

WHAT IS FREEDOM?

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R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) observes: The most amazing thing about the Exodus, far greater than the signs and the wonders, is the transformation that occurred to a nation of slaves. Slaves do not understand the idea of obeying laws when no taskmaster threatens them. Therefore, why would a slave obey the commands in our parashah such as matzah, such as korban Pesach, such as "You shall not break a bone of it," or such as "You may not leave over any of it until morning" if no taskmaster is threatening?

The Sages applied to the generation of the Exodus the verse (Yechezkel 16:7), "You have increased and grown great . . . yet you are naked and bare." The midrash explains: The generation was naked of commandments. [R' Soloveitchik continues:] Their life was a naked one, controlled by lusts and desires. And then there occurred the greatest miracle of all: "Bnei Yisrael went and did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon, so did they do." The slaves suddenly felt the duty of commandments, the power of a life devoted to higher ideas and goals. They understood what it means to possess spiritual ideals and what it means to enter into a covenant with the Almighty. Suddenly, they stood "hedged with roses" [a term used by the Sages to refer to the laws of family purity, which are kept in private and which no authority could possibly enforce. These laws are in contrast to the lust-filled life of a person who recognizes no laws]. No one threatened them with batons, no taskmasters ran around shouting at them. They could have trampled everything, the roses and the glorious flower bed. But, suddenly, they beheld the power and beauty of the roses. This transformation was a hidden miracle of great import. The Jews were able to distinguish between sacred and profane. (Festival of Freedom p. 72-73)

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

The Gemara (Berachot 9a) notes Hashem's use of the word, "Please," and explains that Hashem said to Moshe: Please tell them to ask the Egyptians for silver and gold utensils so that the Tzaddik

[Avraham] will not say, "You kept the part of Your word that said, 'They will serve them and they will oppress them,' but You did not keep the part of Your word that said, 'Afterwards they will leave with great wealth.'" [Until here from the Gemara]

R' Elazar Fleckles z"l (1754-1826; rabbi of Prague) writes: All the commentaries, old and new, ask why Hashem should have to beg Bnei Yisrael to do something that is for their own good? [Just tell them that it's okay to ask the Egyptians for gifts, and they will ask!] Also, why mention what Avraham might say, implying that otherwise Hashem would not have to keep His word?!

R' Fleckles answers, quoting "My son-in-law, my beloved friend, the great light, who is sharp and renowned, R' Itzik Spitz": Hashem could have caused the Egyptians to offer Bnei Yisrael gifts, or He could have caused the Egyptians to throw their valuables into the streets and public places, from which Bnei Yisrael then could have gathered them. However, human nature is that Bnei Yisrael would quickly become bored of that wealth and would soon start yearning for more. They would not feel like they received the "great wealth" that Hashem promised Avraham. Therefore, Hashem told them to "request"--the same Hebrew word means "to borrow"--wealth. Since they would not feel that it was theirs to keep, they would not get tired of having it. (Later, they would keep it as payment for their years of servitude. See Sanhedrin 91a.)

Regarding the second question--of course Hashem keeps His word, and not just because of what Avraham might say! The question was what form the fulfillment of Hashem's promise would take, and Hashem's "concern," so-to-speak, was that Avraham would complain: "You gave my children wealth, but they tired of it, so they feel as if you kept one promise but not the other." Therefore Hashem said to Moshe, "Please help bring about the fulfillment of the promise in this specific way so that they will enjoy what they receive."

Alternatively, R' Fleckles writes: Hashem said to Avraham (Bereishit 15:13-14), "Know with certainty that your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own, they will serve them, and they will oppress them for four hundred years. And also the nation that they shall serve, I shall judge, and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth." The phrase, "And also the nation they shall serve I shall judge" seems to be talking about a nation other than the one that will oppress Avraham's descendants. Hashem meant: At the End of Days, I will judge all nations that have oppressed the Jewish People. The promise, "Afterwards they shall leave with great wealth" also is referring to the End of Days. Nevertheless, in order that no one have any complaints, Hashem asked Moshe's "help" in seeing that the promise would be fulfilled at the Exodus from Egypt as well. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ma'aseh B'Rabbi Elazar)

"He [Moshe] left Pharaoh's presence in a burning anger." (11:8)

Why was Moshe angry? Rashi z"l comments: Because Pharaoh had said to him (Shmot 10:28), 'Do not see my face again'."

R' Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich z"l Hy"d (1863-1944; rabbi of Simleu, Romania) asks: According to Rashi's explanation, why is Moshe's anger recorded here? Pharaoh's command was several verses earlier, as was Moshe's response (10:29), "You have spoken correctly. I shall never see your face again." Why didn't the Torah record there, "Moshe responded angrily . . ." ? Also, we read even earlier (10:11) that Moshe was driven out of Pharaoh's presence; why wasn't Moshe angry then? [See below]

If not for Rashi's explanation, writes R' Ehrenreich, I would have explained Moshe's anger differently. Commentaries note that Hashem generally spoke to Moshe outside of the city, away from the Egyptians' idolatry. Now, because Pharaoh ordered that Moshe never appear before him again, Moshe had to receive the prophecy about the next (and last) plague right there in Pharaoh's palace, amidst all his idols. That is what angered Moshe now, i.e., the fact that Hashem had to appear to him in such a place. When that prophecy was over, Moshe left in anger over this insult to Hashem. (Tiyul Ba'pardes, Aleph #2)

What would Rashi respond to the above questions, i.e., why is Moshe's anger recorded only now?

R' Eliyahu Mizrahi z"l (Ottoman Empire; approximately 1455-1525) explains: Moshe had a mission to perform, i.e., informing Pharaoh about the upcoming Plague of the Firstborn. In order to fulfill his mission effectively, Moshe had to conceal his anger until he was leaving Pharaoh's presence. (Sefer ha-Mizrahi)

How could Moshe say, "You have spoken correctly. I shall never see your face again," when, in fact, he did see him again?

Rashi comments: "You have spoken rightly, and in its proper time you have spoken, for it is true that I will not see your face again."

R' Meir Binyamin Menachem Danon z"l (Yerushalayim; mid-19th century) explains: Moshe meant, "Your timing in giving this order is correct, for I have no need to see your face ever again. There will be one last plague and then my business with you will be finished forever." (Be'er Ba'sadeh)

R' Levi ben Gershon z"l (Ralbag, Provence; 1288-1344) writes: One of the purposes of this account is to inform us of Moshe Rabbeinu's courage, speaking harshly to Pharaoh at G-d's command without fear of harm. This, adds Ralbag, is a trait befitting every prophet.

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

"An unblemished lamb or kid, a male, within its first year shall it be for you; from the sheep or goats shall you take it. It shall be yours for examination until the fourteenth day of this month; the entire congregation of the assembly of Yisrael shall slaughter it in the afternoon." (12:5-6)

The following are selected laws of the Pesach offering from Mishneh Torah: Hilchot Korban Pesach, chapter 1, by Rambam z"l:

(3) The Pesach offering is slaughtered only in the Azarah / Temple Courtyard like other sacrifices. Even in those historical periods when private altars were permitted by Halachah, the Korban Pesach could not be offered on a private altar, but only on the central public altar.

(9) The Pesach offering is slaughtered in three groups, as we read (above), "The entire congregation of the assembly of Yisrael shall slaughter it in the afternoon"--"Congregation" is one group, "Assembly" is a second group, and "Yisrael" is a third group. There had to be no fewer than thirty people in a group.

(10) If only fifty people came, in total, thirty would enter the Azarah and slaughter their sacrifices, ten would leave and another ten would enter, and, again, ten would leave and ten would enter. If it ever happened that fewer than fifty people came, the Pesach should not be slaughtered.

(11) The first group would enter the Azarah until it was full; then the doors were locked. As long as the Shechitah and offering continued, the recitation of Hallel took place as well.

(12) With each repetition of Hallel, the Shofar was blown.

The Gemara (Pesachim 64b) records that once, during the Second Temple Era, King Agrippas wanted to know how many Jews there were. He told the Kohen Gadol, "Take note of the Pesach offerings!" The Kohen Gadol then took one kidney from each Pesach offering that was brought. When the kidneys were counted, they were found to number 1.2 million. And, every Korban Pesach was shared by at least ten people. These figures do not account, notes the Gemara, for those who did not participate because they were Tamei / ritually impure or far away. That Pesach, the Gemara concludes, was referred to as the "Thick--i.e., crowded--Pesach."