

Passover 5764

This weeks double issue includes many Passover-related articles written over the years, and specially compiled to assist in your Seder discussions. The next issue of the JewishTimes will be on April 23rd. During our break, feel free to download previous issues. We wish all of you a happy Passover.



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the Significance *of* Bread

Ramses: Pharaoh during Moses' era?



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

When studying Passover in chapter XII in Exodus, we note its distinction from the other holidays. Passover was celebrated in Egypt - there were commands even before the giving of the Torah. Today, we reenact those commands in the form of the shank bone, the matza, the bitter herbs, and other laws. Succos and Shavuos are commemorations of God's kindness to us. Passover is as well, but it differs from the other holidays with our pre-Torah, Passover observance in Egypt. Additionally, our adherence to God's commands in Egypt contributed to the holiday's structure. There is only one Succos holiday and one Shavuos. But there are two Passovers; the Passover of Egypt, and all subsequent Passovers. What may we learn from its distinction from the other two holidays? What differences exist between these the Passover of Egypt, and our Passover?

Reading the Haggada, we note a conflict in the identity of the matza. The Haggada commences by describing the matza as "lachma anya", poor man's bread. The Jews were fed this during their Egyptian bondage. However, later on, the Haggada, quoting the Talmud (Pesachim 116b) says that

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Weekly Parsha

Tzav

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And the Kohen shall put on his linen vestments and the linen pants he shall wear over flesh. And he shall lift the ashes of the burnt offering, consumed by the fire, that are on the altar. And he shall place them by the altar.” (VaYikra 6:3)

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Passover

the Significance of Bread



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

matza is commanded in memory of the dough which did not rise due to the Egyptians swift, panic-stricken oust of the Jews. We are obligated by Torah law to recall God's swift salvation by eating the matza. The Jews were ousted from the Egyptian city Raamses, and arrived at Succot. When the Jews arrived, they were only able to bake that dough into matza, not bread. The matza serves as a barometer of the speed by which God freed the Jews. Was this matza part of God's orchestrated events? Did God desire this barometer in the form of matza?

We should note at this point that the Jews in Egypt observed only one day of Passover, according to Rabbi Yossi HaGalili in the Jerusalem Talmud 14a. The Torah laws describing those Jews' obligation also appear to exclude any restriction of eating leaven. Certainly on the morrow of the Paschal Lamb the Jews were permitted in leaven. Rabbeinu Nissim comments that it was only due to the rush of the Egyptians that their loaves were retarded in their leavening process. Had the Egyptians not rushed them, the Jews would have created bread. There was no law not to have bread at that point.

But for which reason are we "commanded" in matza? The Haggada text clearly states it is based on the dough which did not rise during the Exodus. This matza demonstrates salvation, the focus of the Passover holiday. This poses a serious problem: Not only do later generations have the command of eating matza, but the Jews in Egypt were also commanded in eating the Lamb with matza, (and maror). If while still in Egypt, when there was yet no 'swift salvation', why were those Jews commanded in this matza? How can Jews in Egypt, not yet redeemed, commemorate a Redemption which did not yet happen? (It is true, the Jews ate matza while slaves. However, the Haggada says the "command" of eating matza was only due to the speedy salvation. This implies the Jews in Egypt who also had the command of matza, were obligated for the same reason, which is incomprehensible.)

The Torah spends much time discussing the dough, and oddly, also refers to it in the singular, (Exod., 12:34), "And the people lifted up HIS loaf before it had risen, ...", "And they baked THE loaf..." (Exod., 12:39) Why this singular reference to numerous loaves? Why so much discussion about the loaf?

Lastly, Rashi praises the Jews for not taking any provisions when they left: (Exod., 12:39) "And they baked the loaf they took out of Egypt into cakes of matza, because it did not leaven, because they were driven from Egypt, and they could not tarry, and also provisions they did not make for themselves." Rashi says the fact they did not take provisions demonstrated their trust that God would provide. If so, why in the very same verse, did the Jews bake the dough? This implies the exact opposite of Rashi's intent, that the Jews did in fact distrust God. It is startling that a contradiction to Rashi is derived from the every same verse. It is also quite interesting why the Jews were making dough at this point, while in Egypt.

In order to answer these questions, I feel it is essential to get some background. The Egyptians originated bread. Certainly, as they tortured the Jews, the Egyptian taskmasters ate their bread, as their Jewish slaves gaped with open mouths, breaking their own teeth on matza, or "poor man's bread".

The title of "poor man's bread" is a relative term - "poor" is always in comparison to something richer. "Poor man's bread" teaches that there was a "richer bread" in Egypt - real bread. The Egyptians enjoyed real bread, while they fed their Jewish slaves matza.

Let us now understand Rashi's comment. He said the Jews were praiseworthy as they did not take food with them upon their exodus, thereby displaying a trust in God's ability to provide them with food. But we noted that in the very same verse where Rashi derives a praise for the Jews who Rashi said took no food, it clearly states they in fact took the loaves! Rashi's source seems internally contradictory.

I would suggest that a new attitude prevailed among the Jews. I do not feel the Jews took that loaf from Egypt for the purpose of consumption. This is Rashi's point. The Jews took the loaf because of what it represented - 'freedom'. They were fed matza for the duration of their bondage. They were now free. They cherished this freedom and longed to embody it in expression. Making bread - instead of dry, poor man's matza - was this expression of freedom. They now wished to be like their previous taskmasters, 'bread eaters'. A free people. Baking and eating bread was the very distinction between slave and master in Egypt. The Jews wished to shed their identity as slaves and don an image of a free people. Baking and eating bread would achieve this. To further prove that the Jews valued such an identification with the free Egyptians, Rashi comments that when the Jews despoiled the Egyptians of their silver, gold and clothing, at Moses command, they valued the Egyptian clothing over the silver and gold. (Exodus 12:35)

However, the Jews had the wrong idea. Their new found freedom was not unrestricted. They were freed - but for a new purpose; following God. Had they been allowed to indulge freedom unrestrained, expressed by eating leavened bread, this would corrupt God's plan that they serve Him. Freedom, and servitude to God, are mutually exclusive. God therefore did not allow the dough to rise. They trusted God, they saw all the miracles. They needed no food for their journey as God would provide. But they took the dough in hopes of making that "free man's food", leavened bread. The cakes of dough were not taken for subsistence, but to symbolize their freedom. They hoped upon reaching their destination, to bake bread, expressing their own idea of freedom. But the verse says the dough only became matza, not their intended end-product. Matza was a mere result of a hurried exodus. They planned to bake bread, but it ended up matza. The Torah teaches that matza was not the Jews' plan. It points out through inference that they desired leavened bread. It also teaches that bread was not desired so much for subsistence, as they verse ends, (Exod., 12:39) "and provisions they made not for themselves." They did not prepare food, as they relied on God for that. This is Rashi's point. The dough they took was not for provisions, it was to express unrestricted freedom. This unrestricted freedom is a direct contradiction to God's plan that they serve Him.

The Jews were now excited at the prospect of complete freedom. God's plan could not tolerate the Jews' wish. God desired the Jews to go from Egyptian servitude, to another servitude - adherence to God. He did not wish the Jews' to experience or express unrestricted freedom, as the Jews wished. To demonstrate this, God retarded the dough from leavening.

Matza does not only recall God's swift salvation, but its also represents Egyptian servitude. In the precise activity that the Jews wished to express unrestricted freedom by baking bread, God stepped in with one action serving two major objectives: 1) By causing a swift ousting of the Jews, God did not allow the dough to rise. God did not allow the Jews to enjoy leavened bread which would embody unrestricted freedom. 2) But even more amazing is that with one action of a speedy redemption, God not only restricted the dough's process, but He also "saved" the Jews - God became the Jews' savior. He replaced the Jews' intended, unrestricted freedom with the correct purpose of their salvation; to be indebted to God. The one act - God's swift Exodus - prevented the wrong idea of freedom from being realized, and also instilled in the Jews the right idea - they were now indebted to God, their Savior. They

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Passover

the Significance of Bread

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

were not left to unrestricted freedom, but were now bound to God by His new act of kindness. An astonishing point.

We return to the command to eat matza in Egypt. This command could not be to commemorate an event which did not yet happen. This makes no sense. I feel God commanded them to eat the matza for what it did represent - servitude. While in Egypt, why did God wish them to be mindful of servitude? Here I feel we come on to another basic theme of the Passover holiday; contrast between servitude and freedom. In Pesachim 116a, the Talmud records a Mishna which states that our transmission of the Haggada must commence with our degradation, and conclude with praise. We therefore discuss our servitude or our ancestor's idolatrous practices, and conclude with our salvation and praise for God. We do this, as such a contrast engenders a true appreciation for God's salvation. Perhaps also the two Passover holidays - in Egypt and today - embody this concept of our salvation. A central goal of Passover is the resultant appreciation for God's kindness. A contrast between our Egyptian Passover and today's Passover will best engender such appreciation. It compares our previous 'bondage' to our current 'freedom'. Perhaps for this reason we are also commanded to view each of ourselves as if we left Egypt.

So in Egypt, we ate matza representing Egyptian servitude. Today we eat it as the Haggada says, to recall the swift salvation which retarded the leavening process, creating matza. We end up with a comparison between Passover of Egypt, and today's Passover: Servitude vs salvation. The emergence of the Jewish people was on Passover. We have two Passovers, displaying the concept of a transition, a before and an after.

An interesting and subtle point is that God mimicked the matza of servitude. He orchestrated the salvation around matza. Why? Perhaps, since matza in its original form in Egypt embodied servitude, God wished that servitude be the continued theme of Passover. He therefore centered the salvation around the dough which eventuated in matza, thereby teaching that we are to be slaves to God. "You are my slaves, and not slaves to man", is God's sentiment addressing a Jewish slave who wishes to remain eternally subservient to his mortal master. The Torah clearly views man's relationship to God as a servant.

With this understanding of the significance of leavened bread, we understand why the Torah refers to all the Jews' loaves in the singular. The Jews shared one common desire; to express their freedom by eating what their oppressors ate.

What is the significance of chametz, leaven? Perhaps, once leavened bread took on the role of freedom, exclusive of any connection with God, leaven thereby took on a character that opposes the very salvation, demonstrated by the matza. This now explains that leaven was not mentioned in connection with the instructions pertaining to the original Paschal lamb. The Jews had not yet displayed any attachment to bread. Only subsequent to the first Passover celebration do we see the Jews' problematic tie to leavened bread. Therefore, only afterwards is there any prohibition on bread. □



SEDER

NOT FOR THE UNCIRCUMCISED

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Something troubling came up in a recent discussion. It was suggested that a "proper" Seder must not have non-Jews present. Is there really such a prohibition? If so, where does it come from, and how prevalent is this practice?

Mesora: A Seder must not have one uncircumcised present eating of the paschal Lamb, as is stated in our Torah, (Exod. 12:48) "Kol arale lo yochal bo", "any uncircumcised may not eat of it." The first, Egyptian Seder was the act where those adhering to God's laws were saved by the fulfillment of that command.

80% of Jews in Egypt perished in the plague of darkness. But why were the 20% saved? It was because they were not steeped in idolatry. They demonstrated this by sacrificing the very animal worshiped by the Egyptians. In order for God to give His Torah 50 days later on Sinai, the Jews back then had to demonstrate their acceptance of the true God, otherwise, their acceptance would be worthless, thinking God was in fact the Egyptian deity. Sacrificing the lamb demonstrated their belief that the lamb was nothing, and that the true God, Who commanded them in this sacrifice, must be followed. By following this command, they attested to God's existence. One only follows the command if they truly feel the commander is real, and must be followed.

God's Torah lifestyle places wisdom as the ultimate goal. Circumcision is a minimalization of the attachment to the physical. Maimonides teaches that both a man and woman have less enjoyment in the sexual act when the man is circumcised. He says that one object of circumcision is to limit intercourse so that intercourse is moderate. God created the organ sufficiently and for procreation, the foreskin is removed so that it helps perfect man's moral shortcomings and counteracts "excessive" lusts. Excessive lusts were the practices of the idolatrous nations. The woman doesn't know she is having less enjoyment unless she been with an

uncircumcised man. The man doesn't know he is having less enjoyment either, unless he has been uncircumcised as an adult.

So two conditions must be met; 1)Acceptance of the One true God - expressed via destruction of the Egyptian God, and 2) Following God's lifestyle of adherence to wisdom and minimalization from lusts, demonstrated via circumcision. □

The OBLIGATION of REDEMPTION

RIVKA OLENICK

If a person honestly contemplates life, hopefully one will realize that the only freedom one has is the freedom to pursue true ideas. A person who chooses to earnestly study the ideas contained in Torah will begin to see that doing so provides one with the reward of developing an independent mind. This is really the greatest freedom. Unfortunately, what most people assume is real "freedom" is actually masked as some form of slavery which is defined as bondage and servitude.

Slavery is a condition of submission to or domination by some influence. Hard, continuous work like that done by slaves, drudgery. How about this definition: One who has no power of resistance, or one who surrenders himself to any power whatever as a slave to ambition. It is easy to become an emotional slave to what culture dictates as freedom. Wealth, fame, acquisition, etc. and the continuous need of approval from others becomes a futile, frustrating trap that is impossible to break out of. Wealth, fame and acquisition were not and are not meant to be the "redeeming" qualities of the Jew. This is what breaks us down as a people, yet we continue in endless pursuit and then claim that God is unfair and unjust for not granting it all to us. Although we live in a free country, our existence as Jews has a different purpose.

Philosophically, we have it backwards. How concerned are we regarding our philosophical picture of life and what we should truly value in life? We are quite sharp at evaluating our financial picture spending hours in enthusiastic conversation, even at the Sabbath table. We allow ourselves to become intellectually shallow and spiritually diminished if we don't actively pursue true ideas. God gave us the freedom to pursue His truths, but if we do not actually pursue them then we are just as bound up as our ancestors were. We are bound up in our own "present day" oppression. Of course, the oppression that we create ourselves is the same oppression that we continue to pursue and can't break away from. "Turn your fantasy into reality!" We justify this and try to make ourselves feel better by thinking we have control over it but actually we are consumed by it. This is a frustrating end in itself because what you think you really need is just more of what you already have so anything more than what you already have is useless.

Every person really lives in their own mind, so either one's mind is in bondage and one always feels poor or one's mind is free and one always feels wealthy. Who wouldn't want to become free and wealthy in the most satisfying way?

God took us out of Egypt from under the burdens of slavery. He heard our cries and our groans, and removed us from our oppression. God restored our energies so that our potential to acquire His knowledge would also be our goal. All of the energies of slavery were redirected, so that our new and restored energies could fulfill their true purpose, which was designed to be a satisfying and appropriate way to live. We were transformed, to serve as an eved Hashem, a servant only of God, not man. Slavery would be redefined



as bondage and servitude only to God that would ultimately produce the greatest freedom for us. We should conduct our lives with continuous thanks and praise to God by thinking about this idea more seriously and more frequently. What produces true freedom is the choice to use one's mind and obtain knowledge and live a reasonable, simple life. Fortunately, our redemption came with the

advantage of a binding obligation: the system of Torah. When we attach ourselves to it, it can bring a person an additional acquisition: peace of mind. The geula, redemption is our obligation in Torah and mitzvos, this is our mesora.

During the Festival of Matzah, and specifically at the Seder we are commanded to relive the geula, the redemption as if we were there. The theme of the Passover seder is that each of us rededicate ourselves to the geula through each mitzvah we partake of at the Seder. Telling over the story, haggada to future generations is not just reading the haggada "to get through it." It is the reenacting of the haggada and being involved in transmitting the mesora. The seder night/s is a seder of limud Torah, including the laws of the Seder. Each mitzva we are obligated to partake of; wine, matzah, maror, etc. has a specific idea attached to it. When we were taken out of Egypt we were then designated as the recipients, the receivers of truth as we still are, that is the point. We understood that it was God, Who took us out, altered the laws of nature by the Red Sea, destroyed the enemy of amalek and through that miracle changed our status. We were and are now to recognize that we were and are to be completely and totally dependent on God, not man. God redeemed us, and our lives were transformed with the purpose and the obligation of obtaining yedias Hashem, God's knowledge. As His Chosen People, we were and are free to pursue it purposefully, which was and still is the purpose and the obligation of the geula for the Jewish people. Blessed are You, Hashem, Almighty God, the King, Whom we can never praise enough!

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Parshas Tzav

RABBI BERNARD FOX

One of the activities that occur each day in the Temple is the removal of the ashes from the altar – Haramat HaDeshen. This procedure is performed in the morning prior to placing the first offering upon the altar. The collected ashes are placed next to the altar and subsequently removed from the Mikdash. Two of the details related in our passage provide a fundamental insight into this activity, Haramat HaDeshen. The passage tells us that a Kohen must perform the activity. The pasuk also stipulates that the Kohen must wear his priestly vestments when executing this duty. These two requirements indicate that this activity is an element of the service in the Mikdash. Therefore, like all other services, only a Kohen dressed in his special vestments can perform this activity.

The Talmud comments in Tractate Yoma that the Kohen does not wear his normal priestly vestments when removing the ashes from the Mikdash. Instead, he wears a set of garments that are similar in design to the normal vestments, but of lesser quality. The Talmud explains that it is not appropriate for a servant to serve his master in the same garments worn when preparing the meal. Therefore, the Kohen should not perform the more exalted services of the Temple in the same vestments worn in preparing the altar.[1] Maimonides asserts that this principle does not only apply to the removal of the ashes from the Mikdash. It also applies to the Haramat HaDeshen discussed in our passage.[2]

Rashi offers an astounding explanation of the comments of the Talmud. Rashi explains the clothing that the servant wears in preparing the meal absorb odors and become stained in the process. It is not appropriate for the servant to then serve his master in this clothing. Similarly, once the Kohen has worn a set of vestments during the Haramat HaDeshen, it is not appropriate for him to wear these garments when performing the other services in the Mikdash.

There are a number of problems with Rashi's explanation of the Talmud's comments. First, according to Rashi, special garments are needed for the Haramat



HaDeshen because, in the process of performing this service, the garments will become soiled. However, the Torah already assures that these garments will not be worn when performing the other services. The Torah requires that the garments worn by the Kohen during service must be new, clean and tailored to the Kohen.[3] This requirement is adequate to assure that the Kohen will not wear soiled garments in the performance of service in the Mikdash. Why is it necessary to establish a separate requirement that the Kohen wear special vestments for Haramat HaDeshen?

Second, the vestments worn during the Haramat HaDeshen are of lesser quality than the garments worn for other services. Rashi's explanation responds to the requirement that the Kohen change his garments after the Haramat HaDeshen. However, Rashi does not seem to offer a reason for requiring garments of lesser quality for Haramat HaDeshen.

There is another discussion in the Talmud that provides an explanation of Rashi's position. The Talmud comments in Tractate

Shabbat that Rav Anan wore a simple black garment when preparing food for Shabbat. He did this out of consideration of the principle that the servant should not prepare a meal for the master in the same garments in which he will serve the meal.[4] The Talmud's comments are difficult to understand. We are required to wear special clean garments on Shabbat.[5] However, Rav Anan went beyond this requirement. He wore a special garment on the eve of Shabbat for the purpose of preparing the Shabbat meals. What was the purpose of Rav Anan's additional custom?

One can designate special garments for Shabbat in two ways. The direct method is to select a special set of clothing and to set it aside for Shabbat. However, there is another means of designation. One can select an alternative mundane garment worn when preparing for Shabbat. It must be a garment that contrasts with the Shabbat garments. Through wearing this mundane garment when preparing for Shabbat, the person demonstrates that a superior set of clothing is held in reserve for Shabbat itself. In other words, if garments similar to the Shabbat clothing are worn in preparing for Shabbat, the status of the Shabbat clothing is diminished. How special are the Shabbat garments if similar clothing is worn when cooking the food! Wearing contrasting, inferior clothing during preparation demonstrates the significance of the Shabbat clothing.

This explains Rav Anan's custom. Certainly, we can assume that Rav Anan selected special clothing for Shabbat. However, in order to further demonstrate the elevated status of his Shabbat attire, he also designated a contrasting mundane garment to be worn in preparing for Shabbat.

We can now understand Rashi's explanation of the Talmud's comments in Tractate Yoma. Rashi recognizes that it is not necessary to require special garments for Haramat HaDeshen in order to assure that clean vestments are worn during the other services. The Torah assures that the vestments worn for the other services will be clean through a direct prohibition against wearing soiled garments during any service. However, Rashi

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Parshas Tzav

RABBI BERNARD FOX

maintains that the garments worn during the other services must be special. They must reflect the elevated status of the service performed by the Kohen. Rashi maintains that the lesser garments worn by the Kohen during the HaraMat HaDeshen enhance the elevated designation of the garments worn during the other services. The garments of the HaraMat HaDeshen – a lesser form of service – contrast with the garments worn during the other services. This contrast demonstrates the elevated status of the superior vestments worn for the more elevated services. In other words, if the HaraMat HaDeshen – a grimy responsibility – could be performed in the typical vestments of the Kohen, the significance of these vestments would be diminished. How special are the typical garments if they are worn for the grimy job of removing the ashes from the altar!

“If it offered as a Thanksgiving offering, then it must be presented with unleavened loaves mixed with oil, flat matzahs saturated with oil and loaves made of boiled flour mixed with oil.” (VaYikra 7:12)

The Todah – Thanksgiving offering – is a type of Shelamim sacrifice. Rashi explains that it is brought in response to surviving a dangerous situation. For example, one who recovers from a serious illness would offer a Todah.[6] Rashi's source for these comments is the Talmud in Tractate Berachot. The Talmud is not discussing the Todah sacrifice. The topic in the Talmud is Birkat HaGomel. This is a blessing recited when one escapes danger. The Talmud outlines the specific situations that require reciting Birkat HaGomel.[7] Rashi maintains that these criteria also apply to the Todah sacrifice. However, Rashi does not indicate the reason that the Todah sacrifice and Birkat HaGomel share these criteria.

Rabbaynu Asher explains that Birkat HaGomel replaces the Todah sacrifice. We

cannot offer the Todah in our times. In order to replace the Todah, the Sages established Birkat HaGomel.[8] This explains Rashi's assumption that the Todah and Birkat HaGomel share identical criteria. Birkat HaGomel is derived from the Todah. Rashi assumes that the criteria for the blessing must be derived from the Todah offering.

There is another blessing recited in response to experiencing a rescue. One who revisits a place at which the individual experienced a personal miracle is obligated to state a blessing.[9] However, there is an interesting difference between these two blessings. Birkat HaGomel is said in a group of ten people. Preferably the group should include two scholars.[10] The blessing recited at revisiting the location of a personal miracle does not require ten people. Why does Birkat HaGomel require a company of ten? Why does the blessing on a miracle not require ten people?

There is a basic difference between these two blessings. The blessing for a miracle is an act of personal recognition and thanksgiving. Because this blessing is a personal act it does not require the presence of a group. In contrast, Birkat HaGomel is a public declaration of the Almighty's benevolence. One confirms to others that personal experience proves G-d's kindness. The blessing is a public testimony. It follows that a group must be present.

This interpretation of Birkat HaGomel explains an interesting halacha. According to many opinions, women do not recite Birkat HaGomel. Others argue. They maintain that women do say the blessing. However, these dissenters stipulate that the woman should recite the blessing in a group of women including a single male.[11] This seems to be an odd requirement. In halacha, women do not constitute a quorum or minyan. Why in this case is a group of ten, composed primarily of women, appropriate?

In order to answer this question, we need to understand the requirement of ten people for Birkat HaGomel. Generally, this stipulation is associated with aspects of tefilah – prayer –

and other activities requiring a tzibur – a congregation. A congregation is created through ten males. However, Birkat HaGomel is not a prayer that requires a congregation. It requires a group of ten for an entirely different reason. The blessing is an act of teaching others and sharing one's own encounter with the Almighty's kindness. One must share with a group. In order to meet this requirement, a group of women is suitable. ■

[1] Mesechet Yoma 23b.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tamidim U'Musafim

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Klai Mikdash 8:4.

[4] Tractate Shabbat 119a.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shabbat 30:3.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 7:12.

[7] Mesechet Berachot 54b.

[8] Rabbaynu Asher, Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Berachot, Chapter 9, note 3.

[9] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 218:4.

[10] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 219:3.

[11] Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, Mishne Berurah 219:3.

Passover

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Passover is the holiday where commemoration functions as the primary command, as this is the holiday of 'transmission', passing down the Mesora - tradition - to the next generation. Recalling the Exodus forms the basis of innumerable other commands, even the basis of the other holidays. A Rabbi pointed out that we count from Passover to Shavuot, and we refer to the Succot holiday as a remembrance of the Exodus. We read in the Passover Hagadda of the command to discuss the story of the Exodus, even if we are wise men, and even if we are alone.

With such importance attached to Passover, I would like to enumerate some questions and offer some answers:

1) Why is matzoh, unleavened bread, essential to the Passover holiday? What is the concept behind it? Additionally, what is the significance of the Paschal Lamb and the bitter herbs, all three of which are so essential, that their omission from our discussion causes us not to fulfill our obligation?

2) Why does the passage in the Torah command us not to have leavened foods existing at the commencement of the slaughter of the paschal lamb? It is not yet Passover, so why should leaven be prohibited?

3) Why must the Paschal Lamb be eaten together with matzoh and bitter herbs? What is the concept behind this law?

4) We constantly find commands which read "do such and such, it is a remembrance of the Egyptian Exodus". Why is the focal point of so many laws the Exodus of Egypt, as opposed to the inheritance of Israel?

5) We read, "masscheel b'gnuss u'misayame b'shevach", "commence with degrading statements and conclude with praise". What is the concept that our recounting the story of the Exodus begin with our degradation, and conclude with praise?

To answer these questions, it is important that we clarify the events. The Jews were slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years, during which time many Jews adopted Egyptian beliefs. This culture was essentially idolatrous, as they raised the lamb and many other objects to a deified status and worshiped it as a god. We recall the Rashi on the passage discussing the plague of darkness, that four fifths of the Jewish people were killed during that plague in order that the Egyptians wouldn't witness it. The reason for their deaths was that

they had abandoned living correct philosophical lives in favor of following the corrupt Egyptian culture.

God planned to redeem the Jews so as to give them the Torah, but to do so, they had to recognize Who was actually giving the Torah. By definition, the Torah only has value as a means to recognize God if God's existence is a reality to the recipients. Jews who deified the lamb were not worthy of accepting the Torah. God therefore commanded the Jews to take the lamb, and hold it four days until the day of slaughter. The purpose of holding the lamb publicly was to denounce idolatry in the face of the idolaters. This would be a demonstration of a strong conviction of God's ultimate superiority over Egyptian gods.

The Jews were commanded to place the blood of the lamb on their doorposts, on the inside. One reason was that the doorpost is the part of the house most seen, as all must pass through to exit and enter. But primarily, it was placed inside for the Jews themselves to see, not for the Egyptians. They needed to ponder that 'blood' was the cause of their redemption. We refer to both the blood of the Paschal Lamb, and the blood of circumcision, which was commanded as well at that time. These two bloods taught those Jews two concepts; 1) Circumcision reminds us that the life of physical enjoyment, Hedonism, is contrary to the Torah's goal of indulging in wisdom, and 2) the Paschal blood reminds one that succumbing to imagined, psychological crutches such as idolatry are diametrically opposed to accepting reality and monotheism.

Study of reality dictates that there is only One Creator, One Source for all that is real and true. These two concepts needed to be accepted for God to save any soul. It is for this reason that God states, (Exod. 12:13) "...and will see the blood and I will pass over you and there will be no plague to destroy when I smite the land of Egypt".

As the Jews followed these commands, they were spared. But as a Rabbi once stated, the Egyptians' firstborns were killed in order to

wipe out those who promulgate that culture. As they were horrified at the deaths, the remaining Egyptians feared for their lives and ousted the Jews in a hurried panic (Exod. 12:33). So fast were the Jews urged to leave that the dough had not time to rise. They later baked it into matzoh, unleavened bread.

The Ibn Ezra points out that had the Jews been given longer time to tarry, the dough would have leavened. Interesting that Ibn Ezra spends ink on this point. But for good reason. This statement teaches us the entire concept

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behind chametz, or leavened foods. Ibn Ezra is teaching that chametz by definition would be that substance which would have emerged had the "Jews tarried in Egypt". Chametz is that which is antithetical to the Exodus. It represents a lingering in the Egyptian culture. Therefore we are commanded to remove all chametz, meaning, we are to recognize how mutually exclusive the idolatrous life is to Judaism. Judaism teaches the acceptance of reality, where man must change himself to be in accord with what is true and real. Idolatry is the opposite - the projection of man's wishes onto reality, creating a psychologically protected universe where all man's wishes are 'true'. Idolatry caters to the infantile, psychological crutches which man has yet to see as false and remove himself from. The Rabbis of blessed memory state, "a righteous person changes himself to be in accord with reality, and a wicked person changes reality to be in accord with himself".

We destroy the Egyptians' God and use it in service to the Only Real God. (See my understanding of Maimonides on this point) We also must not have any chametz around at the point of slaughter, even though it is not yet Passover. The reason is that since acceptance of God is mutually exclusive to idolatry, all remnants of idolatrous life must not coexist. So at the very moment we declare idolatry as false by killing the Egyptian god, we must not have that which represents our desire to linger in Egypt, that being chametz.

This also explains why the Paschal lamb was to be eaten together with matzoh. The eating together means that matzoh "qualifies" the lamb. How so? If we were to simply eat the lamb without the matzoh, we would not be stating that the lamb's purpose is to be redirected towards God. The matzoh represents the act of redemption, as its existence emerged at the precise moment of the redemption. Matzoh therefore represents "Ge-ula", or

redemption for this very reason of serving God. Therefore, we eat the matzoh at the moment we eat the lamb, thereby showing that the lamb is not a god, but the God Who orchestrated the Exodus is God. Eating the lamb without matzoh would mean to say that abolishing idolatry without recognizing God is sufficient. This however is not so, and we must always tie hand in hand the ideas that, idolatry is false, and simultaneously state, monotheism is truth. Our commands must always eventuate in our recognition of the One Who commanded us. Otherwise, we are missing the main point.

Someone had asked, "When the Messiah is here, what will be the purpose to the temple sacrifices?" I say that although idolatry is gone at that point, we still must commemorate how wrong are the false ideas of lost cultures. Although lost, the seeds of that culture which brought forth idolatry are in every man, forever. We therefore require constant recognition of those drives and notions which are idolatrous, destructive and antithetical to Torah.

We asked why we refer to so many commands, as a "remembrance of the Exodus". We now see that the Exodus per se is that event which removed us from idolatry. It is not the "being out of Egypt", or the entrance into Israel which holds such significance. The very act of the Exodus was the event which embodies "leaving" idolatry. Additionally, the Rabbi taught that the Exodus is that which engenders in us an appreciation for God. It is then essential that as Jews, we constantly appreciate God's acts of kindness which allow us to involve ourselves in Torah study, the most enjoyable act, and our lifelong goal. Commencing with our degraded status and remembering our bitterness via the bitter herbs, followed by a conclusion of our state of grandeur engenders such an appreciation,...and an apropos point to conclude! Happy holiday. □



“And you should count, from the day following the holiday, from the day that you bought the omer wave offering, seven weeks. They should be complete.” (VaYikra 23:15)

This pasuk introduces the mitzvah of sefirat ha'omer – the counting of the omer. The Torah requires that we count seven weeks from the day on which the omer sacrifice was offered. The omer was a special grain offering brought on the second day of Pesach. Each of the forty-nine days of these seven weeks is individually counted. On the fiftieth day Shavuot is celebrated. The command is performed through verbally announcing the count each night.

The Talmud explains that this mitzvah must be performed by all males.[1] This law is derived from our pasuk. Ivrit differentiates between the second person singular and the plural. In this case the plural is used. This means that the counting is performed by many.

There is another instance in which we are required to count towards a date. This is the counting towards the Jubilee year – the Yovel. The Yovel occurred in the land of Israel every fifty years. This year was observed

through a number of special laws. Jewish servants were set free. The land of Israel was redistributed to the descendants of those who had first occupied the land. The land was not worked during the Yovel year. Determination of the Yovel required counting. Forty-nine years are counted from a Yovel year. The fiftieth year is the next Yovel.

Who was responsible to count the years between the Yovel years? This obligation was executed by the Great Court.[2] This raises an interesting question. The mitzvah of sefirat ha'omer performed by individuals. The counting for Yovel is only performed by the Great Court. Why are these mitzvot assigned to different elements of the community?

A careful analysis of Maimonides' formulation of each mitzvah will help resolve this issue. In addition to counting the years leading to the Yovel, the Great Court is obligated to declare the Yovel year. These are two separate commandments. The court is obligated to count the years and declare the Yovel. Maimonides, understandably, relates these two commandments. The counting is requisite for the declaration of the Yovel. Both elements merge into a single objective.[3]

The Great Court is responsible for the establishment of the Jewish calendar.[4] The court declared the beginning of each month and subsequently established our current calendar. The establishment of the Yovel year is also a calendar function. It is quite understandable that this mitzvah and the requisite counting should be responsibilities of the court.

Why is the counting of the omer an individual responsibility and not the duty of the court? We can only conclude that sefirat ha'omer does not determine the date of Shavuot. This occurs spontaneously with the advent of the second day of Pesach. The counting is not required to designate the date of Shavuot.

What then is the purpose of counting the omer? Through this counting we recognize the identity of these intervening days. We acknowledge the special nature of each day of the omer. As this is a personal act of acknowledgment, it must be performed by the individual. The court cannot perform this mitzvah.

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“What does the wise one say? What are these testimonies, laws and rules that Hashem our G-d commanded you? And you tell him of the laws of the Pesach. One may not eat a dessert after the Pesach sacrifice.” (Haggadah of Pesach)

One of the mitzvot fulfilled at the Seder is recounting the exodus from Egypt. This mitzvah is ideally fulfilled through a discussion between father and son. The Torah requires the father to employ a pedagogic style that matches the needs of the specific child. The above passage describes the question of the wise son and the appropriate response.

The wise son asks the father to explain the meaning of the various commandments of Pesach. The Haggadah instructs the father to answer the son through teaching the laws of Pesach.

This response is difficult to understand. The father must retell the story of our redemption. Although the method of teaching must match the child, the goal is to discuss these events. Yet, the answer suggested by the Haggadah does not mention the redemption.

The first step in answering this question is to understand that the Haggadah is not dictating the complete answer to be given to the son. The Haggadah is indicating the appropriate approach. The answer is far more comprehensive than the short response included in the above passage. The response must include a complete recounting of the events of the redemption. However, the discussion must begin with a lesson concerning the laws of Pesach.

Why begin with a discussion of the laws? What would be missing if the father immediately retold the story of the exodus and bypassed this discussion of the laws?

The wise son recognizes that the Torah can only be fully understood through

study of its law. The father is required to reinforce this conclusion. He encourages this study. He shows the son that the profound lessons of the Torah emerge from the study of the law. Through this approach, the wise son discovers that the exodus is not just an event but also the basis for the laws of the Torah.

“The following are the ten plagues that the Holy One Blessed Be He brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt: Dam (Blood), Tzfardeah (Frogs), Kinim (Lice), Arov (Wild Beasts), Dever (Pestilence), Sh’chin (Boils), Barad (Hail), Arbeh (Locusts), Choshech (Darkness), Macat Bechorot (The Plague of the Firstborn). Rabi Yehuda expressed them through their initials – D’TzACh, ADaSh, BeAChB.” (Hagaddah of Pesach)

The redemption from Egypt was preceded by ten plagues. The Pesach Hagaddah lists these plagues. The Hagaddah then tells us that the Sage Rabi Yehuda created a mnemonic from the initials of the ten plagues. This mnemonic cannot be accurately transliterated from Hebrew to English. This is because some Hebrew letters have alternate pronunciations. Therefore, in some instances a letter is pronounced in one manner in the Hebrew word for the plague and in another manner in the mnemonic.

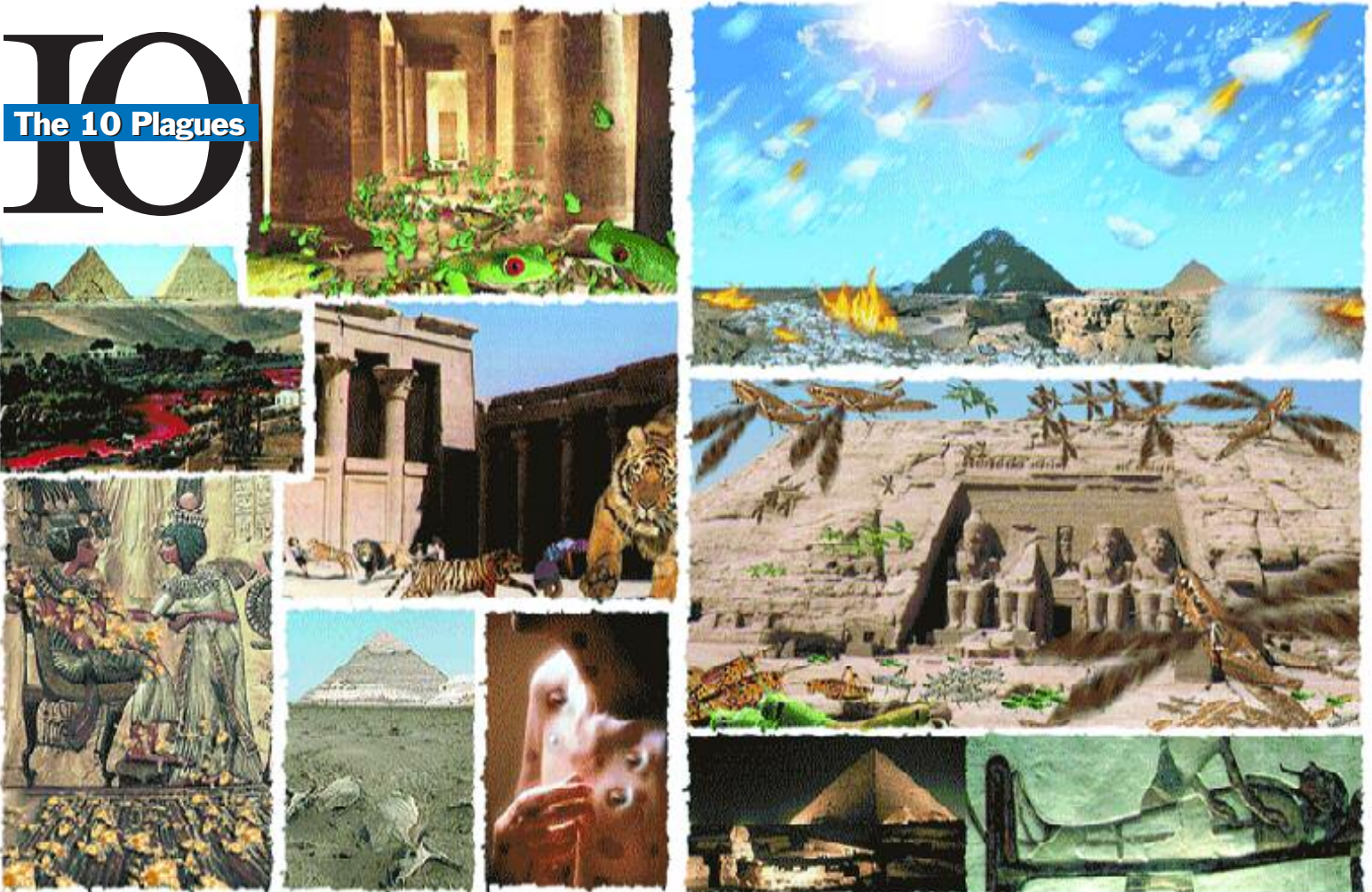
The commentaries discuss the purpose of this mnemonic. We usually employ such devices in order to commit complicated or intricate material to memory. This is not the likely explanation of Rabi Yehuda’s device. Ten plagues are not terribly difficult to memorize. What was Rabi Yehuda’s objective in creating this mnemonic?

There are various approaches to answering this question. Many of these Sages note that the plagues are recorded in Sefer Tehillim. There, the order is

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The 10 Plagues



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somewhat altered.[5] This might create some confusion as to the actual order. Rabi Yehuda wished to indicate that the actual order is found in the Torah. He created a mnemonic that represents the plagues in the order in the Torah.[6]

This explanation assumes that the order in which the plagues occurred was significant. In other words, there was a specific reason for this order and no other. The Midrash seems to confirm this assumption. The Midrash comments that the names of the plagues were carved onto Moshe's staff. These names were arranged in the order of their occurrence. This seems to confirm the importance of the order.[7]

This raises a question. Why was the order important? Why did the plagues occur in a specific sequence? Again, the commentaries offer a variety of responses. One well-known explanation is offered by the Midrash. The Midrash explains that the order is similar to the strategy followed by a king putting down a rebellion. First, the king places a siege around the rebellious city. He cuts off the water supply. Similarly, the Almighty turned the water in Egypt to blood. Then the king commands his troops to sound their trumpets. This is an attempt to confuse and discourage the rebels. The frogs fulfilled this function. Their constant croaking unnerved the Egyptians. The Midrash continues to delineate the similarities between the order of the plagues and the strategy of the king.[8]

Other commentaries offer a completely different explanation of Rabi Yehuda's mnemonic. They explain that Rabi Yehuda was not merely attempting to indicate the sequence of the plagues. Instead, he was dividing the plagues into three distinct groups. What are these three groups? The first three plagues were plagues of the earth or water. The water was turned to blood. Then, an infestation of frogs was generated from the water. Next, the dust of the earth turned to lice.

The next group is harder to characterize. These seem to be plagues that emerge from the general surroundings. The first of these was an infestation of wild beast. These animals emerged from the surrounding wilderness. Pestilence and boils followed this.

The final group of plagues descended from the heavens. These were the plagues of hail, locusts and darkness. Tacked on to this last group is the plague of the firstborn. This plague is not truly a member of this group. However, it is attached to the last group in order to create an effective mnemonic.[9]

There is a basic difference between these two approaches to explaining Rabi Yehuda's mnemonic. In order to better understand this dispute, it will help to consider a pasuk in the Torah. Hashem sends Moshe to Paroh to warn him of the coming plague of Hail. Moshe makes an interesting statement. He tells Paroh that



Ancient painting of Ramses: Pharaoh of Egypt

Hashem could immediately end the bondage of Bnai Yisrael in Egypt. He could bring a plague of pestilence upon Egypt that would obliterate the Egyptians. However, the Almighty does not choose to do this. Instead, it is His will to extend His conflict with Paroh. Why does Hashem wish to continue the struggle? Moshe explains that Hashem wishes to demonstrate and publicize His omnipotence.[10]

What is Moshe's message to Paroh? Moshe is explaining that Hashem could destroy Paroh and his nation immediately. Why is Hashem not acting more forcibly? Moshe explains that this part of the Almighty's will to demonstrate His omnipotence.

How did the plagues illustrate Hashem's omnipotence? This demonstration required two elements. First, the plagues could not be mistaken for a natural set of catastrophes. Second, they demonstrated the extent of the Almighty's control over all elements of the environment. The plagues included both of these elements. They followed a plan. This is the message of the Midrash. The plagues followed the strategy of a king suppressing a rebellion. The expression of this strategy in the sequence of plagues demonstrated the element of design. Clearly, these plagues were not a series of natural catastrophes.

The plagues also affected every element of the environment. The first three plagues originated in the earth and water. The second set of three was produced by the general surroundings. The lash three descended from the heavens. This demonstrated the Almighty's control over every element of the environments.

We can now understand the dispute between the commentaries. Which of these elements is represented by Rabi Yehuda's mnemonic? According to the first interpretation, the mnemonic represents the element of design in the plagues. According to the second interpretation, the mnemonic communicates the Almighty's control over the various elements of the environment that was illustrated by the plagues.

“Raban Gamliel said, “Anyone that does not discuss these three things does not fulfill one's obligation. And these are the things: the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror.” (Hagaddah of Pesach)

Raban Gamliel explains that at the Seder we are obligated to discuss the various mitzvot that are performed during the evening. He comments that any person who does not discuss the mitzvot of the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror does not fulfill one's obligation. This statement is included in the Pesach Hagaddah. The author derived the statement from the mishne of Tractate Pesachim.

Raban Gamliel's statement is somewhat mysterious. He asserts that it is absolutely necessary to discuss the various mitzvot performed on the Seder night. One's obligation cannot be fulfilled without this discussion. However, he does not identify the specific obligation to which he refers. Exactly, which mitzvah is fulfilled with this discussion? If this discussion is omitted, which commandment is incompletely performed?

Maimonides seems to provide an answer to this question. In his Mishne Torah, he places Raban Gamliel's law in the seventh chapter of the Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah – the laws of Chametz and Matzah. This chapter deals exclusively with the laws Tzipur Yetziat Mitzrayim – retelling the account of our redemption from Egypt. The placement of Raban Gamliel's requirement in this chapter indicates that it is essential to the mitzvah of Tzipur. One does not fulfill the obligation to recount the events of our redemption without a discussion of the mitzvot of Pesach, Matzah, and Marror. In other words, the redemption must be described through a discussion of the Pesach, Matzah, and Marror.

The Tosefot offer a different perspective on Raban Gamliel's law. In order to discuss this perspective, a brief introduction is needed. The Talmud provides a source for Raban Gamliel's law. We are obligated to offer a Pesach sacrifice each year. We cannot perform this commandment in our times. However, during the Temple period this commandment was performed. The Torah tells us that our children will ask for an explanation of this sacrifice. We are to respond by providing an account of the offering of the first Pesach sacrifice. This took place in Egypt. Through the merit of offering this sacrifice, the families of Bnai Yisrael were spared from the final plague – the plague of the death of the firstborn. In other words, the Torah clearly states that the Pesach sacrifice must be discussed.

The Tosefot ask an interesting question. Raban Gamliel asserts that we must discuss the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror. The Talmud provides a source for the obligation to discuss the Pesach sacrifice. However, Raban Gamliel insists that we must also discuss Matzah and Marror. What is the source for the obligation to discuss

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these two mitzvot?

Tosefot answer that the Torah does not explicitly state that we are obligated to discuss Matzah and Marror. However, the Torah does equate Matzah and Marror to the Pesach sacrifice. The Tosefot apparently refer to the injunction to eat the Pesach with Matzah and Marror. Through this equation, Raban Gamliel derives the obligation to discuss Matzah and Marror in addition to the Pesach sacrifice.[11]

Let us analyze the Tosefot's reasoning more carefully. The Tosefot explain that the Torah equates the mitzvot of the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror. They reason that a requirement that is fundamental to the Pesach sacrifice is also essential to the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror. We are required to discuss the Pesach sacrifice. Therefore, discussion must also be needed in order to properly perform the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror. It is clear from the Tosefot's reasoning that they regard the requirement for discussion as essential for the proper performance of the mitzvah of the Pesach sacrifice. The mitzvot of Matzah and Marror are associated with the commandment of the Pesach. Therefore, discussion is also essential for the proper performance of these commandments.

This analysis indicates that the Tosefot disagree with Maimonides. According to Maimonides, the discussion of the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror is part of the commandment of Tzipur. The Tosefot seem to regard the discussion of the Pesach sacrifice as an aspect of the commandment to offer the Pesach. They associate the obligation to discuss the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror to the mitzvot to eat Matzah and Marror. In other words, these three commandments – the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror are not performed in their entirety without discussion. ■

[1] Mesechet Menachot 65b.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shemitha VeYovel 10:1.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shemitha VeYovel 10:1.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh 1:5.

[5] Sefer Tehillim, Chapters 78 and 105.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Hagaddah of Pesach.

[7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Hagaddah of Pesach.

[8] Midrash Tanchuma, Parsaht Bo, Chapter 4.

[9] Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam), Commentary on the Hagaddah.

[10] Sefer Shemot, 9:15-16.

[11] Tosefot, Mesechet Pesachim 116a.

Ibn Ezra: the Ten Plagues

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Exodus, 8:12, Ibn Ezra directs our attention to the performers of the Ten Plagues:

"Know, that by the hand of Aaron were the first three plagues and these signs were in the lower matter as I explained earlier, because two (of them) were in water, and the third was in the dust of the earth. And the plagues performed by Moses with the staff were in the higher elements, just as his (Moses') status was higher than Aaron's status. For example, the plague of hail and locusts were brought by the wind, and (so too) the darkness, it was in the air; also the plague of boils was through him (Moses). Only three (plagues) were without the staff; the wild animals, the disease of the animals, and the death of the firstborns. And one (plague) with no staff was through Moses, with a little connection with Aaron, and it was the plague of boils."

The Ibn Ezra focuses our attention on his first word, "Know", which urges the reader to think into this specific commentary. He intimates that there is more here than meets the eye. He does not simply list each plague with its performer, or monitor the involvement of the staff. We are not interested in dry statistics when studying G-d's wisdom. Here, Ibn Ezra is teaching important principles. Beginning with the word "Know", Ibn Ezra is teaching an important lesson.

Each of the Ten Plagues was used as a tool to teach Egypt and the world the following: 1) Aaron and Moses were each assigned specific plagues, in the lower and higher realms respectively, and they performed a similar number of plagues independently, 2) The presence of the staff only in certain miracles - its absence in others, 3) Moses joining with Aaron in a single plague of boils, 4) Distinguishing between Egypt and the Jews through two plagues, in which no staff was used, and placed in the center of the series of plagues.

In his Laws of Idolatry, 1:1, Maimonides'

teaches that early man already began projecting greatness onto the heavenly bodies. Man thought, since the planets, stars and spheres minister before G-d, they too are worthy of man's honor. Eventually, man's sin increased as he replaced simple honor of stars with their worship as deities, until knowledge of G-d was lost. Star worship reveals man's false estimation that the heavens deserve more reverence than the Earth. (We see that man did not say this of our lower, sublunary Earth and its elements, only regarding heavenly bodies.) Man feared not only the spheres, but the heavens. Jeremiah 10:2-3 reads, "So says G-d, 'To the ways of the nations do not learn, and from the signs of the heavens do not fear, because from them the nations fear. Because the statutes of the peoples are false, because a tree from the forest they cut, fashioned by an artisan with an adze.'" Jeremiah teaches that man did in fact fear the heavens. But their fear stemmed from a false projection - not from reality. Jeremiah's lesson is insightful: he equates the fear of heavens with the idolatrous practice of prostrating to wooden idols. He wished to teach that the heavens do not hold any greater powers than does wood. Man's idolatrous emotions project the same flaw onto both heaven and trees.

The primitive view of the heavens determining man's fate was not alien to the Egyptians. G-d corrected this error with one aspect of His plagues. Commanding Aaron to perform the plagues limited to the earthly realm, and for Moses to perform those of the "higher", heavenly realm, G-d discounted the dangerous esteem man held towards the heavens. G-d showed that the only difference between the heavens and Earth is the level of understanding required to comprehend their natures, as the wiser man - Moses - addressed the heavenly plagues, and Aaron addressed the earthly plagues. Both realms were controlled by laws, and both could be understood. Understanding a phenomena removes one's false, mystical estimations. Realizing they are 'guided' means they are subordinate to something greater. These realms

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did not "control", but were "controlled", teaching the Egyptians that their views were false. The Egyptians erred by assuming that the heavens were a governing and mystical realm. Earth, to Egypt, was not divine. G-d corrected this disproportionately high, heavenly grandeur. G-d did so in two ways: 1)By showing the heavens' subordination to a Higher will, G-d demoted heaven's status from the divine to the mundane. 2)By aligning the plagues with Moses' and Aaron's participation, Egypt would understand that not only are the heavens not divine, but they are in equal realms, just as Moses and Aaron are of somewhat equal status. Additionally, Moses and Aaron each performed three miracles independently to equate heaven and earth, dispelling a false supremacy of heaven and meteorological phenomena. Hopefully, the Egyptians would comprehend that both heaven and Earth are equally under G-d's control, and that neither one is significantly greater. Egypt would then realize that Something higher was responsible for all creation. G-d wanted the good for the Egyptians. The 'good' means knowledge of what is true. As it says in the Torah (Exod. 9:16) with regards to these plagues, "...in order that they tell of My name in the whole world."

Interestingly, the three plagues designed in the heavens were hail, locusts and darkness. Why these three? Perhaps to address three errors of the Egyptians. Egypt assumed meteorological phenomena to be divine, so G-d responded with a hail/fire plague to display His exclusive control in this area. Wind was also a heavenly phenomena, but now they experienced an unnatural wind blowing the entire day, the entire night, until the next morning when it delivered the terror of locusts destroying all vegetation remaining of the hail's previous destruction (Exod 10:13). Finally, with the plague of darkness, G-d displayed control over the primary focus in heaven - the sun. Weather, the atmosphere and outer space were all shown as false deities and under the exclusive control of Israel's G-d. Additionally, the plague of "darkness" had one other facet - it was palpable, perhaps to show that it was not a simple solar eclipse.

Ibn Ezra also made specific note of two plagues where no staff was used. These two also included the lesson of national distinction: Exod. 8:18, "And I will distinguish on that day the land of Goshen that My people stand on it, to prevent from being there the wild beasts..." Exod. 9:4, "And G-d will distinguish between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt, and nought will die of the Israelites." Why were both of these plagues designed to distinguish Egypt from Israel? I believe the answer is that by designing not just one plague - which could be viewed as a freak



incident, but two plagues which differentiated "Egyptians" and "Jews" - the goal was to teach that G-d works differently than Egypt's view of the 'divine'. The Egyptians thought that to please their gods was man's correct obligation, and precisely how gods operated - a natural outgrowth of a child/parent relationship. How would such an infantile idea be corrected in order to teach G-d's true system? By Egypt witnessing punitive measures only on their 'side of the river', they were awakened to a new idea; objective morality. They were held accountable. They also realized something even more essential: their relationship to their gods was one where their gods benefited from man's actions. Egypt felt that their gods need man to serve their needs, which were projections of man's own needs. But Judaism teaches that relating to G-d is not for G-d, but really only for man. G-d does not need man. Man must do that which is proper for himself, and if he does not, he will not only be punished, but he will lose the true good for himself. The Egyptian's exclusive receipt of these two plagues - a system of "reward and punishment" - awoke them to a realization that service of G-d means not catering to a god's needs, but rather, an alignment with proper ideals and morality. This is a drastic difference from Egypt's primitive notion of worship.

Simultaneously, these two plagues attacked the very core of Egyptian gods; animals. Their own animals died, and then, wild animals attacked them. It was a devastating blow to their esteemed deities. Their deification of animal gods was destroyed. Pharaoh's response (Exod. 8:21), "sacrifice to your G-d" confirms his lowered estimation of animals, to the point that he encourages Moses to slaughter them, and to do so to his G-d. In other cases, Pharaoh does gesture to free the Jews, but only here in connection with the animal plagues does Pharaoh say "sacrifice to your G-d." I believe the Torah includes these words of Pharaoh to inform us that the plague had the desired effect on Pharaoh. G-d understands what will effect man, and so it does.

The Egyptians were all the more confused when they saw that Israel was not affected, even though they did not serve animals. In Exod. 9:7, Pharaoh himself sends messengers to see if Israel was harmed. This plague of the animal's death concerned him greatly.

Why were these two plagues bereft of the staff? Perhaps the staff carried with it some element of cause and effect; man would hit something, and only then would the plague commence. Perhaps, G-d wished to teach that He is in no way bound by the physical. A plague may occur with no prior cause. Removing the staff might effectively teach this lesson, as nothing was smitten to bring on the plague.

I heard another explanation for the use of the staff: Although G-d did not need it (He needs nothing) for Moses and Aaron to initiate the plagues, it's presence was to remove any divinity projected by Egypt onto Moses and Aaron, lest onlookers falsely believe these two mortals possessed some powers. By seeing the staff incorporated into the miracles, Moses' and Aaron's significance was diluted in Egypt's eyes. But wouldn't people then believe the staff to have those powers? I believe for fear of this erroneous notion, G-d created a miracle where the staff itself turned into a snake. This was to show that it too was under the control of G-d.

Why did the plague of boils require Moses and Aaron to work together? My friend Jessie made a sharp observation. She said that just as Moses and Aaron addressed both the higher and lower forms of matter in their respective plagues, the plague of boils executed by both Moses and Aaron included the higher and lower matter - ashes are from Earth, and they were commanded to be thrown towards the heavens (Exod. 9:8). Her parallel revealed another facet of the boils, as G-d's plagues contain many strata of insights. I believe the boils' combination of realms was to teach that heaven and Earth do not operate in two separate, encapsulated systems. The very act of throwing ashes towards the heavens teaches that both Earth and heaven work together. This was a necessary lesson in the reduction of the heavens' exaggerated status. By showing this further idea that the heavens participate in earthly phenomena, the heavens' false, divine status was stripped that much further. Just as a king who spends his time with commoners will be viewed by others in a less regal light, so too the heavens now lost their reputation by participating in Earthly matters. Moses could have collected the ashes himself, but by working with Aaron, together, they underlined this point.

One question remains: Why are the two animal-related plagues placed in the middle of the series of the Ten Plagues? ■

The Foundation of the Jewish People

RABBI REUVEN MANN

I

The foundation of the system of Judaism is the Exodus, which emancipated the Jews from the enslavement of Pharaoh. It is a Mitzvah to remember the Exodus twice a day which is accomplished in reciting the third paragraph of the Shema. However on the night of Pesach we must do more than merely make reference to the fact that G-d redeemed us from Egypt. We must engage in extensive recitation of the entire narrative pertaining to the Exodus story. The Rambam says in Laws of Chametz and Matza, Chapter 7, Halacha 1: "It is a positive commandment of the Torah to tell stories of the miracles and wonders that were done for our forefathers in Egypt, on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan-as it says: "Remember this day that you exited from Egypt." (Exodus 13,3)

We must pay careful attention to the words of the Rambam. Why does he emphasize that one must discuss the miracles and wonders which were done for us in Egypt? He should simply have said that we should recite the story of the Exodus. Of course in doing so we would make mention of the miracles because they are part of the story. The Rambam is conveying that the essence of the story is the supernatural phenomena which occurred. The whole objective of the recounting is to cause us to focus on the miracles that G-d wrought. The question arises: Why is the miraculous element of the story of such paramount importance?

II

We read in the Ten Commandments: Exodus 20:2 "I Am the L-d your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery."

This Pasuk incorporate's two

commands. 1) to believe in the existence of the Creator and 2) to accept Him as our G-d. The historical event which forms the basis of our obligation to serve G-d is the Exodus. Many commentators have pointed to the fact that, great as the Exodus was, the creation of the universe seems to be even more consequential to our relationship to G-d. Thus they ask, why doesn't it say "I am the L-d your G-d who created Heaven and Earth."?

In his commentary on the Ten Commandments, the Rambam states: (Ramban's Commentary on the Torah-Exodus 20:2)

"I AM THE ETERNAL THY G-D. This Divine utterance constitutes a positive commandment. He said, I am the Eternal, thus teaching and commanding them that they should know and believe that the Eternal exist and that He is G-d to them. That is to say, there exist an Eternal Being through Whom everything has come into existence by His will and power, and He is G-d to them, who are obligated to worship him. He said, Who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, because his taking them out from there was evidence establishing the existence and will of G-d, for it was with his knowledge and providence that we came out from there. The exodus is also evidence for the creation of the world, for assuming the eternity of the universe [which precludes a Master of the universe Who is in control of it], it would follow that nothing could be changed from its nature. And it is also evidence for G-d's infinite power, and His infinite power is an indication of the Unity". as He said, that thou [i.e. Pharaoh] mayest know that there is none like Me on the earth".

According to Nachmanides there is something unique about the Exodus which renders it more instructive than creation. From time

immemorial people have asked: What is the ultimate cause of the world in which we live or, put another way; What is the ultimate reality? There were many philosophers who believed in the eternity of the universe. This essentially means that the world has no cause. It exists because it has to exist. According to this view there is nothing beyond the laws of nature and the notion of miracles must be dismissed. Historically most philosophers denied this idea and maintained that the Universe did not come into being by itself but had to have a cause. They held that the natural order with its infinite wisdom owes its existence to a Supreme Being who is the cause of all that exists. Judaism of course agrees with the philosophers who maintain that the Universe owes its existence to G-d. However the key area in which we differ is the question of the relationship of G-d to the Universe. Thinkers such as Aristotle and Einstein believed in G-d but denied that He intervenes in human affairs or retains a relationship with man. They maintained that the Universe is a necessary result of G-d's very existence and as G-d is unchangeable so is the world. They also rejected the idea of miracles. The foundation of Judaism is our belief that G-d is eternal and nothing exists beside Him. (He is our L-d there is none else). His relationship to the world is that of the Creator to the created. He brought the world into existence from nothingness (ex nihilo) not because of any extraneous compulsion but purely because of His inscrutable Will. He established the Universe, and the laws of nature by which it operates in accordance with His will. He retains complete control over the Universe and can alter the natural order, and perform miracles in order to achieve His objective in creation. All of the

beliefs and practices of Judaism, such as free will, reward and punishment, the efficacy of prayer, etc. are based on this understanding of G-d's absolute power and mastery of His creation. We can now understand the significance of the events surrounding the Exodus. The miracles which completely overturned the natural order demonstrated that there is a Supreme Being who created the world and can make any alterations at Will.

II

Let us review the basic lessons which are contained in the words: "I am the L-d thy G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery"

A) The Universe is not eternal. B) G-d alone is eternal and created the world (ex nihilo-from nothing). C) G-d retains total control over the entire course of human history. D) G-d created the world for a moral purpose which is rooted in the rejection of evil. i.e. idolatry and the affirmation of the true creator of heaven and earth. Equally important is the point that He intervened in the course of human history to rescue a particular people who were to become His nation. This demonstrates that G-d created mankind for a moral purpose which can only be achieved through adherence to the mitzvos, moral imperatives and truths that are contained in His Torah.

It is therefore important to remember that the Jews have a special place in G-d's scheme of things. The Exodus is not just an abstract historical event. It happened to us and gave us our national character and mission. As the Rambam says (ibid.): "This is the intent of the expression, Who brought thee out, since they are the ones who know and are witnesses to all these things".

(continued on next page)

The Foundation of the Jewish People

RABBI REUVEN MANN

He further states in his Commentary on the Torah-Exodus 13:16: "...And because the Holy One, blessed be He, will not make signs and wonders in every generation for the eyes of some wicked man or heretic, He therefore commanded us that we should always make a memorial or sign of that which we have seen with our eyes, and that we should transmit the matter to our children, and their children to their children, to the generations to come. And He placed great emphasis on it, as is indicated by the fact that one is liable to extinction for eating leavened bread on the Passover, and for abandoning the Passover offering, [i.e., not taking part in the slaughtering thereof]. He has further required of us that we inscribe upon our arms and between our eyes all that we have seen in the way of signs and wonders, and to inscribe it yet upon the doorposts of the houses, and that we remember it by recital in the morning and the evening...[He further required] that we make a sukkah every year and many other commandments like them which are a memorial to the exodus from Egypt. All these commandments are designed for the purpose that in all generations we should have testimonies to the wonders so that they should not be forgotten and so that the heretic should not be able to open his lips to deny the belief in the existence of G-d. He who buys a Mezuzah for one zuz [a silver coin] and affixes it to his doorpost and has the proper intent of heart on its content, has already admitted the creation of the world, the Creator's knowledge and His providence, and also his belief in prophecy as well as in fundamental principals of the Torah, besides admitting that the mercy of the Creator is very great upon them that do His will, since He brought us forth from that bondage to freedom and to great honor on the account of the merit of our fathers who delighted in the fear of His name".

In conclusion, we can now understand why the Rambam places such emphasis

on recounting the miracles which took place in Egypt. They contain profound teachings about creation, G-d's ongoing relationship to the world and the special role that the Jewish people play in His plan for mankind. May this Passover be a time of reflection on the foundations of Jewish existence and renewed aspiration to achieve the purpose for which we were created. □

Passover Q&A's

RABBI REUVEN MANN

1) Was Moshe a good negotiator? At first glance it would seem he wasn't a good negotiator. The 2nd plague, frogs seemed to bring Paroh to his knees. (Sh'mos 8:3) Phroh asks Moshe to pray to God to remove the frogs and promises to allow the Jews to leave. Moshe proceeds to pray and God responds by removing the frogs. When Paroh saw that the frogs were gone he hardened his heart and refused to release the Jews. Why didn't Moshe insist on concessions before removing the pressure? Did Moshe learn from this mistake? The same pattern is repeated. See (Sh'mos 8:13). Paroh promised to free the Jews under the pressure of wild beasts. Moshe warns Paroh to be serious, prays to God, the plague is removed and Paroh again hardens his heart. Moshe still does not learn. He repeats the same "mistake" by hail and by the plague of locusts. (Sh'mos 10:

Question: Why didn't Moshe use the leverage he had to pressure Paroh with concessions - instead of accepting his worthless promises? Did Moshe actually trust Paroh?

Answer: We see from this that the purpose of the makkos, plagues was not to beat Paroh into submission. God had the power to save the Jews without any makkos, plagues. Or He could have gone straight to the slaying of the firstborn. See the verses in Sh'mos. The

purpose of the makkos was not to destroy but to teach that there is a supreme being outside the scheme of the universe Who created the world and had adequate control over its true purpose of the makka (plague) was to break down the false idolatrous ideas of Egypt ad to teach them about Hashem - the Creator of Heaven and Earth Who brought the world into being from nothingness and retained absolute control over everything that happened. God wanted Paroh to use his free will to arrive at this conclusion. Had Moshe refused to remove the plague until Paroh complied - then the Jews would have been released but it would be as a result of a freely arrived at choice. Thus the plague created the pain that forced Paroh to deal with the reality. In the moment of pain he recognized God and asked Moshe to remove the plague. Moshe complied. He removed the plague. Now Paroh could reflect on what had happened and arrive at the proper conclusion - not out of a sense of duress. The only value of a miracle is to draw our attention to the facts that can lead us to the truth. However, we must each use our own power of choice. No one can coerce us. If God wanted to He could force the entire world to believe in Him. But the goal is that we should accept Him and serve Him out of our own free will. This is a fundamental foundation of Judaism.

Question 2) If it the will of God for Paroh to accept Him on the basis of free will, why does it say repeatedly that God "hardened" his heart? The plain meaning seems to be that God made him stubborn thereby preventing him from the right choice.

Answer) The great Bible commentator S'forno explains that it doesn't mean that God took away Paroh's power of choice. To the contrary it means that God strengthened Paroh on an emotional level so that he would not be overly frightened and crushed by the awesome blows that were brought down upon him. The average person would have been to emotionally overwhelmed to resist. If that were to happen then Pharaoh would give in from the force of the blows and thus would defeat the purpose of allowing him to recognize Hashem as a result of free will. Thus God strengthened him emotionally and gave him the fortitude necessary to avoid

emotional panic and exercise the power of bachira, choice.

Question 3) The matza is a symbol of the exodus. The reason is because the redemption came about suddenly, and without prior notice so that the Jews did not have enough time to allow the dough to rise. However, why didn't the Jews know that the redemption was imminent? Moshe told them in advance to prepare a sheep for the Korban Pesach and to sprinkle the blood and that God would pass over their houses and slay the first born of Egypt. They knew that the big night was coming and freedom was at hand. Why didn't they have enough time to prepare normal, leavened bread?

Answer) The purpose of the Seder is to engage in spontaneous discussion. Not everything should be scripted. Therefore, while I have an answer to this question I have decided not to express it and to allow you to use your own creativity in resolving this problem.

Question 3) After Moshe's initial meeting with Paroh failed, God told him to return and perform a miracle ie. To throw his staff on the ground and it would turn into a snake. This would seem to be impressive but Paroh called his magicians and each one did the same (with their secret devices). Moshe's snake then devoured their snakes. However, the ability of the magicians to duplicate Moshe was enough to enable Paroh to remain stubborn. Why did God give Moshe a sign, which was subject to imitation thus undermining its authenticity?

Answer) God does not want to overwhelm people into believing in Him. He wants us to use our minds, think carefully, make the appropriate distinctions and reach a logical conclusion. That is why He gave Moshe a sign, which the magicians could imitate. However, if anyone was interested in the truth they could clearly discern between the magic of the sorcerers and the genuine miracle of Moshe. The magicians used slight of hand and always keep the audience at a certain distance. Moreover, the staff of Moshe consumed the snakes of the magicians. There was enough therefore the thinking person to discern and to distinguish the true from the false. It is only through the proper use of our God given intelligence that we can know Him and serve Him. □

Moses' Three Signs

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Exodus, 4:1-9: 1)

"And Moses answered and said, They (the Jews) will not believe in me and they will not listen to my voice, for they will say, 'G-d did not appear to you.' 2) And G-d said to him, 'What is in your hand?' and he said, 'A staff.' 3) And He said, 'Throw it to the ground', and he threw it to the ground, and it became a serpent. And Moses fled from before it. 4) And G-d said to Moses, 'Send forth your hand and grasp it by its tail'. And he sent forth his hand and he seized it, and it was a staff in his palm. 5) 'In order that they believe you, that G-d appeared to you, the G-d of their fathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob.' 6) And G-d said to him, 'Further, bring now your hand into your chest', and he brought his hand into his chest, and he took it out, and behold his hand was leprous as snow. 7) And He said, 'Return your hand to your chest', and he returned his hand to his chest, and he took it out, and behold it returned to its flesh. 8) 'And it will be if they do not believe you, and they do not listen to the voice of the first sign, then they will listen to the voice of the second sign. 9) And it will be if they do not listen to also these two signs, and they do not listen to your voice, and you will take from the waters of the Nile, and you will spill it onto the dry land, and it will be that the water that you take from the Nile, and it will be blood on the dry land."

G-d instructs Moses on his mission to free the Jews. G-d then responds to Moses' doubt of the Jews' conviction in his divine appointment, by giving him three signs. These signs will prove G-d's appearance to him. A number of questions arise. Before

reading further, take time to review the verses above, and discuss them with others. Simply reading on will remove your opportunity to engage in the process of learning and the use of your own thought. This process is how we become better Torah students, thereby refining our own thinking for future study. It is also an enjoyable activity. The Torah was purposefully written in a cryptic style so as to engage the mind in this most prized activity of analysis, induction, deduction and thought - our true purpose whose rewards are unmatched, both here, and in the next world. Once you have spent due time reviewing the issues, feel free to read the questions enumerated below, and our possible answers.

1. The sign of blood is said to be the ultimate proof of G-d's directive. How does this sign surpass the others?

2. If blood is more convincing than a staff turning into a serpent, or leprosy, why not instruct Moses to perform the blood sign first? Three signs would then not be necessary!

3. What are the ideas conveyed through each specific sign? Why were these three selected?

4. Why does G-d give Moses signs easily "duplicated" by the magicians?

5. What is meant by the "voice" of each sign?

6. In both cases, the transformation of a staff into a serpent, and Nile water into blood, does not take place until both objects reach the ground, as it says, "and he threw it to the ground, and it became a serpent", and "it will be blood on the dry land." What is the reason for this "miracle at a distance"?

7. Why do the first two signs "return" to their original objects? What need does this serve?

8. Why is Moses requested to "conceal" his hand in order for it to

become leprous? G-d could certainly make him leprous without him concealing it.

9. In contrast to the sign of blood where G-d tells Moses what will happen to the Nile's waters before the sign's performance, why does G-d not tell Moses what will happen to the staff or his hand before those miracles?

10. What will the Jews learn when they hear Moses referring to G-d as "the G-d of their fathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob"?

We must say the following: The reason for three signs is twofold; 1) G-d wished the viewer to be convinced of His appointment of Moses with minimal, emotional amazement; and 2) G-d wished this from everyone, as additional signs of less deniability accompany the first. G-d knows what the most convincing sign is, i.e., blood, but He desired it come last in the sequence. A Rabbi Mann teaches in this weeks JewishTimes issue, G-d desires we use our minds.

Action at a Distance

It is for this very reason, that additional features are found in these signs. I refer here to the fact that both the staff, and the Nile's waters transformed only once on the ground. It is not the ground that is essential here, but the "distance between Moses' hand and the transformation". All magicians require tactile control of their manipulated objects. Without physical contact, they cannot create illusions through sleight of hand. However, Moses' objects did not transform, while in his hand, but only once distanced from his control. "Distance" teaches that this was not sleight of hand - his hand was no where near the transformation! These signs could only be explained as true miracles, as G-d's actions.

Magic Does Not Exist

Sforno on Exod. 4:3 cites Talmud Sanhedrin 67b: (Responding to the plague of lice, and their inability to mimic it)"Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'this is the finger of G-d.' This proves that a magician cannot produce a creature less than a barley corn in size. [Strengthening this first position] Rav Pappa said, 'By G-d, he cannot produce something even as large as a camel! [So what does it mean that a magician cannot produce a creature less than a barley corn?] [It means] these that are larger than a barley corn, he can collect, and produce the illusion that he has magically created them." This Talmudic portion teaches that the human hand cannot control that which is too small. Sleight of hand was known in the times of the Talmud, and in Egypt's times. Magic is all illusory. What these Egyptians performed by hand, was quicker than the eye, but only when the object was large enough to maneuver it properly. Our Rabbis did not accept that any powers exist outside natural laws. G-d is the only One capable of altering natural law, as He created it, and controls it. Saadia Gaon too stated that the Egyptian's blood trick was performed by the use of colored dyes, and the frogs were mimicked to leave the Nile by their use of chemicals that frogs repel, causing them to jump from the water onto land. Sforno also states that the snakes of the Egyptian's had no movement, i.e., they were not real. Moses' staff transformed into a "nachash", not the lifeless "tanin" of the Egyptians. The difference in terms, indicates to Sforno, a difference in the two performances.

Blood

Blood is the source of life. When one sees water transformed into blood, one realizes that life itself is in G-d's hands. This strikes at the core of any person's greatest fear - death.

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Moses' Three Signs

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Additionally, its creation from the Nile disputed the Nile's position of grandeur. But as G-d wishes we come to know Him by the use of our higher natures - our intellect - He did not place the blood sign first in sequence. G-d offers a person the chance to rise to a higher level by following his mind. With a minimalistic performance, man has the opportunity to exercise his thinking, and derive truths concerning G-d's will (His appointment of Moses) and His very existence.

Creation: Arrived at Through Reason

I digress to focus your attention on a related and essential idea: G-d's position as the Creator is the most import concept of human comprehension. Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed", Book II, end of Chap XXV:

"...Owing to the absence of all proof, we reject the theory of the Eternity of the Universe: and it is for this very reason that the noblest minds spent, and will spend their days in research. For if the Creation had been demonstrated by proof, even if only according to the Platonic hypothesis, all arguments of the philosophers against us would be of no avail. If, on the other hand, Aristotle had a proof for his theory, the whole teaching of Scripture would be rejected, and we should be forced to other opinions. I have thus shown that all depends on this question. Note it."

Maimonides teaches "all depends on this question". What does he mean? It believe him to mean that by design, G-d wished that our conviction of this most central idea - G-d as Creator - must not be evidenced empirically. This idea, this primary realization is to be arrived at through thought, and understanding,

not through amazement at marvelous feats. In other words, our recognition of G-d as the Creator 'must' be apprehended through our reasoning. This is the highest form of recognition of G-d, and the preferred method to knowing Him, and His works. "All depends on this question" means that proof of Creation was purposefully left to the realm of the "philosophical", and not to "emotional" via astonishing, miraculous displays. It is easy to witness a miracle, and be convinced, but in such a case, our mind forfeits the exercise of reasoning - THE mark of man's perfection. It is fitting that man use his crowned capacity in the pursuit of this question, of G-d as the Creator. I now return to our topic.

The Serpent and Leprosy

Before resorting to blood, why did the staff transform into a serpent? On the surface, both the staff and a serpent have similar appearances, they are narrow, elongated shapes. Once transformed into a serpent, the viewer might second guess what he saw, "Was it in fact a staff before hand, or was it a serpent in some stiffened state?" Control of one's emotions and clear thinking are required so as not to dismiss a miracle. Moses was given these signs for the very reason that the Jews were bent on disbelief in G-d's appointment of Moses. Hence, subsequent to a sign, the Jews might seek to explain away the miracle. To say the very minimum about this specific sign, we may suggest that it teaches that G-d controls life. He can turn a staff into a living organism. G-d's control of life, would appear to offer the most impact on the Jews. Therefore G-d's signs were indications of His control of life. But this was yet animal life. More impressive, was Moses' hand becoming leprous. Here, G-d sought to teach that He controls human life.

He does so in the negative (becoming leprous) as well as the positive (healing of Moses' leprosy). The fact that Moses own hand was smitten, may serve to teach again that it was not Moses who created such a feat, as one would not risk self injury. Similarly, one would not create a dangerous serpent.

Another observation of the serpent and leprosy, is that the transformation into a serpent displays G-d's control over the "matter" of creation, while leprosy displays His control of His "laws" of creation. Transforming a staff into a serpent displays G-d's control over matter itself. Disease has a natural process. Moses' leprous hand displays that G-d controls "how" things behave. These two, initial signs bear witness to G-d control of both aspects of Creation - of matter, and laws governing that matter.

Perhaps, in order to minimize the affect of "astonishment", G-d instructed Moses to first conceal his hand before it became leprous. For if a hand became leprous in plain sight, it would overwhelm the viewer, prohibiting his mind from fully functioning. This feat would startle him. Therefore, G-d told Moses to hide his hand. G-d also gave Moses signs easily "duplicated" by the Egyptians. And as Rabbi Mann taught, this was for our reason that the viewer use intelligence to discern true miracles of G-d, from man's sleight of hand. We may also suggest that the "voice" of each sign refers to the underlying concept derived by the mind, as opposed to the apparent, illusory trick. G-d wished the viewer to understand each sign's message - its "voice".

Why did the first two signs return to their original forms? This is simply a practical issue, that Moses may once again perform these signs. I don't feel we need to look further, after suggesting this practicality.

Why does G-d not tell Moses what will happen to the staff or his hand before those miracles? Mindful that G-d enabled these signs as a "response" to Moses' concern that he be validated, perhaps G-d did not inform Moses of the sign until it happened for good reason: G-d wished that Moses sense the effects of a these signs, just as would the Jews. By experiencing the sign without advance warning, Moses could identify with the perception and emotional impact afforded the Jews through these signs. Thereby, Moses' "first hand" knowledge gave him the security in these signs. His concern was answered by G-d in a primary fashion. He now knew how the Jews would react to these signs - that they were impressive. Had Moses been told by G-d what was about to happen, his expectation would lessen the emotional impact of these signs.

The Fulfillment of G-d's Promise

Our final question was, "What will the Jews learn when they hear Moses referring to G-d as "the G-d of their fathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob"? I believe this may serve to illustrate G-d's consistent kindness. As Moses was G-d's emissary for the Redemption, the Jews would be more inclined to accept this news and Moses' role, by recalling how G-d favored their ancestors, and not just on one occasion, but the lifetimes of many individuals. The Redemption was not a deviation, disbelieved by the Jews, but it was consistent with the manner in which G-d relates to His people - to His prophets' descendants. We learn from this that G-d saw it necessary that even prior to the act of redemption, the Jews required a psychological conviction in G-d's forthcoming salvation. This state of mind was necessary, and G-d reassured the Jews of His unchanging kindness through this statement. ■

the PLAGUE of HAIL

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In Parshas Vau-Ayra, at the end of the ninth chapter, we find Moshe (Moses) not only responding to Pharaoh's plea to halt the plague of hail, but also giving Pharaoh rebuke: Exod. 9:30, "And you and your servants, I know that you have yet to fear G-d." Why, during the plague of hail, unlike other plagues, does Moshe suddenly rebuke Pharaoh? Is there something we may derive from this story that may explain Moshe's behavior? It doesn't appear that G-d instructed Moshe to rebuke Pharaoh, so Moshe's words here could be his own. What did Moshe see in this plague, and what was his purpose in this dialogue?

We must understand that each plague was not randomly selected, but each was carefully designed by G-d. Each one contained some unique idea. Moshe understood better than any man, the depth which can be discovered by studying G-d's creations, including these plagues. I am certain Moshe pondered each plague, but saw something unique in hail.

After Moshe says "And you and your servants, I know that you have yet to fear G-d", these two verses follow, "The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk. And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later." There is a question as to who said these two verses. Ramban says these words are spoken by Moshe. I agree, and would like to pose my own interpretation based on Ramban.

G-d intended to awaken the Egyptians and Pharaoh to His unique distinction as the Creator of heaven and Earth, Exod 9:16, (G-d instructing Moses what to tell Pharaoh) "However because of this have I sustained you, on account that I shall show you My strength, and that you shall declare My name throughout the land." G-d desired not only to show His might, but to counter obstacles in this society's corrupt nature so they may arrive at the truth.

What obstacle did Pharaoh have? Moshe said, "You and your servants have yet to fear G-d". Pharaoh's obstacle was obstinacy. Moshe was first telling Pharaoh his exact flaw in recognizing G-d. Moshe then viewed the hail, and pondered the different affects it had on various crops. Moshe saw that stiff plants broke, while flexible ones survived. He then thought to himself why G-d created a plague with such a characteristic of affecting plants in two manners. Perhaps Moshe gained insight into this specific plague and into G-d's approach in reprimanding the Egyptians. G-d designed the specifics of each plague. But we may question whether these specific plagues were pre-designed from the outset, or did G-d design each plague in line with what was needed at each juncture, depending on Pharaoh's current response.

Pharaoh was now being obstinate, as Moshe pointed out to him "you have yet to fear G-d". Obstinacy had to be pointed out to Pharaoh if he was to understand Moshe's next statement which was in direct response to his character. Stripping Pharaoh of his defenses would be the best method for him to finally recognize G-d. Perhaps G-d included other messages in the plagues for Moshe to derive through his own keen analysis of their unique properties. Moshe therefore intimated to Pharaoh his character flaw via a parallel: "The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk." Meaning, "you Pharaoh are going to be broken" as you are stiff like the flax and barley. "And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later." Again a parallel, "you Pharaoh would be spared if you were flexible", as are the wheat and spelt.

Moshe attempted to teach Pharaoh that "this current plague was designed as a parallel to you". The goal being that Pharaoh repent and follow G-d, as G-d wishes this for all mankind, "For I do not desire the death of the dead

(the wicked) says G-d, but (in his) repentance and in his living." Pharaoh was being taught by Moshe that there is in fact a G-d Who knows all man's thoughts. Hopefully Pharaoh would be impressed and acknowledge the Creator.

This taught Pharaoh an essential lesson about G-d: He not only recognizes man's thoughts and actions, but He "interacts" with man. How else could G-d design a plague to address a single man's (Pharaoh) specific nature? This is a great lesson.

The proof that this was a central theme in G-d's plagues, is Moshe and Aaron's initial address to Pharaoh. In Exodus 5:1-3, Moshe and Aaron approach Pharaoh for the first time: 1) "So says G-d, the G-d of Israel, send My people that they may celebrate Me in the desert. 2) And Pharaoh said, 'Who is G-d that I should listen to His voice, to send Israel, I do not know G-d, and Israel I will not send.' 3) And they (Moshe and Aaron) said, 'The G-d of the Hebrews called unto us, let us go a journey of three days in the desert and we will sacrifice to G-d our G-d, lest we be afflicted with plague or the sword.'" Pharaoh responds in verse 2, and then in verse 3, Moshe and Aaron attempt to clarify something to Pharaoh. What point is repeated in verse 3? They now state "The G-d of the Hebrews called unto us..." This reiterates their initial address of "So says G-d, the G-d of Israel..." Moshe and Aaron wished to communicate a new idea to Pharaoh, that the Jewish G-d "calls" to man. He is unique, and far above the lifeless Egyptian gods. However, Moshe and Aaron saw that their initial attempt to deliver this novel concept to Pharaoh was glossed over. They repeated their words, but now with more clarity, "G-d called to us". This time, in verse 3, they did not use the passive "G-d said" as in verse 1, but the active "(G-d) called to us". The G-d of Israel actually communicates with man. This was what Moshe and Aaron wished to impress on the leader of a culture, whose idols were stone and metal. A "knowing" and "powerful" G-d was Moshe and Aaron's message. Thus, if they disobeyed, this "powerful" G-d would bring plague or death (sword). Moshe and Aaron wished to teach Pharaoh the two most primary concepts that distinguish G-d from all other deities: He is omniscient and omnipotent, all knowing and all powerful. G-d's system of reward and punishment is also based on this idea, and Pharaoh was taught reward and punishment through G-d's distinction between the Jewish and Egyptian livestock. Only the latter were plagued. We see a theme permeating the plagues.

Returning to the metaphor used by Moshe about the stiff and soft crops, why did Moshe tell Pharaoh this through metaphor, and not directly? When someone is faced with a self-realization that conflicts with his ego, he will not be able to tolerate such a stark reality, and he will deny it in defense. To allow Pharaoh a path to accept this idea, Moshe used a method which does not generate a strong, defensive response, but one wherein the listener may ponder. Moshe used a metaphor which can, after time, appeal to the person more casually, thereby avoiding a direct onslaught of the person's self image. A direct approach would only result in Pharaoh's reluctance to hear G-d's message, and the loss of any good for Pharaoh.

We see a clear proof against those self-righteous Jews who falsely assume they have more purpose than Gentiles. If this were so, G-d would not be so concerned with Pharaoh's and the Egyptian's knowledge of G-d. G-d told Moshe at the very outset that Pharaoh will not hearken to him. Yet, G-d instructs Moshe to perform the plagues, "on account that I shall show you My strength, and that you shall declare My name throughout the land." G-d is concerned that all nations recognize the truth of His existence. ■