

# HOW SHABBOS BRINGS REDEMPTION

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

## How Shabbos Brings Redemption<sup>1</sup>

The first scenes in the drama of our redemption from Egypt all took place on Shabbos. Moshe, a medrash<sup>2</sup> tells us, negotiated a day of rest for his people. "Work a slave incessantly, without any respite, and you kill him," he told Paroh. Paroh relented, and allowed them Shabbos to regain their strength. Another medrash speaks of old scrolls the Jews had preserved, which told of a promised redemption by G-d. Reading them refreshed them, gave them joy. It was on Shabbos, of course, during their time away from their toil, that they were able to turn to these scrolls. In this very concrete example of the role Shabbos played in a nascent redemption, we have just a hint of the fuller meaning of what Chazal tell us:<sup>3</sup> "Yisrael is redeemed only in the merit of Shabbos."

*Geulah* rises from the deepest descent into *galus*. Understanding the nature of *galus* will therefore help us understand how *geulah* addresses it, and how Shabbos helps bring it about.

Kabbalistically, *galus* is the unavailability of *Daas*<sup>4</sup>. Practically, this means that deficiencies in *emunah* and/or *kedushah* bring about *galus*, since they perforce must diminish the effects of *Daas*. *Toldos Yaakov Yosef* cites the *Besht* as pinpointing the cause of the Egyptian *galus*: they lacked the realization that HKBH creates the world anew each day. In other words, a deficiency not in basic *emunah*, but in clarity and precision of *emunah*, created the space for *galus*. *Geulah*, in turn, addressed that deficiency and vividly displayed to the Jews the nature of His Providence, and His role as not only Creator but engineer and orchestrator of all phenomena. The ten *sefiros*, through which *hashgachah* wends a path from His Will to concrete activity, each have a countervailing *kelipah*, which obscures the presence Hashem. The ten *makos* challenged and opposed the ten "anti-*sefiros*," breaking their power, weakening their obscuring stranglehold over our conception of Divinity. (This, of course, is what *detza"ch ada"sh* and *b'achav* are about. They point to a progressive campaign to evince the role of Providence in all things. The first set dealt with things below ground, the next with things that dwell on earth, and the last with things above ground. Each set is linked in the Torah to some declaration by the Egyptians, or some goal described by Hashem, that prominently uses some form of the word "*daas*."

By the time all the *makos* had run their course, there was very little room left for doubt or opposition. Paroh, it is true, remained a hold-out. This only evidences the loftiness of *emunah*. Just as *emunah*

comes from a higher place, so does the ability to hide from it, to oppose it. Paroh was able to persist only because of Divine assistance, which offered him a capacity to deny. This capacity was not native to him nor within his ordinary grasp; like some levels of *emunah*, his counter-*emunah*, his radical unbelief in the face of the obvious went beyond *teva*. (Even Paroh had his moment of clear belief, but not till the crossing of the Sea.) Within all this we recognize how far-reaching and insidious are the effects of the *sitra achra*, reaching to every nook and cranny of *emunah*!

Our escape from Egypt began with the ten *makos*, or began with an infusion of *emunah*. The refrain is repeated several times in the narrative: "the nation believed,"<sup>5</sup> "they believed in Hashem and Moshe His servant."<sup>6</sup> The *makos* created and reinforced belief, belief that took hold of them on three levels - belief in the mind, belief in the heart, and belief that saturates a person's very limbs.

Similarly, the other great component of *Daas - kedushah*<sup>7</sup> - operates on three levels - *kedushah* experienced intellectually, emotionally, and taking hold of a person's entire body.

It is easy to see how extraordinarily important Shabbos is to *geulah*. Shabbos, of course, is an experiential affirmation of *emunah*, particularly Hashem's creation of everything in six days. It is also a living font of *kedushah*. *Reishis Chochmah* posits that we draw upon ourselves all aspects of *kedushah* from Shabbos. This is alluded to in the verse, "And Hashem blessed the seventh day and sanctified it," i.e. the blessing is the sanctity that we find in it and draw from it.

It does not end there. If we are correct that the short definition of *galus* is the removal from us of *Daas*, Shabbos is clearly the necessary corrective. "It is a sign between Me and you so that you will **know** that I am Hashem Who sanctifies you."<sup>8</sup> This knowledge is synonymous with *deveikus*; Shabbos offers us the highest levels of *deveikus* we can experience. When we take advantage of them, when we taste of the level of "And you shall cling to Him,"<sup>9</sup> - which is the goal of all Torah and mitzvos - we bring *geulah* to the world, whose ultimate definition is full *deveikus* with Him.

We can come at it from a different direction as well. Curiously, Chazal find an allusion to the four exiles in the second verse of Chumash. We are accustomed to seeing *galus* as a consequence of sin; they see it woven into the fabric of Creation.

The Ari opined that *galus* came about because of a deficiency in *zarecha* - the lives of Avraham's descendents. Chazal, however, seem to distance themselves from this. They argue<sup>10</sup> that not a single Jew in Egypt was lost to licentious behavior.

The resolution is simple and straightforward. The Jews were not involved in what we would term *aveirah*. They were still deficient. Their deficiency lodged in the vast area between mitzvah and *aveirah* - in dealing with the permissible. We are told "Sanctify yourself in what is permissible to you."<sup>11</sup> A constant theme of our lives must be to take of the permissible things of this world in a

different manner than others do. It is true that the Torah does not specify consequences and retribution for failure in this area. This is because rank *aveirah* damages body and soul, and must be dealt with explicitly. Deficiency in *kedushah* in this area does not inflict damage upon the person, but it does mar the soul. *Galus* comes about not necessarily because of out-and-out sin, but because Jewish souls require a purging of the harm inflicted by improper indulgence in the realm of the permissible.

Shabbos offers an escape from the quagmire of spiritual mediocrity. It offers an opportunity for a person to renew himself as a different being through his "Shabbos *neshamah*." When his ordinary soul loses its spiritual luster through becoming comfortable and mired in the material, the Shabbos *neshamah* gives him an opportunity to link more significantly with G-d.

Shabbos provides for the individual the identical promise it holds for the nation in need of redemption. No *galus* is worse than that of the individual held captive to his own *yetzer hora*. Such a person needs nothing less than redemption; that redemption begins with Shabbos, just as the national one. In Kiddush, we refer to Shabbos as *techilah l'mikra-ei kodesh*.<sup>12</sup> The Rebbe of Kobrin rendered this "the beginning for those called to *kedushah*." One who responds to an inner urge to seek *kedushah* must begin with Shabbos, and use its special *neshamah* as a vehicle to repair his damaged relationships with all things, even with permissible things.

Shabbos brings *geulah*. It brings a person to a place where he can once again feel a closeness to Hashem. The chief *avodah* of Shabbos is to return<sup>13</sup> to a position of *deveikus*. The affairs of the rest of the week plunge a person into so many activities that are experienced as unrelated to G-d. These activities therefore sever some of the bond between him and Hashem. Shabbos restores the love between him and His Creator.

<sup>1</sup> Based on Nesivos Shalom pgs.65-69

<sup>2</sup> Shemos Rabbah 1:28

<sup>3</sup> Vayikra Rabbah 1:3

<sup>4</sup> The Rebbe refers (explicitly!) to the sefirah of daas; the word should not be simply translated as "understanding." He specifically points to daas as one of the mochin - the "mentalities" - the "upper" sefiros that describe processes "internal" to G-d, rather than externally manifested.

<sup>5</sup> Shemos 4:31

<sup>6</sup> Shemos 14:31

<sup>7</sup> This likely means that Daas cannot flow to a person whose conduct is far removed from the intrinsic holiness of its Source

<sup>8</sup> Shemos 31:13

<sup>9</sup> Devarim 10:20

<sup>10</sup> Vayikra Rabbah 32:5

<sup>11</sup> Yevamos 20A

<sup>12</sup> Lit. the first of the holy convocations, or "called-upon days."

<sup>13</sup> The words "return" and "Shabbos" are related

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