

IT'S AMAZING

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Bo

It's Amazing

Volume 26, No. 15

A midrash relates a parable regarding a princess who was rummaging amongst the stalks in the field in search of food until, one day, a king saw her and took her to his palace. Thereafter, the other women said to her in wonder, "Yesterday you were rummaging amongst the stalks, and today you are sitting in a royal carriage?!"

She replied, "Just as you are amazed, so I am amazed." Similarly, the midrash says, the nations of the world said to the Bnei Yisrael, "Yesterday you were slaves in Egypt and today you are the chosen people?!"

Bnei Yisrael replied, "Just as you are amazed, so we are amazed."

R' Yedayah Ha'penini z"l (died 1315) explains this midrash as follows: The amazement of the gentiles and of Bnei Yisrael was for different reasons. To the idolatrous nations who did not know Hashem and who attributed events to the stars or to nature, the ascent of Bnei Yisrael was truly beyond their understanding. A nation's rise from slavery, such as Bnei Yisrael experienced, was unnatural and unprecedented.

To Bnei Yisrael, who were aware of Hashem's abilities and who had learned from their ancestors that Hashem watches over Bnei Yisrael, the source of their amazement was different. Bnei Yisrael in Egypt were idolators, and they expected G-d to punish them for it. They were doubly amazed — not only did Hashem not punish them for their idolatry, He made them His chosen nation!

So, why were Bnei Yisrael redeemed? R' Yedayah writes that Bnei Yisrael failed to realize that the Exodus took place in the merit of the Patriarchs and because of Hashem's promise to the Patriarchs. Bnei Yisrael themselves really did not deserve to be redeemed.

Also, while Bnei Yisrael did not merit the redemption at that moment, G-d had great plans for them.

Hashem redeemed them from Egypt so they could be the means of revealing His Name in this world. (Peirush Tehilim, Ch.21)

"Please speak in the ears of the people; let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels." (11:2)

Rashi z"l writes, based on the Gemara (Berachot 9b): Hashem said, "Please instruct them regarding this so that that tzaddik Avraham will not say that I fulfilled (Bereishit 15:13), 'they will serve them, and they will oppress them,' but I did not fulfill (ibid. verse 14), 'they shall leave with great wealth'."

Many commentaries ask: Is this the only reason Hashem has to keep His promise--so that Avraham will not complain?

R' Zvi Pesach Frank z"l (1873-1960; Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim) answers in the name of R' Mordechai Sender Kopstein z"l (rabbi of Radin, the hometown of the Chafetz Chaim): The real booty that Hashem promised to give to Avraham's descendants was the booty they collected at the Yam Suf, which was many times greater than what they took with them from Egypt. Why, then, did He even bother giving them booty when they left Egypt? Because they did not know what would happen at the Yam Suf seven days after the Exodus. If He took them out of Egypt empty-handed, it would appear that He had not kept his promise. That is what He wanted to avoid by His instruction in our verse. (Har Zvi Ha'shalem Al Ha'Torah)

R' Pinchas Menachem Alter z"l (1926-1996; Gerrer Rebbe) offers another answer, and also answers a second question: Why does the midrash refer to the Patriarch as "that tzaddik Avraham"? He explains:

Commenting on the verse (Shmot 19:4), "You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me," the classic Aramaic translation known as Targum Yonatan ben Uziel states that, on the night of Pesach, Hashem miraculously transported Bnei Yisrael to the future site of the Bet Hamikdash to offer the korban Pesach. This was the first time they performed the mitzvah of aliyah l'regel / the festival pilgrimage, a mitzvah which our Sages say we were given in the merit of Avraham.

It turns out, then, that because Avraham was a tzaddik, there was an exodus before the Exodus. Hashem intended all along to give Bnei Yisrael riches at the "real" Exodus. However, He did not want there to be even the appearance that He did not keep His promise. Therefore, He asked Bnei Yisrael to please request gold and silver from their neighbors even before the first exodus. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Pnei Menachem)

"It is a Pesach offering to Hashem." (12:11)

Rashi explains that the name "Pesach" derives from the word "skipping." He writes: "For Hashem skipped over the houses of the Jews which were among the houses of the Egyptians. He jumped from Egyptian to Egyptian, and the Jew was in the middle. As for you, serve Him for the sake of Heaven."

What does Rashi's last comment mean and how is it related to his explanation of the word "Pesach"? R' Nosson David Rabinowitz z"l (1866-1930; maternal grandfather of the current Munkatcher Rebbe) explains as follows:

Sometimes a person witnesses a powerful event which inspires him to strengthen his service of Hashem. However, that is not the ideal. Rather, we should serve Hashem because, and only because, that is His will.

Moshe was concerned that the plague of the firstborn would have an undesirable effect on Bnei Yisrael. This is why, according to Rashi, Moshe instructed them: "As for you, do not serve Hashem because you will see Him skipping over your houses. Instead, serve Him for the sake of Heaven."

In this light, we can understand why the Korban Pesach is referred to (in verse 12:43) as a "chok" — a mitzvah whose reason is unknown. Although the Korban Pesach (whose blood was placed on the doorposts to identify a Jewish house) recalls the great miracle that Hashem performed and our gratitude to Him, that should not be our reason for performing the mitzvah. Rather, we should observe the mitzvah of Korban Pesach as if its reason is unknown to us.

The Torah tells us (12:50), "All of Bnei Yisrael did as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did." The Torah is informing us that Bnei Yisrael took Moshe's message to heart and sacrificed the Korban Pesach solely for the sake of the mitzvah. (Ve'eileh Ha'davarim She'ne'emru L'David p.101)

"Moshe said, 'So said Hashem - At about midnight I shall go out in the midst of Egypt'." (11:4)

"It was at midnight that Hashem smote every firstborn . . ." (12:29)

Rashi writes: Moshe said "about midnight," which implies near to it, either just before or just after it, and he did not say "at midnight" because he feared lest Pharaoh's astrologers might make a mistake as regards the time when the slaughter of the firstborn actually took place, thinking that it was a little earlier or later than midnight, and they would then say, in consequence of this error, "Moshe is a liar."

R' Moshe Sofer z"l (the Chatam Sofer; died 1840) offers the following explanation for why the astrologers were likely to mistake the time. Our Sages teach that all prophecy emanates from Eretz Yisrael. Thus, when G-d told Moshe, "at midnight," He meant midnight in Eretz Yisrael. However,

midnight arrives in Eretz Yisrael a few minutes before it arrives in Egypt. Thus, it was likely that the astrologers would note the wrong time. (Torat Moshe)

"They baked the dough that they took out of Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven from Egypt and they could not delay, nor had they made provisions for themselves . . ." (12:39)

R' Yitzchak Al-Achdab z"l (Spain and Sicily; late 14th-early 15th centuries) writes: Many commentaries write that, at this time, Bnei Yisrael were not yet commanded not to eat chametz for seven days. Therefore, after eating the korban Pesach with matzah, they began to bake bread. However, they were suddenly expelled from Egypt and their bread had no time to rise. In commemoration of this, we eat matzah for seven days.

However, he continues, this is difficult to accept, for if they wanted leavened bread and they were forced to eat matzah, why is that worth commemorating? Furthermore, although it is true that they were not yet commanded not to own chametz for seven days, they certainly were not permitted to bake chametz on the first day of Pesach!

Rather, he writes, after Bnei Yisrael finished eating their korban Pesach and matzah, they began baking matzah for the next day. Suddenly, however, G-d revealed Himself in Egypt and, in the ensuing uproar, which was followed by preparing to leave, Bnei Yisrael were unable to bake the dough which they had prepared. That dough should have risen during the night that followed and become chametz, but a miracle happened and it remained unleavened. It is to commemorate that miracle that we eat matzah for seven days. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Pesach Dorot p.112)

Letters from Our Sages

The letter below was written by R' Moshe Yehoshua Hager shlita (the Vizhnitzer Rebbe in Bnei Brak, Israel). It is printed in Igrot Kodesh no. 11.

19 Menachem Av 5745 [1985]

Much peace to you, my beloved students, dear young men, outstanding in Torah, chassidut, good deeds and service of Hashem. May Hashem, Who is good, lengthen your days and years, [and fill them] with good and pleasant things. After inquiring of your welfare,

Because you are planning to travel for Shabbat to the grave of the holy Tanna [sage of the Mishnah] Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (may his merit protect us and all of Israel) in order to rise in stature and feel the holiness of Shabbat on a high level, with a pure heart and joy that comes from holiness, with love, brotherhood and friendship--I very much wish I could be with you in your company, to rejoice

with you in songs and praises for the honor of His Name, may He be blessed. Pray for me there that I should merit to serve Hashem with awe, joy and love, with holiness and purity. Amen, may it be His will.

From the depths of my heart I ask of you to accept upon yourselves, bli neder, a demand to grow in all areas of Divine service. Regarding Torah study--accept upon yourselves to learn several consecutive hours without interrupting to speak about mundane matters. Regarding prayer--accustom yourselves not to speak from the beginning until the end of the prayers. Regarding good character traits and interpersonal relations--distance yourselves from falsehood as far as an archer can shoot [paraphrasing Bereishit 21:16], because the service of Hashem depends on this. Be very careful not to embarrass others, for that is a very serious matter. The purpose of life in this world is to rise to high levels, a little bit at a time, and to give pleasure to G-d, with love, awe and joy, in purity and keeping the body holy. Then you will merit to the blessing [quoted in the Gemara (Berachot 17a)], "May you see your world in your lifetime and may your end be in Olam Haba." [Rashi z"l explains the first phrase to mean, "May you have everything you need in this world."]

... I bless you from the depths of my heart that you will merit to study with great diligence, with desire and love, with holiness and purity and a feeling that your soul is being elevated, and may you feel the holiness of Shabbat in all 248 of your limbs; then it will be good for you in this world and the next. Amen, may it be His will.

These are the words of your friend, the one who loves you, who desires the best for you with my heart and soul, and who looks forward to the redemption of the nation of Yisrael and the building of the Bet Hamikdash speedily in our days.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. The low cost of sponsorship is \$36. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.