

# A SLAVE'S RANSOM

*by Shlomo Katz*

## **Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz**

### **Vaera**

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#### Today's Learning:

Sanhedrin 3:4-5

Orach Chaim 566:7-567:1

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Metzia 51

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shevi'it 19

This week's parashah contains seven of the ten plagues that Hashem brought upon the Egyptians. Why were the plagues ten in number? R' Yosef Moshe z"l (Polish rabbi; died 1815) offers the following explanation:

On the verse (Yirmiyahu 31:19), "Is Ephraim My dear son," the midrash comments (as if quoting Hashem): "How dear is he to Me? How many frogs did I pay? How many lice did I pay?" The Midrash refers to these plagues as if Hashem gave the frogs and lice as a ransom for Ephraim, a nickname for the Jewish people.

Was it halachically proper to pay a large ransom for Bnei Yisrael? Halachah in fact prohibits paying exorbitant ransoms in order not to encourage kidnaping. There is one case, however, where halachah not only permits, but demands, that a huge ransom be paid. Specifically, the gemara states that if one sells his slave to a non-Jew, and the non-Jewish buyer prevents the slave from observing

mitzvot, the seller is obligated to redeem the slave even for ten times the slave's value.

Such was the case in Egypt. The verse (Devarim 26:6), "The Egyptians treated us badly," also can be translated, "The Egyptians made us bad." They lowered our spiritual stature by preventing us from performing the mitzvot. Hashem therefore had to ransom us even for a ten-fold ransom. This is why we introduce the plagues in the Haggadah with the statement: "These are the ten plagues that Hashem brought on the Egyptians in Egypt." The last two words are seemingly redundant, but they emphasize why there were ten plagues: Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt, where they could not perform mitzvot. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Be'er Mayim p.72)

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*"V'lakachti / I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a God to you; and you shall know that I am Hashem your God, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt." (6:7)*

This is one of the "Four Expressions of Redemption" for which we drink four cups of wine at the Seder. Specifically, the Sages say that this verse alludes to the giving of the Torah.

R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (see back page) writes: We learn from here that our existence as a people depends on our acceptance of the Torah, and only through the Torah are we called "G-d's nation." The Biblical Ruth recognized this when she converted to Judaism. Thus, the gemara (Yevamot 47b) teaches that Ruth's statement (Ruth 1:16), "Your people are my people," was responding to Naomi's attempt to dissuade her from converting, saying, "We have 613 commandments." It is our Torah and mitzvot that define us as a people.

Yet, there is a fifth Expression of Redemption, one which is not represented by a cup of wine. This is (Shmot 6:8): "Ve'haivaiti / I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand to give it to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov; and I shall give it to you as a heritage." Why is this Expression not represented by a cup of wine? Because it is not simply another promise like the other four Expressions; it is the ultimate goal of all of the others, and they are preparatory steps for it. (Midrash Ariel)

Without a Torah perspective -- "Torah eyeglasses," R' Yechezkel Abramsky z"l (1886-1976; best known as the author of Chazon Yechezkel) used to call it -- one cannot recognize even one of Hashem's miracles. The most obvious miracle will make no impression on a person who does not have Torah eyeglasses.

This is stated in the above pasuk. Hashem says, "I will take you to Me as a nation" -- this occurred when the Torah was given - and only then will you "know that I am Hashem, your G-d, who is taking you out from under the burdens of Egypt."

Looking back at history, we find generations which appear to have been more faithful to G-d than the generation which witnessed the Exodus. This is for the reason explained above: Those later generations had the Torah to guide them; the miracles of the Exodus, on the other hand, occurred

before the Torah was given, and were thus of limited educational value.

The gemara (Eruvin 100b) states: "If the Torah had not been given, we would learn modesty and discretion from cats, not to steal -- from ants, marital fidelity -- from doves, etc." Where then, asked R' Chaim Brisker, are the millions of people who should have learned these traits from those animals? The answer is that we could have learned from the animals if the Torah had not been given. Now, however, the only source of faith, morals and proper behavior, is the Torah itself. (P'ninei Rabbenu Yechezkel II p.54)

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*"They are the spokesmen [sent] to Pharaoh . . . they are Moshe and Aharon." (6:27)*

Rashi writes: "They are the ones who were commanded [to speak], and they are the ones who carried out their mission, as righteous when they finished as they were when they began."

R' David Soloveitchik shlita asks: Is Rashi's statement really necessary? Would I have thought otherwise of Moshe and Aharon?

R' Soloveitchik answers: We learn from here that when one becomes involved with a rasha -- even as his opponent -- it is noteworthy if he walks away from the encounter without at least a slight spiritual blemish. This is so even if one is as great as Moshe or Aharon. We find the same idea in last week's parashah, which concludes the list of Yaakov's sons with the words, "And Yosef was in Egypt." Rashi explains that even though Yosef was in Egypt, he was not harmed spiritually. We see that even someone as great as Yosef had to fear being influenced. (Nevertheless, the lesson from Moshe and Aharon is even more significant, for it teaches that even the rasha's adversary must fear that he will be influenced by the rasha.) (Quoted in Shai La'Torah)

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*"Behold! With the staff that is in my hand I shall strike the waters that are in the River, and they shall turn to blood." (7:17)*

The Mishnah (Avot 5:8) teaches that Moshe's staff was one of the ten things that were created in the last moments of the Six Days of Creation. R' Eliezer Felkeles z"l (rabbi of Prague; late 18th century) explains the significance of this fact as follows:

Rambam writes that the Divine Attribute which we refer to as "Ratzon" / G-d's Desire was utilized only during the Six Days of Creation. Everything that will exist at any time in the future was "desired" by G-d during the Six Days of Creation. Even things which appear to be deviations from the laws of nature, notably, the Ten Plagues, actually are built into the Creation.

The Midrash relates that the Ten Plagues (or their initials) were engraved on the staff. This alludes to the same idea, writes R' Felkeles. The Ten Plagues were already planned during the Six Days of Creation and were not a suspension of G-d's laws. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ma'aseh B'Rebbe Eliezer)

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*"Only in the land of Goshen, where Bnei Yisrael were, there was no hail." (9:26)*

R' Simcha Zissel Broide z"l (Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim; died 2000) observes that this distinction between the Egyptians and Bnei Yisrael showed Hashem's love for the Jewish people more so than did the distinctions made in earlier plagues. For example, the fact that the plague of Blood did not affect Bnei Yisrael did not necessarily show the extent of Hashem's love for them because water is a necessity of life. (Hashem "had" to save the Jews.) In contrast, the plague of Hail struck only at selected crops. The fact that Hashem did not strike even selected crops of the Jewish people shows His regard for them. (Sahm Derech p.63)

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### **R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l**

R' Yitzchak Zumbrower-Arieli was born in Yerushalayim in 1896. He received his early education in yeshivot Torat Chaim and Etz Chaim, and was ordained by R' Chaim Berlin. When World War I broke out, hardships and the Turkish draft caused him to flee to Petach Tikvah, where he remained for three years.

In 1919, R' Arieli was among those who welcomed R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook to Yerushalayim, and he joined R' Kook in founding the yeshiva which today is called "Merkaz Harav." R' Arieli was appointed mashgiach / dean of students of the yeshiva, and he worked closely with R' Kook for 16 years, until the latter's death. R' Arieli continued to serve at Merkaz Harav for decades afterward.

To yeshiva students at large, R' Arieli is best known as the author of Enayim La'mishpat. As regular Talmud students know, one of the marginal glosses on the typical Talmud page is the Ein Mishpat, which directs students of particular Talmudic passages to the relevant halachic rulings in Rambam's Code and in the Shulchan Aruch. (The Ein Misphat was compiled in the 16th century by R' Yehoshua Boaz Baruch, who was responsible for many improvements in the appearance and user-friendliness of the Talmud page.) R' Arieli's Enayim La'misphat, begun in 1936, adds thousands of cross-references to those included in the Ein Mishpat, and also cross-references the Talmud to halachic works composed after the 16th century. And, unlike the Ein Misphat, which is an index only, the Enayim La'mishpat discusses the cited sources and explains their relevance as necessary.

R' Arieli left several other works, including: Shirat Ha'geulah, a haggadah commentary; Yerach Ha'eitanim, thoughts for the month of Tishrei; and Midrash Ariel, a Torah commentary. He also was active in the building of Yerushalayim, and was among the founders of two neighborhoods - Kiryat Shmuel and Neve She'an.

R' Arieli was frequently consulted from within Israel and abroad as a posek / halachic authority, and he was the official posek of Yerushalayim's Bikkur Cholim hospital. He strongly advocated close

cooperation between poskim and doctors to ensure that halachic decision-making was based on current and correct medical information.

R' Arieli died on 13 Nissan 5734 / April 5, 1974.

*Sponsored by the Goodman family in memory of mother and grandmother, Rivka bat Yehuda a"h*

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.

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