

EGYPT VS. SHABBAT

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Bo

Egypt vs. Shabbat

In this week's parashah, Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt. In the Aseret Ha'dibrot in Parashat Va'etchanan (Devarim 5:15) we read, "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem, your Elokim, took you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore Hashem, your Elokim, has commanded you to make the Shabbat day." In what way is Shabbat a reminder of the Exodus?

R' Ehud Rakovski-Avitzedek shlita (Yerushalayim) explains: Egyptians believed that the source of all blessings was the Nile, which was in their backyard, and that they needed no connection with an external source of blessing, i.e., with the Creator. Thus, Egypt is the antithesis of Shabbat, which testifies to the existence of a Creator.

He continues: Egyptians were involved with black magic, astrology, and other forces that conceal the identity of the only true power--Hashem. In contrast, when Moshe spoke to Pharaoh, he always referred to G-d by His "proper Name," Y-K-V-K (which we pronounce "Hashem"), not by the Name "Elokim," which refers to G-d as He appears through nature. [But Pharaoh replied (Shmot 5:2), "Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Israel!"]

Our Sages refer to Egypt as the "home of slaves." This means, R' Rakovski explains, that the Egyptians themselves were slaves--specifically, slaves to materialism. In contrast, Shabbat is the day of rest from materialism, a day of holiness. (Da'at Shabbat p.306)

"Hashem said to Moshe, 'Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn . . .'" (10:1)

R' Mordechai Leifer z"l (1824-1894; Nadvorna Rebbe) asks: How is, "for I have made his heart

stubborn," a reason for Moshe to go to Pharaoh? To the contrary, that would seem to be a reason not to go to Pharaoh!

He explains: Pharaoh considered himself to be a god (see Rashi to 7:15), and Hashem wished to show him that, not only was he not a god, he was but a pawn in Hashem's hands. Therefore, He said to Moshe, "Come to Pharaoh," and tell him that "I, G-d, have made his heart stubborn." Tell him that he had no say in the matter and was merely My pawn. (Divrei Mordechai)

"Pharaoh said to him, 'Go from me! Beware -- do not see my face any more, for on the day you see my face you shall die!'" (10:28)

R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852) writes: Hashem caused Pharaoh to say this shortly before the Exodus so that no one would think that Pharaoh allowed Bnei Yisrael to leave out of respect for Moshe. Similarly, Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to publicly slaughter lambs-- which the Egyptians venerated--so that the Egyptians would despise Bnei Yisrael. All of this, so that there would be no question that the Exodus occurred solely due to Hashem's might. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Yad Mitzrayim)

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

Rashi z"l writes: "The word 'na' is always an expression of entreaty. Here it means, 'I entreat you to admonish Bnei Yisrael about this, so Avraham will not say, "The prophecy (Bereishit 15:13), 'They shall serve them, and they shall afflict them,' He fulfilled, but the promise, 'And afterward they shall go forth with great wealth,' He did not keep.'" R' Shlomo Amar shlita (Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel) quotes his son, R' Y. Amar, as noting that Rashi has explained why Bnei Yisrael should be entreated. However, the verse implies that the entreaty was addressed to Moshe himself. Why?

R' Y. Amar explains: Halachah states that if a man says to a woman, "Be married to me with this ring on the condition that I will give you 200 zuz," the woman would be legally married even if she forgives the promised gift by saying, "It is as if I received it." Why? Because the real purpose of such a promise is for "harvachah" (loosely translated, "icing on the cake") and is not an integral part of the marriage transaction.

Here, Hashem was telling Moshe: Don't think mistakenly that My promise that Bnei Yisrael will leave Egypt with great wealth was for harvachah, in which case you will present it to Bnei Yisrael as being optional. Rather, *please* understand that leaving Egypt with great wealth was

an integral part of My promise to Avraham. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Mi'yamim Yamimah p.113)

"Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt, saying, 'This month shall be for you the beginning of the months . . .'" (12:1)

Why was the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon given to Moshe and Aharon together, rather than to Moshe alone, as were most of the mitzvot?

R' Kalman Winter z"l (rabbi of Southeast Hebrew Congregation-Knesset Yehoshua in Silver Spring, Maryland; passed away 8 Marcheshvan of this year) explained: The moon was the first creation to act jealously, i.e., when it [or its guardian angel] challenged G-d's decision to create two luminaries in the heavens (see Chullin 60b; Rashi to Bereishit 1:16). In contrast, though Aharon was older than Moshe and experienced prophecy before Moshe did, he greeted Moshe with truly heartfelt happiness upon learning that the latter had been chosen to lead Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt (see Shmot 4:14). Because of this contrast, it was fitting that the commandment to sanctify the new moon be taught to Aharon along with Moshe. (Heard from R' Winter z"l)

"Moshe called to all the elders of Yisrael and said to them, 'Mishchu / Draw forth or u'kechu / buy for yourselves one of the flock for your families, and slaughter the Pesach-offering'." (12:21)

The words "mishchu u'kechu" literally mean, "Pull and take." The midrash records that the Sages offered two explanations for this phrase. Rabbi Yose Ha'Glili says, "Pull yourselves away from idolatry--the lamb being an object of veneration for the Egyptians--and take mitzvot," while Rabbi Yishmael says, "From here we learn that one can join a partnership for the Pesach-offering ('take') and withdraw from it ('pull away') until the time it is slaughtered."

R' Raphael Hamburger z"l (1722-1803; rabbi of Altona-Hamburg-Wandsbeck, Germany) writes: It is unusual for two Sages to argue about the meaning of a verse, with one giving it a halachic meaning and the other giving it an aggadic / moralistic meaning. In reality, though, these two interpretations not only are complementary, they are saying the same thing. He explains:

R' Yose Ha'Glili agrees with the halachah that one can join a partnership for the Pesach-offering and withdraw from it until the time it is slaughtered. However, he was bothered by the wording of the verse; since one cannot withdraw from a partnership unless one has first joined that partnership, the verse should have said the opposite of what it actually says, i.e., "kechu u'mishchu" / "Take" first, and only afterward, "pull away." Therefore, R' Yose Ha'Glili explains the

verse as incorporating a command to "pull away" from idolatry by setting aside a lamb for slaughter. Indeed, since every one of Bnei Yisrael had an obligation to take a lamb in order to distance himself from idolatry, there seemingly could have been no partnerships that first year.

R' Hamburger continues: The above demonstrates the unity of halachah / the legal part of the Torah, on the one hand, and aggadata, the non-legal, philosophical and moralistic teachings of the Torah, on the other hand, though each has a separate role. Halachah relates to yir'ah / fear of G-d, for one fears that he will not fulfill his legal duty, while aggadata relates to ahavah / love of G-d, for it teaches man to appreciate G-d and the world. (Da'at Kedoshim: Introduction)

Letters from Our Sages

The letter below was written by R' Yechezkel Levenstein z"l (1895-1974). Reb Chatzkel, as he is popularly known, was mashgiach ruchani of the Mir yeshiva in pre-war Poland and in Shanghai, China during World War II. After the Holocaust, he lived briefly in New York and then settled in Yerushalayim. In later years, he served as mashgiach ruchani of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. This letter is printed in Ohr Yechezkel: Michtavim, no. 20. (Another section of this letter appeared in Hamaayan two weeks ago.) Reb Chatzkel was particularly renowned for mining the story of the Exodus for lessons in morality and emunah / faith, as this letter demonstrates.

... These parshiyot--Shmot, Va'era, Bo, Beshalach--teach us to know the ways of the yetzer hara. On the verse (7:3), "I shall harden Pharaoh's heart," Ramban z"l explains that Pharaoh did not want to free Bnei Yisrael under any circumstances. He said he would release Bnei Yisrael only because he no longer had the strength to tolerate the plagues and he wished to free himself from the terrible suffering they caused. Therefore, Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart during the last five plagues so that he could tolerate them and, as a result, he did not send out Bnei Yisrael. That was his desire all along--not to subjugate himself to G-d. [Until here is a summary of Ramban's words. Reb Chatzkel continues:] We asked: What is all the fuss about? If he had sent Bnei Yisrael out because of his suffering, would he not have been like one who performs a mitzvah shelo lishmah / not with proper intention! . . . Don't our Sages say that one should always perform mitzvot shelo lishmah because, in this way, he eventually will perform them lishmah / with proper intention? The answer is that our Sages legitimized performing mitzvot shelo lishmah only by a person whose ultimate goal is to arrive eventually at a state of lishmah. Pharaoh was not aware of such a path and, truly, had no such desire. This is evident from the verse where Moshe and Aharon said to him (5:1), "So said Hashem, Elokim of Yisrael, 'Send out My people . . .'," and Pharaoh responded, "Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice to send out Yisrael? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Yisrael!" This means that even if he had known who Hashem is, he still would have had no intention of sending out Bnei

Yisrael. He didn't want to subjugate himself to G-d and to choose truth and right. Therefore, he never came to see the truth or to choose right. The Torah is showing us that all of the signs and the wonders had no impact and brought him no closer to the truth, and he remained the wicked Pharaoh that he was before.

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 **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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