

SUBCONSCIOUSLY

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Last week's Parashah ended with Moshe Rabbeinu seeming to complain to Hashem: "My Master, why have You done bad to this people, why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he did bad to this people, but You have not rescued Your people." This week's Parashah then opens: "Elokim spoke to Moshe." Commenting on the use of the Divine Name "Elokim," which refers to Hashem's Attribute of Justice, Rashi z"l writes: "He took Moshe to task because he had spoken so critically."

R' Ben Zion Neshet shlita (one of the senior rabbis in Tel Aviv, Israel) writes in the name of R' Nosson Zvi Finkel z"l (1849-1927; the Alter of Slabodka): G-d forbid one say that Moshe, about whom Hashem said (Bamidbar 12:7), "In My entire house, he is the trusted one," would speak critically of G-d. Rather, Moshe Rabbeinu heard Bnei Yisrael complaining that things had gotten worse since he went to Pharaoh, and, subconsciously, that complaint influenced the tone of Moshe's words. In fact, Moshe meant his words as a plea for Hashem's mercy, not as a complaint.

R' Neshet notes that this incident illustrates the power that a person's environment has to influence him subconsciously. There is another example in last week's Parashah (2:21): "Moshe swore to dwell with the man [Yitro]; and he gave his daughter Tziporah to Moshe." A Midrash states that Moshe swore, as a condition of being allowed to marry Tziporah, that his firstborn son would be a priest for Avodah Zarah / idolatry. Of course, explains R' Eliyahu Dessler z"l (1892-1953; Lithuania, England, Eretz Yisrael), Moshe never uttered such an oath. Rather, his willingness to live in a place such as Midian, with its negative subconscious influences, was equivalent to be willing to give-up his firstborn to idolatry. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Shir Tziyon p.72)

The Torah teaches that the purpose of the Plagues in Egypt was not only to punish the Egyptians, but also to teach both the Egyptians and Bnei Yisrael about Hashem's existence and His power. R' Moshe Chagiz z"l (1671-1750; Yerushalayim and Amsterdam) notes that many articles of faith can be learned from the Parashot dealing with our slavery in Egypt and the Exodus. These include:

1. Hashem exists, as is written (6:2), "I am Hashem."
2. Hashem is Echad / unique, as is written (9:14), "So that you shall know that there is none like Me in all the world."
3. Hashgachah, i.e., that Hashem pays attention to individual beings, as is written (8:18), "I am Hashem in the midst of the land."
4. Hashem rewards and punishes [as each person deserves], as is written (11:7), "So that you shall know that Hashem will have differentiated between Egypt and Yisrael."
5. Hashem speaks to mankind through prophets that He sends as His messengers, as is written (3:10), "Now, go and I shall dispatch you to Pharaoh."
6. The prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu was on a higher level than that of other prophets, as is written (7:1), "Aharon your brother shall be your spokesman," i.e., not on the same level as you (Moshe).
7. Hashem brings about miracles and wonders as He pleases, which is absolute proof that He created the world. All of the plagues demonstrate this, for He changed every aspect of nature – land and sea and everything in them -- at His Will. From this it follows, as well, that He preceded everything, which means He always existed.
8. Hashem knows the future and what is in people's hearts, as is written (3:19), "I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go." (As an aside, R' Chagiz writes that this verse addresses the much-discussed apparent paradox between "Yedi'ah" / Hashem's knowledge of the future and "Bechirah" / man's free will. The verse states, "I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go, v'lo [usually translated, 'except through'] a strong hand," i.e., Hashem's "strong arm." However, the verse may be translated, "I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go, but there is no strong hand," i.e., even though I know what choice Pharaoh will make, that does not compel his choice.)
9. Every person has the free will to be righteous like Moshe or wicked like Pharaoh, as is written (7:13), "The heart of Pharaoh was strong." Even though Pharaoh saw clear evidence that Hashem had sent Moshe, he still was able to choose wickedness.
10. Hashem hears the cries of the poor and oppressed, as is written (6:5), "Also, I have heard the groan of Bnei Yisrael." – Continued –
11. Hashem will redeem us in the future at the hand of a prophet as He did in Egypt, as is written (3:14), "I Shall Be As I Shall Be." [As I am with them in this exile and will redeem them, so I will be with them in future exiles and will redeem them.] In addition, the entire account of the Exodus gives us hope and confidence.

12. A person should not attribute events to chance; rather, when things happen to him, he should repent, as even Pharaoh eventually did, confessing (9:27), "Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones."
13. All creations do Hashem's bidding, and He can use even the smallest of them as His agent, as is evident from the Plagues.
14. One must give his life in Hashem's service [as the frogs did].
15. Hashem does not desire the death of the wicked, but rather that they repent, as is evident from the repeated warnings Pharaoh was given.
16. Hashem takes away life and gives it back, as happened to the snake which turned into a stick and back into a snake.
17. The Torah is of Divine origin, as is written (3:12), "You will serve Elokim on this mountain," i.e., Har Sinai.
18. Hashem despises evil, as is written (3:7), "I have indeed seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt, and I have heard its outcry because of its taskmasters."

R' Chagiz concludes: Because of all of these lessons, it is Hashem's desire that we remember all of the wonders that He did in Egypt, and it is our duty to do so every day. (Eileh Ha'mitzvot No.21)

"I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand [i.e., swore] to give it to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov; and I shall give it to you as a Morashah / legacy--I am Hashem." (6:8)

R' Shmuel Yehuda Katznellenbogen z"l (1521-1597; rabbi of Venice, Italy) writes: There is a difference between the word "Morashah" / legacy and "Yerushah" / inheritance, namely that one receives an inheritance, while he leaves a legacy. It follows that, in this verse, Hashem hinted to Moshe Rabbeinu that the generation of the Exodus would not enter Eretz Yisrael. They would never inherit the Land; they would only leave their rights to it as a legacy for their descendants.

R' Katznellenbogen continues: The word Morashah also appears in the verse (Devarim 33:4), "Moshe commanded us the Torah, a Morashah for the Congregation of Yaakov." This indicates that we are commanded to pass on the Torah to our children as a legacy. (Derashot Maharam Mintz no.1)

The Bet Hamikdash

"Whoever never saw Herod's building [i.e., the Bet Hamikdash] has never seen a beautiful building in his life. How was it built? Rabbah says, 'With green marble and white marble.' Some say, 'With blue, green and white marble.' Herod wanted to coat the surfaces with gold, but the Sages told him, 'This way is nicer, for it is reminiscent of the waves of the sea'." (Bava Batra 4a)

What is the significance of the fact that the patterns on the stones of the Bet Hamikdash looked like

the waves of the sea?

R' Shmuel Eliezer Eidels z"l (Maharsha; 1555-1631) explains: The Gemara (Chullin 89a) teaches that the reason for wearing Techeilet / strings dyed a certain shade of blue in our Tzitzit, rather than some other color, is that Techeilet is reminiscent of the color of the sea, which is reminiscent of the color of the heavens, which reminds a person of the Heavenly "throne." This, writes Maharsha, reminds us of the unity of all of Creation--the lower worlds (represented by the sea), the upper worlds (represented by the heavens), and the spiritual worlds (represented by Hashem's throne). Sinning breaks the connection between the physical and spiritual worlds, but wearing Tzitzit reminds us not to sin, as the Torah states (Bemidbar 15:39), "It shall constitute Tzitzit for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them; and not explore after your heart and after your eyes, after which you stray."

Perhaps, writes Maharsha, the Sages in Herod's time saw the wave pattern on the Temple's walls as serving the same purpose. (Chiddushei Aggadot: Bava Batra 4a and Chullin 89a)

R' Avigdor Miller z"l (1908-2001) offers another explanation: Just as waves seem to want to rise higher, so the Jewish People, when they visit the Bet Hamikdash, aspire to rise higher. (Quoted in Lekket Perushei Aggadah: B.B. 4a)