained. When *Hashem* limited the effect of the pestilence to only the livestock, He proved to the Egyptians that although His Power is infinite, He has the ability to dictate, direct, and affect what He chooses. This is the meaning of the verse, "in order to show you My strength."

Midrash: Because of pursuing the Jewish people in their flight from Egypt, the Egyptian army perished in the Sea, there was only one Egyptian survivor - Pharaoh himself.

Torah: Pharaoh was spared so that he should understand and appreciate *Hashem's* ability, and thus declare His

Name throughout the world. *Hashem* allowed him to live so that there would be someone other than the Jewish people to tell the world what had happened. Pharaoh, the monarch of Egypt, who initially defied G-d, was the one to tell the world.

Chazal: Pharaoh lived many years and ultimately became the King of Nineveh. We read in the Book of *Yonah* that not only did he personally do *teshuvah* (repented) when he heard the ominous warnings of *Yonah*, but he also compelled his community to return to *Hashem*. When one overcomes a serious or life-threatening situation, the question he must ask himself is – why did *Hashem* spare me? Is it that He wants me to simply return to the workplace and continue my life as before? It is obvious that he must conclude that *Hashem* saved him for another purpose.

Based on the *Torah's* explanation of why Pharaoh was saved, we can say that *Hashem* spares people from tragedies so that they can appreciate His existence. If that is the reason *Hashem* spared Pharaoh, an evil pagan, it is logical that if *Hashem* spares us, His people, it is for us to recognize and appreciate His existence, and thus declare His Name. We do not only come upon this realization through surviving a life-threatening situation. We can see the Hand of *Hashem* in existence through conception, pregnancy, and the birth process.

Gemara in Tractate *Nidah*: From one droplet of colorless semen, a fetus develops into a child, made up of many components of different textures and colors. From one drop of semen, the child develops eyes, organs, blood, sinews, bones and most amazingly, intellect. If one focuses on nature alone, one can see the Hand of *Hashem*, which is truly miraculous. We must ask ourselves why *Hashem* performed the miracle of creating us and continues to Will this ongoing Miracle? The explanation comes from the verse, "I have let you endure, in order to show you My strength and so that My Name may be declared throughout the world." From this, we understand that *Hashem* performs these miracles so that we should appreciate His continuous involvement in existence and thus declare His Name. The Jew acknowledges this purpose by living a life that conforms to the *Torah*.

Learning the Hard Way

Torah: Prior to the plague of Hail *Moshe* said to Pharaoh (in the Name of *Hashem*), "You still tread upon My

(Hashem's) people, not to send them out. Behold, at this time tomorrow I shall rain a very heavy hail, such as there has never been in Egypt...the hail shall descend upon them and they shall die." Hashem is saying to Pharaoh that since he did not release the Jewish people from bondage, it is an indication that he truly does not value them nor understand who they are. Therefore, Pharaoh was "treading" upon the Jewish people, which implies that he did not appreciate their existence. Otherwise, he would not have treated them the way that he did.

The *Torah* juxtaposes the plague of hail, which devastated Egypt, to the statement, "You still tread upon My people" in order to communicate to Pharaoh that he will only understand who the Jewish people are when he experiences the consequences of "treading upon them." This is the plague of hail. For example, if one scratches his hand it is not as severe as scratching his cornea. Because of the nature of the eye, the consequence of injuring it, even slightly, is greater than withstanding the same injury to a hand.

Only when one experiences the consequence of injury, can one understand the delicate nature of that particular organ. Hashem wanted Pharaoh to understand that "treading" on His people has grave consequences. The plagues that had come upon Egypt, prior to the plague of hail, had not yet taught Pharaoh the lesson of valuing the Jewish people because he continued to "tread" upon them. Therefore, the plague of hail was necessary.

The way one treats and behaves towards one's fellow indicates the degree to which he values him. One only insults or damages another person if he does not value that individual's existence. The *Torah* juxtaposes the principle that one should love his fellow as himself with the prohibition of speaking *loshon hara* (evil speech). This is to teach us that if one loves his fellow as himself, he would not speak negatively about him.

Torah: When Yaakov fled to the home of Lavan (his uncle), he prayed to Hashem to protect him "ushmarani."

Yalkut: Yaakov asked to be protected from, "Forbidden relationships, murder, idolatry, and *loshon hara*." One can understand Yaakov's request to be protected from the three cardinal sins, which are so serious; however, why does he simultaneously ask to be protected from *loshon hara* (speaking negatively about another individual without constructive value)? It would seem from Yaakov's request that he is equating *loshon hara* to the three cardinal sins. How do we understand this?

The answer is – if one takes another person's life, it is an indication that he does not value that person's existence; if one commits adultery, it is an indication that he does not value the exclusivity of the woman's relationship with her husband because he does not value the husband; if one worships idols, this is an indication that he only cares about himself and not G-d.

When a person speaks *loshon hara* it is because he does not have any concern for the consequences of his negative statements vis-à-vis the person of whom he is speaking. The victimization of an individual does not begin with murder or adultery, but rather with devaluing him. *Loshon hara* is the beginning of the process of minimizing another person's worth, which can ultimately lead to violating the cardinal sins. However, if one holds another in the same esteem as himself, then he would not speak negatively or want to victimize him in any way.

We need to reflect on our own behavior in order to understand and appreciate where we are. For example, if a person needs something to write on and uses a *Torah* book as a writing slate, this is an indication to what degree he lacks respect for the *Torah* itself. If a person truly valued the *Torah*, he could not use it in this manner. Another example is the way in which one unravels his *tefillin*. The straps have the same level of sanctity as the *tefillin* itself (the boxes and parchment). Thus, one should treat every aspect of the *tefillin* with respect. As we see regarding the plague of hail, the *Torah* is teaching us that one will come to understand how to value something only when he realizes the consequences.

Appreciating the Wisdom of a Wise Man

Torah: Before Yosef passed away he made his brothers take an oath that when they leave Egypt they should take his remains with them. "Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him..." In fact, Moshe was the only one who sought out the remains of Yosef in order to take them out of Egypt.

Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) in *Mishlei*: "A wise heart takes *mitzvos*."

Gemara in *Sotah*: This is referring to Moshe Rabbeinu. The reason Moshe searched for the remains of Yosef while the other Jews were preoccupied with borrowing the gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians was that he had "a wise heart." Although it was a *Mitzvah* to borrow

the personal effects of the Egyptians as G-d commanded them, *Moshe* chose to seek out the remains of *Yosef* because he had a wise heart.

Moshe understood that without locating the remains of *Yosef*, the Jews would not be able to leave Egypt, regardless of all the miracles that had taken place. If this is the case, then it should have been an obvious priority for every Jew to seek out *Yosef's* remains. If so, then why did it take special wisdom to do so? Every Jew, even ones without that special wisdom, should have understood this.

Mishna in *Pirkei Avos*: "Who is a wise man – the one who sees the outgrowth of his actions (or other events)." The question is why does the *Mishna* state that the wise man is the one who "sees" rather than the one who "understands" the outgrowth of his actions or other events? The answer is that understanding is something conceptual. It is something that is abstract and not tangible. However, if one "sees" the consequences and the outgrowths of one's actions, it is something that is real and concrete. Therefore, one deals with this reality differently because it seems tangible.

The *Chacham* (one who is wise) is a dimension of person who not only realizes what the future will bring based on the present but one who "knows" what the future will bring. Therefore, he deals with the future as the present. For example, if one sees fire and knows that it burns, he will not act irresponsibly by extending his hand into it; however, if he only conceptually believes that fire will burn, then it is possible based on one's conflicts, to justify extending his hand into the fire because its destructiveness is not a reality.

Shlomo HaMelech depicts *Moshe* as the "*Chacham lev* – the wise of heart" because he could not rely on anyone but himself to locate the remains of *Yosef*. The possibility of not locating it was a reality for *Moshe* because it would mean that the Jews would not be redeemed. However, all the others who did not have this wisdom of the heart only related to that possibility on a conceptual basis. Therefore, their priority was to engage in what was tangible to them – the silver and gold vessels. Their view was that someone would attend to *Yosef's* remains.

However, *Moshe's* perspective was that this could not be left to chance because of the grave possibility that the Jews would not be redeemed. He understood that they were at their lowest point - the 49th level of spiritual contamination. If the Jews remained in Egypt for a moment longer than they were intended to, they would

have become spiritually extinct. Thus, there would not be a Jewish people or a Sinai. All existence hinged on the remains of *Yosef* being located and removed within the proper time frame.

Torah: Avraham Our Patriarch trusted his faithful servant *Eliezer* with all of his material assets. Despite his enormous wealth, he trusted *Eliezer* implicitly. *Eliezer* was not only astute as the administrator of his master's estate but he was also spiritualized to the point of having a similar radiance as his master *Avraham*. When *Avraham* chose *Eliezer* as the person to locate a wife for his son *Yitzchak* (who would be the future Matriarch), he bound him by an oath to take a proper wife from *Avraham's* family and not from the daughters of Canaan. If *Eliezer* violated this oath, he would forfeit his share in the world to come.

The question is if *Avraham* had such a level of faith in his servant that he was entrusted with his fortune, then why when it came to choosing a proper wife for *Yitzchak* did he make him take an oath? The answer is that although it was unlikely that *Eliezer* would defy the order of his master, when it came to the spiritual future of the Jewish people, *Avraham* made him swear. He "saw" the consequence of what would happen should the proper wife for *Yitzchak*, a matriarch of the Jewish people, not be chosen. Therefore, it was not something he would leave to chance. This is because *Avraham* had wisdom of the heart.

Torah: When Hashem told *Avraham* that he would father a child at the age of 99 from *Sarah*, he rejoiced. *Hashem* valued this belief as righteousness for *Avraham*. However, when *Sarah* was informed that she was going to have a child she chuckled. She had a momentary flicker of doubt. The question is why was *Avraham* able to rejoice although he at that age was no longer able to father a child? The answer is because *Avraham* was a man who had wisdom of the heart; he "saw" *Hashem's* Word as a reality. Therefore, he rejoiced and *Sarah* did not.

The Attribute of Truth is a Key Element in Prayer

Torah: After the Jewish people left Egypt, the Egyptians pursued them to the Sea. "Pharaoh approached; the Children of Yisroel raised their eyes and behold! – Egypt was journeying after them, and they were frightened; the Children of Yisroel cried out to Hashem." It is clearly indicated from this verse that the Jewish people believed

that it was within the power of *Hashem* to save them from the hands of the Egyptians. As it is stated, “and they cried out to *Hashem*.” However, the next statement expressed by the Jews seems contradictory.

Torah: “They said to *Moshe*, “Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the Wilderness?” On one hand the Jewish people prayed to *Hashem* (indicating their firm belief), and yet they spoke to *Moshe* as if they were heretics, blaming him for taking them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. How do we understand this?

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The verse “they cried out to *Hashem*” means that Jewish people took hold of the “craft” of their forefathers *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*. Just as the Patriarchs prayed to *Hashem* at various times of need, so too did the Jewish people pray to *Hashem* at this perilous moment. If the Jewish people truly believed in *tefillah* (prayer) as their forefathers did, then why did they immediately complain to *Moshe* about their imminent destruction?

Ramban: The Jewish people prayed; however, when *Hashem* did not immediately respond to them they came to *Moshe* with their claim. *Rashi* uses the term they took hold of the “craft” of their forefathers to indicate that they did not pray with the level of conviction and belief in *Hashem* as their forefathers had done. They merely mimicked the behavior of the Patriarchs by praying in a time of need.

The Jewish people did not truly understand or appreciate *tefillah* nor did they have relevance to it at this moment. They had just emerged from being idol worshipers in Egypt. However, they were aware of the blessing that *Yitzchak* had given to his son *Yaakov*, “*Ha’Kol kol Yaakov* – the voice is the voice of *Yaakov*.” This indicates that the power of *tefillah* (prayer) belongs to *Yaakov* and his decedents. *Tefillah* is the weapon of the Jew; however, there are certain criteria necessary to give it effectiveness.

What are these criteria? They include the characteristic of self-negation combined with the belief and understanding of *tefillah* which make it effective. The Jewish people prayed because they knew the Patriarchs had done so. However, they did not have the self-negation or the belief that was possessed by the Patriarchs. Therefore, *Hashem* did not respond to their prayers immediately and this caused them to complain to *Moshe*.

We say in *Ashrei* (Psalm said three times a day): “*Hashem* is close to all who call upon Him – to all who call upon Him

truthfully (*b’emes*).” On a literal level, one would understand this to mean that when one calls out to *Hashem* sincerely, He will be close to him. If *Hashem* is close, then He will respond. On a deeper level, one can understand this verse to mean that *Hashem* is close to those who possess *Emes* (truth). If one lives a life of *Emes* (truth), which is consistent with what is dictated by the *Torah* then this causes *Hashem* to be close and to respond.

Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos*: “The signet of *Hashem* is *Emes*.” Therefore, if a person possesses this attribute then he has a commonality with *Hashem*, thus causing *Hashem* to be close to him. However, if one lacks integrity and is not true to what he understands and believes, then he does not possess the attribute of *Emes* and *Hashem* will not be close to him. The ultimate truth –*Emes*– is *Torah*. As it is written in *Mishlei*, “Acquire truth and do not sell it.”

Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zarah*: The acquisition of truth is referring to *Torah*, which is unadulterated. The Prophet states, “*Teetain Emes L’Yaakov* – Give truth to *Yaakov*.” *Yaakov*, our Patriarch, is identified as the “man of truth” because he was the man of *Torah*. Therefore, one can understand why the weapon of *Yaakov* was his *tefillah*– “*Ha’Kol kol Yaakov* – the voice is the voice of *Yaakov*.” If one possesses *Emes*, then his voice truly reflects the voice of *Yaakov*.

Gemara in a number of locations: *Hashem* created the *yetzer ha’rah* (the evil inclination) and *Torah* as its antidote. Meaning, one is able to counter and neutralize the evil inclination with *Torah* study.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: This is true only if one studies *Torah* “*l’smah* – with the proper intent (which is study of *Torah* for its own sake).” If one studies *Torah* with the proper intent then it defuses the evil inclination and acts as an antidote. However, if a person studies *Torah* with an ulterior motive, then the person’s involvement in the *mitzvah* is lacking integrity. He is studying it for his own sake and not for the *Torah* itself. Therefore, since he is lacking in *Emes*, his *Torah* study is not an effective antidote against the evil inclination just as prayer is not effective if one is lacking in *Emes*.

At the conclusion of the *Amidah* (silent prayer): “ May it be Your will *Hashem*...that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days, Grant us a share in Your *Torah*, and may we serve You there with reverence, as in the days of old...” First, we beseech *Hashem* to rebuild the *Bais HaMikdash* and then we ask Him to give us a portion of

His *Torah*, which is the means by which one identifies with *Emes*. Only when we possess truth are we able to serve *Hashem* with reverence, as in the days of old. We reinstate the commonality with *Hashem* through *Torah*, which is truth. At the sea, since the *tefillah* of the Jewish people was lacking in the quality of *Emes*, *Hashem* did not respond immediately to their outcries. Their commitment to *tefillah* was only as a “craft” of their forefathers.

When Does One Truly Fear G-d?

Torah: *Hashem* split the Sea and enabled the Jewish people to cross safely. Afterwards, *Hashem* closed it on Pharaoh and his army. “On that day, *Hashem* saved *Yisroel* from the hand of Egypt, and *Yisroel* saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. *Yisroel* saw the great Hand of *Hashem* that inflicted upon Egypt; and the people feared *Hashem*, and they had faith in *Hashem* and *Moshe*, His servant.”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: When the Sea closed on the Egyptians, the Jewish people were concerned that perhaps they were not destroyed and that they came up on the other side and would continue to pursue them. In order to alleviate their fears and concerns, the *Torah* states, “*Yisroel* saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore...” This indicated that *Hashem* had performed a miracle by causing the Sea to cast the remains of the Egyptians onto the seashore.

Torah: Only after the Jewish people saw the Egyptian remains on the seashore did they “fear *Hashem*” and had “faith in Him and *Moshe* his servant.” It is difficult to understand why the Jewish people only feared *Hashem* after they saw the destruction of the Egyptians. They had already witnessed revealed miracles such as the ten plagues. They experienced the splitting of the Sea, which was the greatest miracle of them all which even caused the pagan nations of the world to tremble in fear of *Hashem*.

Midrash: The level of revelation experienced by the maidservant at the Sea was greater than that of *Yechezkel* the prophet. So why did they fear *Hashem* only after seeing that their oppressors no longer lived? How do we understand this?

The *Torah* is teaching us something profound – that as much as one recognizes the omnipotence of *Hashem* (even at a level that is greater than *Yechezkel* the prophet), if one fears anyone other than *Hashem*, then he does not truly fear Him. If one fully comprehends and internalizes the reality of who G-d is, then he has no reason to fear

anyone. Nothing can happen to him that is not the Will of *Hashem*. It was only when the Jewish people no longer feared the Egyptians (because they were destroyed in the Sea) that they were able to fear *Hashem*.

We also can understand from the verse, “they had faith in *Hashem*...” (only subsequent to the destruction of the Egyptians) that one does not have sufficient clarity to have “faith in *Hashem*” unless all distractions are removed. As long as the Jewish people were distracted by the existence of the Egyptians, they were blocked from fully internalizing who G-d was. Therefore, they could not have complete faith and reverence for Him.

The reason a person fears anything is because he believes and feels that his life or his predicament is dependent on that which he fears. However, if one has faith that *Hashem* totally dictates one’s existence, then there is no reason to fear anyone other than Him. Thus, if one does fear someone other than *Hashem*, it is a deficiency in his faith.

Torah in *Mishpatim*: Every Jew has an obligation to visit the Temple Mount (*Bais HaMikdash*) three times a year on the festivals and “see the Presence of the Master, *Hashem*.”

Gemara in Tractate *Chagigah*: There is a case of a Canaanite slave who had two masters and was subsequently emancipated by one of them. As a result of this emancipation, half of him is considered a full Jew who has all the obligations of the *Torah* incumbent upon him. The other half of this individual (the part owned by the master) retains the Canaanite slave status (he is only bound by the *mitzvos* of a woman). Since half of him is fully obligated in all the *mitzvos*, one would think that perhaps such an individual would be obligated to visit the *Bais HaMikdash* and “see the Presence of the Master, *Hashem*.”

Gemara: Even though half of him is fully obligated in the *mitzvos*, he is absolved from visiting the Temple Mount. The reason for this is that this *mitzvah* entails going to “see the presence of the Master, *Hashem*,” indicating that the individual who has one master is obliged to go, not the one who has two. If one has a master other than *Hashem*, he cannot fully appreciate and internalize *Hashem*, who is the Master. Therefore, the half-Jew/half-slave is exempt from visiting the Temple Mount. The degree one reveres and fears *Hashem* is determined by the concerns and trepidations that one has in his life.

To what Standard is One Held?

Torah: After the Jewish people crossed the Sea to safety, “*Moshe* caused *Yisroel* to journey from the Sea of Reeds and they went out to the Wilderness of *Shur*; they went for a three-day period in the Wilderness, but they did not find water. They came to *Marah*, but they could not drink the waters of *Marah* because they were bitter...The people complained against *Moshe* saying, “What shall we drink?” ...There He (*Hashem*)tested them.”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: *Hashem* “tested” the Jewish people in *Marah* and He saw how “stiff-necked” they were because when they spoke with *Moshe* they did not address him in a respectful manner. Rather than complaining to *Moshe*, the Jewish people should have asked him to pray on their behalf to *Hashem* for water. The Jews failed the test, which demonstrated that they are a “stiff-necked” people. The question is – why only in *Marah* was it considered a test and their failing proved that they were a stiff-necked people? Why was it not considered a test when they were at the shore of the Sea and complained?

When the Jewish people were pursued by the Egyptians to the Sea, they said to *Moshe*, “Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the Wilderness?” Soon after the Sea split and the Jewish people crossed to safety. The Jewish people demonstrated the identical failing which was shown later in *Marah vis-à-vis Moshe*. Rather than saying to *Moshe* “why did you take us into the desert to die” the Jews should have said, “pray to G-d so that He should save us.” This is something they did not do.

Before *Moshe* passed away, he recounted all the failings of the Jewish people over the forty-year period from the time of the exodus from Egypt. One of the failings that he mentioned was how the Jews had lacked in faith before the splitting of the Sea and thus complained – “were there not sufficient graves in Egypt...” If this is the case then why was it not considered a failing of a test, which proved that the Jews were a stiff-necked people? How do we understand this?

The Jews initially complained to *Moshe* by saying, “Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the Wilderness?” This was before they had witnessed the splitting of the Sea. Although they had seen the plagues in Egypt, which were clearly identified as the Hand of G-d, nevertheless, they had not yet achieved the level of spirituality that they reached after the Sea was split. The

Torah states, “They believed in *Hashem* and *Moshe* His servant,” which did not precede the splitting of the Sea. There was no comparison between the level of revelation during the period of the plagues and the revelation of *Hashem* at the time of the splitting of the Sea.

Thus, once the Jewish people reached this advanced level of belief, how could they address *Moshe* in the inappropriate way that they had done in *Marah*? As a result of the splitting of the Sea, they understood who *Moshe* was and instead, should have asked him to pray for them. However, this was not the case. They complained and thus failed the test. This was considered a failure because they already understood that *Moshe* was the servant of *Hashem* and therefore they should have behaved differently towards him.

Those who are less learned in *Torah* are less culpable than those who are learned. This implies that those who have an advanced level of understanding are more culpable. Thus, if one behaves in a manner that is not consistent with his level of understanding, then it is considered a serious failing. Although it was considered a failing and a lack of faith for the Jewish people to complain to *Moshe* before the splitting of the Sea, it was not considered a failure nor did it indicate that they were stiff-necked people. However, after the splitting of the Sea, (when they understood who *Moshe* truly was) the appropriate thing would have been for them to ask him to pray on their behalf. Since they did not, it is considered that they failed the test and demonstrated that they are a stiff-necked people.

Torah; “*Hashem* spoke to *Moshe* saying, ‘Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the *Midianites*; afterward you will be gathered unto your people (*Moshe* will pass away).”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: Despite the fact that *Moshe* understood that he was going to pass away after fulfilling the commandment to destroy the *Midianites*, “he nevertheless performed the *Mitzvah* with joy and he did not delay.” If *Moshe* had decided not to act immediately upon the dictate of *Hashem*, he would have extended his life.

Midrash: *Moshe*’s immediate response to the dictate of *Hashem* without considering its consequences makes him “praiseworthy.” Meaning, even a person as great as *Moshe* is considered praiseworthy for making this decision despite all of the reasons to delay.

Midrash: Yehoshua Bin Nun, the disciple and successor of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, led the Jewish people into the Land of Israel. Upon entry, *Hashem* commanded him to conquer the land and divide it among the tribes and then he will pass away. Understanding that his passing was going to be determined by when his mission was completed, *Yehoshua* chose to delay. His justification was that as long as he was alive the Jews would not succumb to idol worship. Nevertheless, *Yehoshua* had ten years taken from his life.

Midrash: Initially he was meant to live 120 years like his Rebbe, Moshe. The difficulty is that if *Chazal* tell us that even for a person as great as *Moshe Rabbeinu* that his decision (not to delay) was considered praiseworthy, it indicates that if he had chosen to delay it would not have been considered a claim against him. So, why was *Yehoshua* held accountable for his decision to delay the conquest and division of the Land? How do we understand this?

The answer is that although the decision not to delay the battle with the *Midianites* was considered “praiseworthy” even for a person as great as *Moshe Rabbeinu*, despite all the considerations, *Moshe’s* decision to ignore all the considerations establishes precedence. When G-d gives a dictate, one must attend to it immediately without any delay.

Therefore, *Yehoshua* should have followed the precedent that was set by *Moshe Rabbeinu*. He should not have delayed regardless of how pure his intent may have been. This failing was the cause his early passing. A person is only held to a standard that is consistent with his own level of understanding. Therefore, if one understands how to behave and does not, it is considered that he has failed.

The Evolution of the Spirituality of the Jewish People

Torah: One of the four expressions of redemption that Hashem related to Moshe was, “V’lakachti eschem li l’am – I will take you for Myself to be My people and I will be your G-d (Elokim).” This expression of redemption is referring to the Sinai experience when the Jewish people became the *Am Hashem* (the Nation of G-d). At Sinai, we find that the Jewish people are referred to as “*mamleches kohanim v’goy kadosh – a kingly priestly holy people.*” The Jewish people did not immediately ascend to that level, but rather it was a progression.

Initially when *Hashem* sent *Moshe* to tell Pharaoh to release the Jewish people from bondage, He said to *Moshe* “Tell Pharaoh... Release My son, My firstborn (*Beni Bechori*).” *Hashem* identifies the Jewish people as his first-born child, which signifies that it is the most intimate relationship, as between a father and his son. The first-born son is the most special to his father. The relationship of a father and his son is not the same as that of a king and his subjects.

Subsequently, the *Torah* tells us that *Hashem* said to *Moshe* “Tell Pharaoh in My Name *Shlach Ami – Send out My people.*” This verse identifies the Jewish People as “My People.” Meaning, that at this moment the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people was: King to subject. The nature of this relationship is that the subject is selflessly dedicated to do the will of the master and the master is dedicated to provide for the subject.

The relationship between G-d and the Jewish people has a duality; on one hand, the relationship is father (*Avinu*) to son, but at the same time, the son must recognize that the father is the master (*malkeinu*). Thus, the son must be dedicated to doing His will. Even before the Exodus, the Jewish people had established themselves as G-d’s people and G-d’s children.

However, regarding Sinai, the Jewish people are referred to as “*mamleches kohanim v’goy kadosh – a kingly priestly holy people.*” As a result of the receiving the *Torah* at Sinai, which is accepting *Hashem* as their G-d, the Jewish people became sanctified. This established the status of *Kedushas Yisroel* - the sanctity of the Jewish People.

In Egypt, the Jewish people were devoid of *mitzvos*, as the verse in *Yechezkel* states, “and you are naked (devoid of spirituality).” As pagans in Egypt, the Jewish people had no relevance to spirituality and were no different from the Egyptians. Then *Hashem* gave them two *mitzvos*: the *mitzvah* of *milah* (circumcision) and the *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach* (the Pascal Lamb Offering).

Circumcision is the “sign that is engraved in our flesh.” It is the manner in which the Jew identifies with G-d, as the *Torah* refers to circumcision, “*ohs bris kodesh – the sign of the Holy Covenant.*” The *bris milah* is something that is part of a Jew’s physicality and cannot be removed. Concerning the *mitzvah* of the *Korban Pesach*, the lamb/goat was an Egyptian deity. Thus, the significance of slaughtering it was the rejection of idolatry.

After the Jewish people were circumcised and they sacrificed the *Korban Pesach*, they reached a point where they developed the capacity for *kedushah*. (Sanctification). Thus, the Commandment that follows is, “*Kodesh Li Kol Bachor* – Sanctify for Me all the first born sons.” At this point *Hashem* sanctified the *bachor* (first born) of the Jewish people because the *bachor* shares a commonality with Him. Just as *Hashem* is the *Rishon* the First (and Only), who is the essence of all that is holy, so too is the first born – who shares that characteristic. The sanctity of the *bachor* is innate to who he is. However, the sanctification of the Jewish people as a whole (*Kedushas Yisroel*) was not able to take place until Sinai.

Kedushas Yisroel was only bestowed upon the Jewish people at Sinai. Although they were considered “G-d’s people” (even before the Exodus – as it is stated “*Shalch Ami*”), at that moment they had no relevance to *kedushah*. This is explicit in the verse, “*V’lakachti eschem li l’am* – I will take you for Myself to be My people and I will be your G-d (*Elokim*).” It was only when the Jewish people ascended to the level of accepting *Hashem* as their G-d, “*Elokim*,” could they be sanctified. This could not have taken place if there were any spiritual impediments. *Hashem* identified the Jews as His people before Sinai. However, identification as “a holy and priestly nation” only occurred at Sinai. Why could He not bestow this new status upon the Jewish people before the Exodus?

Rashi in *Yisro*: The greatest miracle of Egypt (even more than all the plagues) was that the Jewish people were able to leave Egypt. The difficulty is, after Egypt was devastated through the plagues, and the Jews were asked to leave – why was the Exodus itself the greatest miracle? The Egyptian people literally drove the Jews out of Egypt in order to stop the death that was brought upon them.

Ramchal in *Derech Hashem*: The Jewish people, as a result of their bondage in Egypt, were so infected with spiritual contamination that they had virtually no capacity to internalize and have any sense of spirituality. When *Hashem* took the Jews out of Egypt, He purged all of their impurities and gave them a capacity to relate to and be receptive to *kedushah*. In Egypt, it was impossible for the Jewish people as a whole to attain sanctity (*Kedushas Yisroel*).

Being Appreciative

Torah: “The Children of Israel were armed (*chamushim*) when they went up from Egypt.”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The word “*chamushim*” to mean that only one fifth of the Jewish people left Egypt and four fifths perished during the days of darkness.

Rashi citing *Chazal* in *Parshas Bo*: The reason four fifths of the Jewish people perished during the plague of darkness was so that the Egyptians should not witness the demise of the evil ones among the Jewish people (those who did not want to leave Egypt). It was important that the Egyptians should be unaware of the destruction of four fifths of the Jews because they would say that the Jewish people were dying as they were. *Hashem* wanted the Egyptians to understand that it was only they who were being punished.

Midrash Tanchuma: There is another interpretation as to why the Jews who were evil died during the days of darkness. The Jews who survived the days of darkness praised and offered thanks to *Hashem* for not allowing the Egyptians to be aware of the demise of the Jews who perished during darkness because the Egyptians would have rejoiced over their death. The question is, why is it important for *Chazal* to inform us that the Jews who survived the days of darkness gave thanks and praise to *Hashem* for not allowing the Egyptians to witness the demise of the evil Jews?

It is difficult to understand. If all the Jews in Egypt witnessed the revealed miracles, which clearly identified the Hand of *Hashem*, how is it possible that the vast majority of the Jewish people did not want to leave Egypt? As it is stated, “*v’chamushim* – only one fifth left Egypt.” It is clear that there was a fundamental difference between these two groups of Jews. One group possessed a characteristic and quality that allowed them to fully appreciate and internalize the events that they had witnessed. However, the other group did not possess this quality.

The most fundamental quality an individual needs in order to be able to recognize and understand situations correctly is “*ha’karas ha’tov* – recognition of the good.” If a person has the ability to recognize that he is the beneficiary of some one else’s kindness then he is able to appreciate and understand his benefactor. However, if the person does not have the capacity to view himself

as the beneficiary of someone else's kindness then he is always suspect of his benefactor's motive. Thus, he remains untrusting.

Despite the tragedy of the destruction of four fifths of the Jewish people, the one fifth that survived gave thanks and praise to *Hashem* for not allowing the Egyptians to rejoice in the demise of the evil Jews who did not want to leave Egypt. One would think that those who survived were overwhelmed with their grief and could not think of anything but attending to the burial needs of those who died.

Midrash: Nevertheless, despite the tragedy that had befallen them, they saw *Hashem's* kindness and thus offered thanks and praise to Him. Because of this quality of *ha'karas ha'tov*, they were truly able to appreciate *Hashem's* concern for them. Therefore when they witnessed the miracles and the destruction of Egypt, they were fully trusting that this was only to bring about their redemption. If a person has the quality of *ha'karas ha'tov*, he will then have relevance to spirituality because he is able to process the events of his life in a way where he sees the goodness of *Hashem*.

Gemara: *Dovid Ha'Melech* (King David) promulgated that every Jew should recite at least 100 *brachos* (blessings) every day. *Dovid Ha'Melech* enacted this in response to ending a plague that had befallen the Jewish people. Initially he did not understand why they were deserving of this punishment. However, he finally realized that it was because the Jews were beneficiaries of *Hashem's* sustenance and kindness but did not acknowledge this fact. Thus, *Dovid Ha'Melech* and his *Bais Din* (*Rabbinic Court*) enacted that every Jew should say 100 *brachos* every day, which caused the plague to cease. The 100 *brachos* encompassed every aspect of our existence.

For example, the *brachos* we recite each morning articulate our acknowledgment that *Hashem* allows us to stand erectly, gives us the ability to see, and provides the amenities that are necessary such as clothing the naked etc. It is irrelevant how much wealth a person may have; the fact that he able to cloth his own nakedness is only because *Hashem* is his provider. It is not that we thank *Hashem* for the luxuries of life, but we must acknowledge Him for the bare necessities.

People take these things for granted. Everything in life is a manifestation of the kindness of *Hashem* and we are the beneficiaries of His kindness. Therefore, we must be beholden and thank *Hashem* for everything we have. If

one is able to recognize and appreciate this fact then one is humbled because he understands who he is not.

The Value of Anticipation

Torah: After the Sea split and subsequently closed on the Egyptian army thereby destroying them, "then *Moshe* and the Children of *Yisroel* chose to sing this song to *Hashem* (*Aaz Yashir*)...*Miriam* the prophetess (*ha'navia*), the sister of *Aaron*, took her drum in her hand and all the women went forth after her with drums and with dances."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The reason *Miriam* is referred to as "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of *Aaron*," is because when she first prophesized, she was a young girl and the sister of *Aaron* (before the birth of *Moshe*). She said to her father, "My mother will give birth to a son and he will be the Redeemer of *Yisroel*." Why is it important for the *Torah* to relate that after the splitting of the Sea that *Miriam* (as a young girl) had prophesized that her parents would bring forth the Redeemer of *Yisroel*? What relevance does this have to singing the praises of *Hashem* at this moment?

Midrash: The level of revelation experienced by the maidservant at the Sea was greater than that of *Yechezkel* the Prophet. One could say that *Miriam* sang the praises of *Hashem* at this time because she too was inspired. However, if this is the case then it has no relevance to her being a prophetess. Evidently, her early prophecy has relevance to this moment.

Torah in *Behaloscha*: *Miriam* became a leper because she spoke critically (*Loshon hara*) of her brother *Moshe*. As a result of her condition, she had to be sent out of the camp of Israel for seven days until she recovered. The *Midrash* tells us that until she could rejoin the people and travel again, *Miriam* merited that the Divine Presence, the Clouds of Glory, and the Jewish people waited for her recovery. This was because G-d rewards people measure for measure. When *Moshe's* mother *Yocheved* could conceal him no longer, she put him into a box and placed it into the water among the reeds.

Torah: "Miriam stood at a distance and waited to see what would happen to him."

Midrash: In the merit of her waiting to see what would happen to her brother *Moshe*, the camp of Israel, the Divine Presence, and the Clouds of Glory did not travel until she recovered from her leprosy.

What was so special about *Miriam* waiting to see what would happen to *Moshe*? One would think that any sister would do as much. However, *Miriam's* concern for her brother was not merely the sisterly concern for a sibling's survival. When she waited in anticipation to see what was going to happen, her concern was whether *Moshe* would survive the water and thus become the Redeemer of Israel (as she had prophesized), or would he perish— thus eliminating the possibility for redemption. She was deeply distressed at the possibility that there would be no exodus from Egypt and consequently no giving of the *Torah* at Sinai. If this were to occur, the purpose of existence would not come to fruition!

Hashem saw that not only was *Miriam* concerned that His Will would not be fulfilled, but it caused her great anguish. He rewarded her measure for measure – just as she waited to see what would happen to *Moshe*, the 600,000 Jews, the Divine Presence, and the Clouds of Glory waited for her.

It is clear that *Miriam* anticipated the moment of Redemption all her life. From the time that she had prophesized that her parents would bring forth the Redeemer of Israel, she waited for the redemption when *Moshe* would take the Jews out of Egypt to become G-d's people at Sinai. *Miriam* rejoiced after the splitting of the Sea, not because she had reached a new level of understanding because of this great miracle, but because she had prophesized this as a child (as *Aaron's* sister before the birth of *Moshe*) and had yearned for this moment. When it finally arrived, she was overwhelmed with joy and burst forth with song. Thus, she led the women to sing the praises of *Hashem*.

Amidah (silent prayer) of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*: We ask *Hashem* to instill fear and awe in all mankind. Additionally, we ask *Hashem*

to give honor and glory to *Klal Yisroel* and reveal Himself and bring *Moshiach*. We say that as a result of knowing and experiencing *Hashem's* Presence, the *tzaddikim* (the devoutly righteous), the *yesharim* (the straight – who are at a more advanced level than the righteous), and the *chassidim* (the scrupulously devout – who are even more advanced than the straight) will rejoice at various levels of joy. It would seem that if all mankind is brought to the realization of who G-d is and awed by His Presence, one would think that all mankind would become ecstatic as a result of this realization and revelation. Therefore, why do we single-out only these three levels of spiritually advanced individuals?

It is because the *tzaddik*, the *yaasher*, and the *chassid* have dedicated their lives to the sanctification of G-d and await the revelation of His glory. Therefore, when *Hashem* does reveal Himself, they will be overcome with the various levels of joy. The ordinary person, who does not anticipate and yearn for that moment, will not appreciate it as something extraordinarily special when it takes place. This is what the *Torah* is communicating with the verse, "*Miriam* the prophetess" led the women in songs of praise.

The question one must ask is – when one witnesses a *kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of G-d's Name), how does one react? Does one become ecstatic with joy? Or, does one remain relatively unmoved. The answer to that question will indicate what level a person has reached.



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