

MOSHE ADDRESSING YOSEF'S REQUEST

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. Moshe Addressing Yosef's Request

The Torah states, "Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him (imo), for he had firmly adjured the Children of Israel, saying, 'G'd will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you.'" Why did Yosef implore the Jewish people to take an oath to assure that his remains will be taken out of Egypt at the time of the exodus? Was he concerned as his father Yaakov was, that he would be deified if his remains were in Egypt? Or was it because Yosef wanted to be buried in the Land of Israel.

Torah states regarding the laws of inheritance that if there are no sons, a daughter is the heir and thus inherits her father's estate. The Torah tells us that the daughters of Tzelofchad, who were from the tribe of Manasseh came to Moshe with a claim. They had said that since their father had died without any male heirs, they have a right to his portion in the Land. Moshe presented their claim to G'd. G'd responded that their claim was valid and they are justified to have a share in the Land.

The Midrash asks, "Why does the Torah trace the pedigree of the daughters of Tzelofchad back to Yosef, the Patriarch of the Tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh? Since they are identified as the descendants of Manasseh, it is understood that they are the descendants of Yosef. The Torah needed to trace the genealogy of the daughters of Tzelofchad back to Yosef because he had a special love for the Land (of Israel) 'chibas haaretz'. Where do we find that he had a special love for the Land? The verse states, 'When G'd will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land (Egypt)...then you must bring my bones up out of here with you (to the Land of Israel).' Just as Yosef had a special love for the Land, and therefore did not want to be buried in Egypt, so too did the daughters of Tzelofchad, his descendants want a portion in the Land because of their special love. What had motivated the daughters of Tzelofchad to present their claim to Moshe was not a monetary reason, but rather their special love for the Land.

The Torah tells us that there are different types of spiritual contamination, each of which do not allow one to enter or remain in particular camps of Israel. For example, if one had become a leper, he needed to be sent outside of all of the camps of Israel. If one had become contaminated because of a flow (zav), he was permitted to remain within the camp of Israel, but was not permitted to enter into the camp of the Levites. In contrast, one who had become contaminated through coming in contact with the dead is permitted to enter into the camp of the Levites but not the camp of the Divine Presence. From where is this law derived? The Gemara tells us that the verse states, "Moshe

took the bones of Yosef with him (imo)..." The word "imo (with him)" seems to be superfluous. It is coming to indicate that the remains of Yosef stayed with Moshe in his camp, which was the camp of the Levites. He only needed to take the remains out of Egypt in order to meet the obligation of the oath. Moshe could have delegated the responsibility of transporting Yosef's remains to another. Why was it necessary of Moshe to keep the remains in his proximity?

King Solomon writes in Proverbs, "Chacham lev yeekach mitzvos - the wise hearted takes mitzvos." Chazal tell us that the "wise hearted person" is referring to Moshe, because he was the only one who chose to seek out the remains of Yosef. The rest of the Jewish people were preoccupied with gathering the wealth of Egypt for themselves. Moshe had the wisdom of heart to recognize that without recognizing the prerequisite for redemption, which was locating the remains of Yosef, they would not be able to leave. Moshe kept the remains of Yosef with him until they would be buried in the Land because Yosef's intent for being removed from Egypt was not only to not remain in Egypt but to be buried in the Land. Moshe understood that in order to fulfill the oath properly, he could not delegate this responsibility to another after realizing how the Jewish people had glossed-over this responsibility by giving greater importance to another mitzvah (gathering the wealth of Egypt).

2. Succeeding as a Jew Despite the Influences of the World

The Torah states regarding the mitzvah (positive commandment) of eating the Pascal lamb, "...and you shall not break a bone in it." When one partakes of the Pascal sacrifice, one is not permitted to break the bone to remove its marrow. Although the marrow itself is considered the meat of the sacrifice; nevertheless, the Torah forbids it. Chinuch explains the philosophical basis for the negative commandment regarding the breaking of the bone of the Pascal offering to eat its marrow. There is a fundamental principle that one is the product of his actions. Consuming the meat of the Pascal sacrifice symbolizes and demonstrates the Jew in a state of freedom. The slaughtering of the sheep/goat was a negation and rejection of the deity of their Egyptian masters. They had begun to establish their independence with the slaughtering of the Pascal sacrifice. If one gnaws on the bones of the Pascal sacrifice to remove its marrow, his behavior reflects the behavior of a dog and not of a free man. It is the way of a dog to gnaw on bones for their marrow. Chinuch states that if one does not believe that one's behavior will determine and affect his own development as a human being, that individual does not understand the dynamics of life. All of one's actions will determine one's spiritual development in the positive and in the negative. If one is an evil person and is compelled to do acts of righteousness, he will become, over time righteous. Conversely, if a righteous person is compelled to do acts of evil, he will become in time an evil person.

We live in a physical world that is steeped in philosophies that are corrupt and false. Mankind is compelled and driven to accumulate and amass material wealth without consideration for one's spiritual development. Even when one is associated with a particular theological position it is usually rooted in falsehood and evil. The Jew is exposed to evil and falsehood continuously on the obvious

and subliminal level. How does one protect himself from these negative influences? If one is the product of his actions and involvements, then one must be extremely cautious to choose a course of action that will allow him to assume a perspective of spirituality.

When one performs a mitzvah, it is predicated upon a blessing, "Blessed are You Hashem, our G'd. King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments..." G'd has endowed the Jewish people with His commandments so that they can be sanctified and elevated. Through the performance of mitzvos the Jew is sanctified and is drawn closer to G'd. Since man is the product of his actions, then by performing mitzvos continuously, one would become spiritualized. Every Shabbos and Yom Tov we pray in the Amidah, "Sanctify us with Your Commandments..." Despite the fact that we live as physical beings and are continuously involved with the mundane, we supplicate G'd to allow us to be impacted positively through the performance of mitzvos. This sanctification will allow the Jew to have a capacity to process life with a spiritual objective.

Rambam writes in Hilchos Deos (The Laws of Proper Conduct) that one may be sanctified and spiritually advanced not only through the performance of the mitzvos themselves but also through the performance of one's daily behavior/routine. If one engages in physical activity in order to become a more effective servant of G'd, then that physical action becomes assumes spiritual value because of its objective. If one eats healthy to serve G'd or one sleeps with that same objective then he is in effect performing mitzvos. If one procreates in order to bring forth children who will be devoted and dedicated to His Torah and mitzvos, then even the act of cohabitation will become sanctified. If this is the mindset of the Jew, then all aspects of his life are considered mitzvah.

The only way one can create an insular setting for himself, despite the hedonism and affluence of society is to conduct oneself in the manner described by Rambam. Through the study of Torah, which is the equivalent of performing all of the mitzvos, one can come to an understanding that will allow him to appreciate value and the ramifications of his actions. It is only through Torah study that the Jew is truly ignited. As we say in the Amidah (Silent Prayer) in the blessing of Repentance, "Bring us back our Father, to Your Torah and bring us near, our King, to Your service...." In order to be drawn closer to the service of G'd, one must first be brought back to His Torah.

3. Belief, A Prerequisite for Clarity

The Torah states after the splitting of the Sea, "...and they had faith in Hashem..." Ramban explains that other than the Sinai event, there was no other time in history in which the Jewish people had reached such an advanced level of belief in G'd. This is understandable because the level of revelation at the splitting of the Sea was of such a degree that even Yechezkel the prophet did not merit to witness what the lowly maidservant had seen. They had declared, "Behold, this is my G'd I will glorify Him!" G'd's Presence was so palpable that one could point his finger at Him. Seemingly, having such a great degree of belief in G'd at that moment should not be considered a significant accomplishment. However, since the Torah explicitly states at the time of the splitting of the Sea

that the Jewish people had believed in G'd, despite the obviousness of G'd's Presence, their belief was something significant and valuable.

The Midrash states, "Because the Jewish people had faith in G'd at the time of the splitting of the Sea, they merited to inherit the Land of Israel. We find that the reward that Avraham, our Patriarch, had merited for having faith in G'd was exceptional. After G'd had informed him that he would have a son, the Torah states, 'And Avraham believed in G'd and He considered it to be righteous.' Because of his belief he merited inheriting this world and the world to come." At that time, Avraham was 99 years old. He had already dedicated his life to the selfless espousal of monotheism. He had been thrown into the fiery kiln of Kasdim, rather than bowing to the idol. He had also withstood the test of needing to leave his homeland, his birthplace, and his family. He did not question G'd when he was confronted with a famine in Canaan, causing him to go to Egypt. Despite all this accomplishment, Chazal tell us that it was only because he had "believed (in) G'd" when he was told that he would have a son that he merited this world and the world to come. Why was Avraham's belief regarding having a child considered to be so exceptional? Evidently, despite all the reasons not to believe, Avraham did believe in G'd.

The Midrash continues, "We also see that the 'the people believed' regarding the battle against Amalek when Moshe had raised his hands in prayer...This is the gate through which the righteous shall pass when entering into the world to come. It is the gate of belief (emunah) in G'd. As it states, 'Open the gates for the righteous nation that keeps the faith...' ...Despite all the challenges that he needs to overcome, the tzaddik lives with his belief in G'd. As it states, 'The righteous through his belief shall live.' The ultimate redemption shall come only in the merit of belief. It was only in the merit of their belief in G'd that the Divine Presence came upon the Jewish people at the splitting of the Sea, As it states, '...they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant. Then Moshe and the Children of Israel chose to sing this song to Hashem...'"

It was not because of a spontaneous feeling of elation and gratitude that they were able to articulate so clearly every aspect of the miracles that had taken place at the Sea. It was only because the Jewish people had believed in G'd that they merited the Divine Presence to dwell upon them, which endowed them with the ability to articulate their praises to G'd through the song at the Sea. Had it not been for their degree of belief, they would have not been the ultimate beneficiaries of the events that had transpired at the splitting of the Sea.

If one has a profound belief in G'd, he will merit to be able to understand and appreciate the Torah and its dictates. There are many aspects of the Torah and its spirituality that cannot be fathomed through human intellect alone. One must be endowed by G'd with a capacity to be able to process these areas. The one who has sufficient belief in G'd, and thus accepts all of the principles and laws of the Torah without question, will be enlightened by G'd in order to comprehend the concepts that are conveyed and principles that are communicated through the Torah. Belief in G'd is a fundamental prerequisite to be able to process and perceive existence for what it truly is.

The area of Statutes (Chukim), is one aspect of the Torah. Statutes are laws that cannot be understood within a rational context. For example, the prohibition against wearing a combination of wool and linen (shatnez), dietary laws, and the Red Heifer are all classified as Statutes. Sforno explains that when one observes a Statute, he demonstrates his belief in G'd. This is only because he is adhering to the Statute only because it is the Will of G'd and not because he has any sense of its meaning. One may refrain from stealing because he senses in the act a degree of evil by taking something that is not rightfully his. It is only through one's belief in G'd that one can merit His endowment of understanding in order to process life through His eyes.

4. The Antipathy of the Nations of the World Against the Jewish People

The Torah states when the Jewish people left Egypt, "Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light..." The Midrash cites the verse " 'All Heaven and Earth I (G'd) fill...' The world is filled with His Glory. If this is so, why does the Torah tell us that 'He went before them?' (If the entire world cannot contain His Glory it seems denigrating for G'd to go before the Jewish people and lead them through the desert.) G'd went before the Jewish people in order to reveal to the world His love for them. The purpose of this revelation was so the nations of the world should accord the proper level of respect that is befitting for them. However, not only did they not offer the proper respect to the Jewish people, the nations of the world murdered and victimized them in the most severe manner. It is because of this mistreatment of the Jewish people the verse states, 'At the end of time I will gather all of the nations and bring them to the valley of Yehoshafat. I will judge them there for My nation and portion, Israel, that they had dispersed among the nations.' The verse does not say that G'd will judge the nations for being idolaters, murders, or adulterers but rather because they victimized His Portion, Israel. Egypt will become desolate and Edom will be annihilated."

Understanding G'd's special love for the Jewish people, as He had demonstrated when they were taken out of Egypt, the nations of the world when they victimize the Jew, is it is considered an affront against G'd. It is evident that the opposition and derision against the Jew is only because of what he represents, which is the spirituality of G'd.

The Torah tells us that after the incident of Baal Peor, G'd told Moshe to destroy the nations of Midian saying, "Avenge the vengeance of Israel against Midian...". However when Moshe addressed the Jewish people he said, "Avenge G'd's vengeance in Midian." The Midrash tells us that G'd said to Moshe, "if I had told you to avenge the vengeance of Israel in Midian, why did you say to the Jewish people to avenge the vengeance of G'd in Midian?" Moshe responded, "Before the receiving of the Torah at Sinai, the nations of the world did not have this degree of enmity towards the Jewish people. It was only after they received Your Torah that they increased their level of hatred towards them because of our relationship with You. Thus, the basis of their hatred is our representation of G'd in the world. Thus it is the Vengeance of G'd against Midian." The nations of the world victimize, persecute, and kill the Jewish people only because they represent G'd's Presence in this existence,

which is something that they cannot tolerate. They abhor spirituality and G'dliness.

G'd openly displayed His love for the Jewish people by leading them after their departure from Egypt. Although the nations of the world are culpable for violating the three cardinal sins, they will be judged and condemned because they were opposed to G'd's intent of Creation, which is to recognize Him as the Master. The world was only created for the sake of the Jewish people to fulfill the Torah. Therefore, by victimizing them the nations are in effect rebelling against G'd Himself.

The only reason the Jew has been persecuted throughout history is because of his spirituality. Amalek has no capacity to value the spirituality of the Jewish people or G'd. Because they are G'd's chosen people, their representation is something that the Amalekites cannot tolerate. Therefore, the Torah states, "My Throne cannot be complete until Amalek is obliterated from under the heaven."

Chazal depict the Amalekites as "the fool who jumped into the scolding bath. Although he is scolded by the hot water, he nevertheless cools the bath for others." After the Splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian armies for the sake of the Jewish people, the world stood in awe and fear of them. No nation would dare engage with G'd's people after witnessing His wrath. Nevertheless, the Amalekites attacked the Jewish people without any concern for the consequences of their actions. They are likened to the fool who jumps into the scolding bath and is burned. However, they ultimately diminished the world's perception of the Jewish people.

The value of G'd leading the Jewish people was not only for the sake of the nations of the world to understand the innate value of the Jew, it also to communicate to each individual Jew his own level of value. G'd chose the Jewish people to be the testament to the world that He created existence. Every Jew must ask himself, "Why was I chosen?" Evidently it is because he has a very special spiritual potential. Understanding this, the Jew must take advantage of the opportunity that we may not fully appreciate.

5. Pharaoh's Lack of Understanding of the Jew (From Bo)

The Torah tells us that after the eighth plague (locusts), Pharaoh summoned Moshe and Aaron and said to them, "Go and serve Hashem, your G'd; which ones are going? Moshe said, 'With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go; with our sons and with our daughters...Pharaoh said to them, 'So be Hashem with you as I send you forth with your children! Look- the evil is upon you...let the men go now.'" Pharaoh told Moshe that he would only allow the men to go out into the desert and not all of the Jewish people because he had seen "evil" upon them. What was Pharaoh's concern?

Rashi cites the Midrash which states, "Pharaoh said, 'I see through my astrology a star in the heavens that is called 'Raah (evil).' Pharaoh said to Moshe and Aaron that he had seen in his astrological gazing that when they will go out into the desert the star of evil will come upon them. It is a sign of bloodshed and death. After the Jewish people had sinned with the Golden Calf, G'd wanted to destroy them. Moshe supplicated Him saying, 'What will Egypt say if You destroy the Jewish

people? It will only confirm what they had said- that the Jewish people would be killed in the desert.' G'd, immediately converted the blood that was seen by the astrologers, as death, into the blood of circumcision. After the Jewish people would enter into the Land, Yehoshua had them circumcise themselves..." Since Pharaoh had seen the star "Raah" which indicated to him that there would be bloodshed in the desert, he refused to send them out. However, what he did not see in the stars was that G'd would convert the blood that represented death into the blood of circumcision.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "Ein mazal l'Yisroel (A Jew is not bound by the zodiac)." Every person is born under a certain star. If one were to be able to decipher the stars accurately, one would be able to foresee the entire future of one's existence. However, a Jew is able to supersede and override what is encoded in the stars. Tosfos explains that although a Jew does have a "destiny that is reflected in the stars" he is able to alter it through great merit and the supplications of the community on his behalf. However, the destiny of the non-Jew is fixed and indelibly encoded. Whatever is communicated through the stars will occur as it is exhibited in the zodiac. The non-Jew is not able to extricate himself from what is destined to happen.

Pharaoh had seen in the stars that the Jewish people would be killed in the desert. He had seen the liability of the Jewish people for their sin with the Golden Calf. Although it was correct that they deserved to be punished by death, Moshe's supplication was able to overturn the decree and the blood was transformed to be the blood of circumcision. The astrologers of Egypt had initially seen in the stars that the Redeemer of Israel will be born and that he would die through water. When Yocheved had placed Moshe into the Nile, the stargazers of Egypt said to Pharaoh, "The Redeemer of Israel has just died!" However, this did not happen. Did the astrologers of Egypt misread the stars?

On a natural level, when Moshe was placed into the Nile, he should have drowned. However, due to a miracle, Moshe did not die. This is the reason Moshe did not strike the Nile to bring about the plague of blood and frogs, in order not to destroy something from which he had benefited. These plagues were delegated through his brother Aaron. The stars reflect and transmit only what exists within the physical/natural realm. They do not communicate anything that is outside of the natural order. This is the reason that when Moshe was placed in the Nile, the stars communicated that the Redeemer of Israel had died. It is true that the Jewish people deserved to die as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf; however, because of repentance and the supplication of Moshe which are concepts of spiritual rehabilitation, it is something beyond the zodiac.

The Jerusalem Talmud asks in Tractate Berachos, "What is the liability of a soul that sins? The soul that sins shall die." Just as one who ingests a lethal substance will surely die, one who sins will also die as a result of sin. However G'd says, "Repent and you will live." Repentance is a spiritual concept that does not exist within the natural order. It is a spiritual mechanism that rehabilitates one's spirituality. Thus, it supersedes the natural order. Pharaoh had no understanding of spiritual rehabilitation and therefore, the star that had read "bloodshed will come upon the Jewish people" could not be altered.

The effect of atonement as a rehabilitative mechanism, which restores one's spirituality, only has relevance to the Jew. The only sacrifice that a non-Jew can bring to the Temple is a burnt offering that has no relevance to atonement. Ramban explains that when one brings a sin offering, in addition to confession and repentance, one must understand that in fact he should have been the one to be slaughtered and burnt. However, because of G'd's Mercy, he is able to bring the animal sacrifice as a substitute for himself. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks regarding the concept of an atonement sacrifice, "How does the slaughtering and burning of the sacrifice atone for the sinner, if in fact the sinner himself deserves to die for his transgression? How do we reconcile this with G'd's Judgment being just and fair? " Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that when the Jew sins, he transgresses only because he is inclined for the physical. He does not function and behave as an individual whose essence is spiritual. When one repents and recognizes the wrong that he had done, at that moment, he is no longer the same individual who had sinned. Therefore, the repentant cannot have his life taken, but rather a substitute for the sinner as a physical being, has the animal slaughtered in his place. This is the reconciliation between the concept of sacrifices of atonement and G'd's Just Judgment. Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and **Torah.org**.

Rabbi Kalatsky is the founder of the [Yad Avraham Institute](#), a New York-based learning center whose mission is to disseminate Torah to Jews of all backgrounds and walks of life.