

# THE SLAVERY IN EGYPT

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Vaera

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Today's Learning:  
Kilayim 1:8-9  
O.C. 311:7-9  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nidah 21  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Bava Kamma 28

As our parashah opens, G-d tells Moshe, "I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov as 'Kel Shakkai,' and My Name 'Hashem' I did not reveal to them." R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of Einayim La'mishpat) explains G-d's message as follows:

"Kel Shakkai," referring, as it does, to G-d's precise measurement of creation, alludes to the Attribute of Strict Justice, which demands strict measure-for-measure accounting. This is the highest form of Divine Providence; indeed, in the beginning, G-d's "design" called for the entire world to be subject to Strict Justice. He knew, however, that the world could not exist under that Attribute, so He paired it with the Attribute of Mercy [see Rashi to Bereishit 1:1]. Nevertheless, G-d did act pursuant to Strict Justice with the patriarchs, for they were on a sufficiently lofty level.

(R' Arieli explains in passing that the difference between G-d's "design" and His implementation is alluded to by the verse (Tehilim 145:17): "Hashem is righteous in all His ways, and magnanimous in all His deeds." G-d's true "ways" are based on righteousness, i.e., differentiating between right and

wrong - Strict Justice. However, His deeds are magnanimous, i.e., tempered with Mercy.)

R' Arieli continues: The level of Providence that was applied to the patriarchs is reached by serving G-d with love, as it is written (Yeshayah 48:8), "The seed of Avraham, My beloved." No person ever reached this level except they. For their sons, in contrast, Providence is tempered with Mercy, manifested by the fact that the Exodus occurred before its time, i.e., before the 400 years passed.

In fact, Yaakov asked that his descendants merit to deserve Hashem's favor even when subjected to Strict Justice - "May 'Kel Shakkai' show you mercy" [Bereishit 43:14]. Then, the redemption from Egypt would have been the complete and final redemption. Instead, however, the difficulty of the subjugation required that Hashem apply Mercy that was undeserved and end the exile early. (Midrash Ariel)

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*"Moreover, I have heard the groan of Bnei Yisrael whom Egypt enslaves, and I have remembered My covenant." (6:5)*

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l (Chida; died 1806) writes: Hashem told Avraham (Bereishit 15:13), "Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own, they will cause them to be \*enslaved,\* and they will \*oppress\* them for four hundred years. But also the nation for which they shall \*slave\* I shall judge, and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth." Hashem told Avraham that He would punish the nation that would \*enslave\* Bnei Yisrael. Why didn't Hashem also say that He would punish the nation that would \*oppress\* Bnei Yisrael? Likewise, why does our verse refer only to slavery and not to oppression?

Chida explains: The Egyptians did not deserve to be punished to the extent that they were only fulfilling Hashem's decree. Therefore they were not punished for oppressing Bnei Yisrael. However, the decree of slavery was lifted from Bnei Yisrael as a result of Yosef's slavery. [As the trailblazer for the Avraham's descendants in Egypt, Yosef could fulfill the decree on behalf of all of them.] Thus, the Egyptians did deserve to be punished for \*enslaving\* the Jewish People. That is why our verse says that Hashem heard the groans specifically of Bnei Yisrael who Egypt \*enslaved.\*

(Nachal Kedumim)

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*"When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Provide a wonder for yourselves,' you shall say to Aharon, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh -- it will become a snake!' (7:9)*

What is meant by "Provide a wonder \*for yourselves\*"? Wasn't the wonder provided for Pharaoh? R' Shalom Rokeach z"l (the first Belzer Rebbe) explains:

For himself, Pharaoh did not care to see a sign from Hashem, as Mishlei (18:2) states, "The fool does not desire understanding." We read similarly in Yishayah (17:11-12) that Hashem invited the wicked king Achaz to challenge and test Him, and Achaz responded, "I will not ask [for a sign] and I will not test Hashem."

Rather, Pharaoh's intention was to impugn the emunah / faith of Moshe and Aharon. "Surely you have doubts and would like to see a sign," he implied.

R' Rokeach continues: [Obviously Moshe and Aharon had no doubt as to the truth of their mission.] However, the typical Jew does sometimes experience doubts in matters of faith. Why did Hashem create us this way?

The answer is that such experiences are meant to be growth opportunities, for a person who has doubts will either research the answers to his questions in our holy literature or he will go to a tzaddik to find answers.

Deep down, every Jew wants to know the truth. In contrast, the wicked (such as Pharaoh) are terrified of the truth. This is why Pharaoh was not content to deny the veracity of Moshe and Aharon's message. Instead, he had to goad them as if they did not believe either.

(Midbar Kodesh)

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*"Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them regarding Bnei Yisrael and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take Bnei Yisrael out of the land of Egypt." (6:13)*

Rashi comments: "He commanded them regarding Bnei Yisrael"- to deal with them in a gentle manner and to be patient with them. "Regarding Pharaoh, the king of Egypt"-that they should show respect to him in all they spoke.

R' Avraham Yitzchak Bloch z"l hy"d (Rosh Yeshiva in Telz, Lithuania; killed in the Holocaust) asks: Why did Moshe and Aharon need to receive a special command to deal with Bnei Yisrael in a gentle manner? Moshe and Aharon were, after all, exceedingly humble and undoubtedly treated every person respectfully.

R' Bloch explains: There are two concepts that come into play when one is seeking the truth. One is "emet la'amitah" / "absolute truth." The second is simply "emet" / "truth." Unlike emet la'amitah, ordinary emet is not pure in the sense that one who wishes to impart emet may alter his presentation to account for his listeners' backgrounds and preconceived notions. But such a presentation is not without risks, for it may lend credence to the very notions that it seeks to refute. Indeed, the mere fact that one would trouble to defend Torah beliefs against heretical ideas gives credibility to those very heretical ideas.

Returning to our verse: Why would Hashem command Moshe and Aharon to show honor to the evil Pharaoh? Absolute truth would dictate that Pharaoh did not deserve honor, but relative truth required that he be honored. Honoring kings, whether or not they personally deserve honor, is necessary to preserve world order. Therefore, such honor is the "truth." Rashi himself notes this when he explains why Yaakov sat up in Yosef's presence. He writes (Bereishit 48:2): Yaakov said, "Although he is my son, he is a king, and I will do honor to him." >From this, Rashi continues, we may infer that we must show honor to a person of royal rank. Similarly, he concludes, Moshe showed honor to the king.

What is Rashi teaching? That although Yosef was Yaakov's son, and emet la'amitah dictated that Yaakov not honor him, nevertheless, Yosef was a king and Yaakov did honor him in order to preserve world order. Similarly, Moshe showed honor to Pharaoh.

For the same reason, Moshe and Aharon had to be told to treat Bnei Yisrael gently. As individuals, Moshe and Aharon certainly would have been gentle, but as teachers of Torah, emet la'amitah might require that they be unforgiving. No! said Hashem. Use simple emet! Be gentle!

R' Bloch continues: The above thoughts have serious ramifications when it comes to dealing with our less observant brethren. At first glance, these thoughts might dictate that we approach our brethren on their terms and not appeal to them with "absolute truth." However, says R' Bloch (after additional discussion), such an approach could be appropriate only vis-a-vis a Jew who is a "clean slate," one who is not yet in the grasp of heretical ideas. In contrast, to approach a Jew who is beset by heretical ideas with anything less than emet la'amitah / absolute truth would lend credence to his misguided ideas. Rather, we must approach him with emet la'amitah. Even if he will not be outwardly receptive, the Jewish spark within him will listen.

(Shiurei Da'at p.94)

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## **R' Avraham Dov Berish Flamm z"l**

Born 5564 (1804) - Died 24 Tevet 5633 (1873)

R' Flamm is considered to be the leading disciple of the famed Dubno Maggid, R' Yaakov Kranz z"l, although, in fact, the two never met. (The Dubno Maggid died in the year R' Flamm was born.) R' Flamm was, however, the leading student of the Maggid's/ preacher's fragmentary writings, and it was he, together with the Maggid's son, R' Yitzchak Kranz, who edited these and prepared them for publication.

R' Flamm was himself a popular maggid, and he held that post in several Polish and Lithuanian cities. (Until recent times, rabbis did not deliver weekly sermons. The rabbi's role was to rule on halachic questions and deliver two derashot a year, on Shabbat Hagadol and Shabbat Shuvah, and it fell to

the maggid to deliver lectures on ethics on a regular basis.) Also, besides publishing the Dubno Maggid's Ohel Yaakov and Sefer Hamiddot, R' Flamm wrote several works of his own. His Yeri'ot Ha'ohel and Sefat Ha'yeria were printed together with Ohel Yaakov, while his Shemen Ha'mor is a free-standing work. All of these works are intended to teach ethics and belief in the fundamentals of Judaism.

R' Flamm was born in Mezeritch, Poland where the Dubno Maggid also lived part of his life. (This is not the Ukrainian Mezeritch which is famous in chassidic history). He was a descendant of scholars including R' Avraham Abish Lissa of Frankfurt and Maharam of Padua. (Sources: Otzar Harabbanim No. 1017; the introductions to R' Flamm's works)

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