

# JewishTimes

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**IMAGE GALLERY:  
THE 10 PLAGUES**

# PASSOVER DOUBLE ISSUE

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KORBAN PESACH  
FEELING THE EXODUS  
SIGNIFICANCE OF BREAD  
GOD DOES THE IMPOSSIBLE?  
MOSES' STAFF      ALIEN LIFE?  
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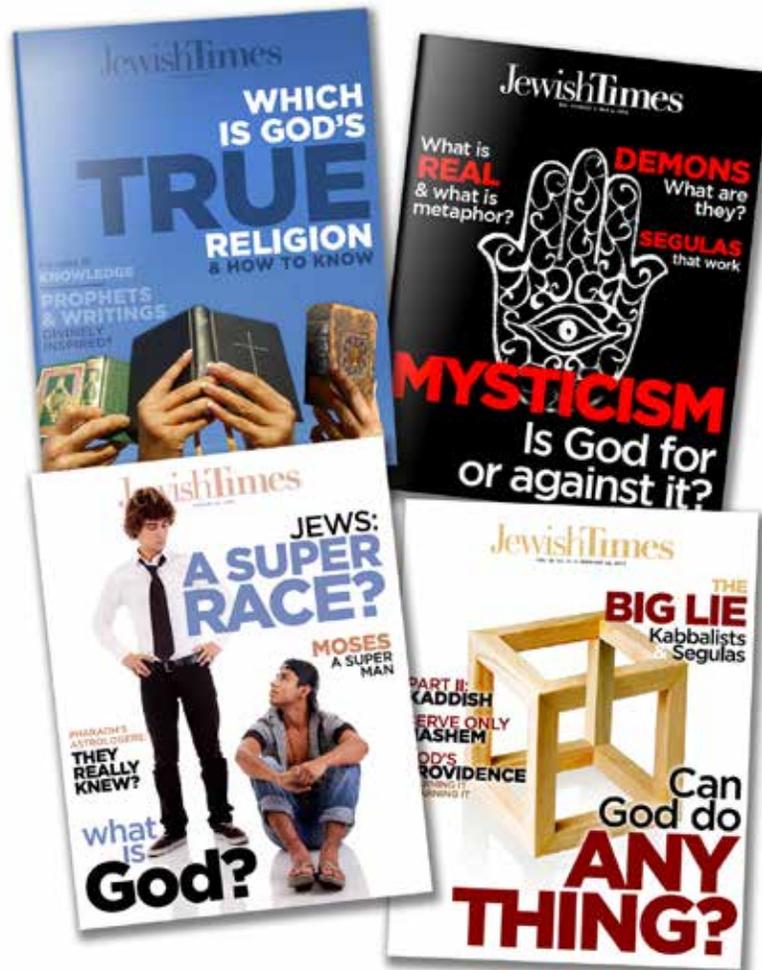


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## LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

## Extraterrestrial Life: Its Impact on our View of God

**Rabbi:** *(The following is a response to a blog post)* Life cannot create itself; nothing can create itself. We know not what God is, but we know that an original source of all existences is required to explain the precise design and existence of the universe. What issues do extraterrestrial life pose to religion? The answer is "none." For if such life exists, it too requires a Creator. But remain focused: extraterrestrial life remains unsubstantiated. And even if proven, in what manner would new life forms impact our Bible? In no way does the existence of intelligent life elsewhere impact Biblical truths. God remains the Creator; all life remains indebted to God. Extraterrestrial life also requires God. If extraterrestrial life exists, it too ponders the very question we discuss, and will be equally amazed at the existence of life on Earth as we are at life elsewhere. After the amazement and novelty wears off, both Earthly life and extraterrestrial life will still focus their attention on how we all got here. God alone – the being who exists without any creation – will remain the most awed existence. ■

## CHRISTIANITY VS. THE BIBLE:

# Is God Infinite? Can He Do the Impossible?

*(The following is a portion of an ongoing debate)*

**Rabbi:** “God said through His prophet Isaiah (40:25), “there is nothing to which you can equate Me.”

Thus, God cannot become man, for then He will be equatable to man. Reason too dismisses such a notion that the all powerful God could render Himself subjugated to natural law by becoming flesh.

**Reader:** In the last statement above, you combined the Word of God, “there is nothing to which you can equate Me” with your personal opinion, “Thus, God cannot become man, for then He will be equatable to man.” You are entitled to your opinion, but are you infallible? Is it theoretically possible that one of your personal opinions is incomplete or in error?

**Rabbi:** All men err, even the greatest man ever, namely Moses. How much more so myself? But you must demonstrate my error, not simply suggest I have erred, without qualification. And without qualification, the question then rests on you: why do you suggest I err without cause? Is it possible you have erred here, or harbor biases that cause you to reject an idea, without cause?

Furthermore, is it not more reasonable to be consistent when defining “there is nothing to which you can equate Me,” to mean as I suggested, that God is not equal to anything, including man? My explanation does not veer from the understanding of “equatable,” so why do you contest it?

**Reader:** If God is infinite, how can there be anything “completely outside of God”? Does it not follow that all time and space must maintain their existence in God, in some way?

**Rabbi:** This suggestion, that God fills all space, is another expression of your error of assuming God equates to something, namely time and space, as you openly commit

yourself. You violate God’s words that He is not equatable to anything.

This error stems from man’s inability to accept an existence outside of his senses. You force God into your sensual world, when in fact, He created the physical universe, and by definition, He must exist outside of time and space. Thus, all time and space must NOT maintain their existence in God, in any way.

**Reader:** Is your statement of your opinion, “Thus, God cannot become man, for then He will be equatable to man” based on the personal conclusion/assumption that if God became man he would have to “give up” His infinite Divinity? Yes or no, please.

**Rabbi:** Suggesting God can become man is like suggesting a circle can simultaneously be a square. As God is “Creator”, He cannot partake of “creation”, i.e., human qualities. Either an existence is the Creator, or creation: both is impossible. Reason does not tolerate contradictions. Again, this violates God words to Isaiah above.

**Reader:** Do you believe that God is infinitely powerful enough to become man and retain His entire infinite divinity? Yes or no, please.

**Rabbi:** This would then violate His very words to Isaiah, since He could be come this conceivable God/man creature, as you described. He would in fact be equatable to something you conceived, but He said He is not equatable to anything. So you contradict yourself.

In his great work, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides explains that God can not do the impossible. You propose the impossible.

One must abandon their childhood view of God as a superman, where “anything is possible.” Just as it is impossible for God to be both physical and non-physical, or to give one person two birthdays, all other impossibilities are not ascribed to God. In fact, by not performing the impossible, we find a perfection in God, as He does not contradict reality, maintaining truths as eternally true, which is the definition of all “truths.” ■



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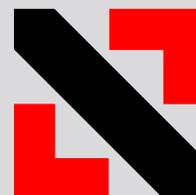
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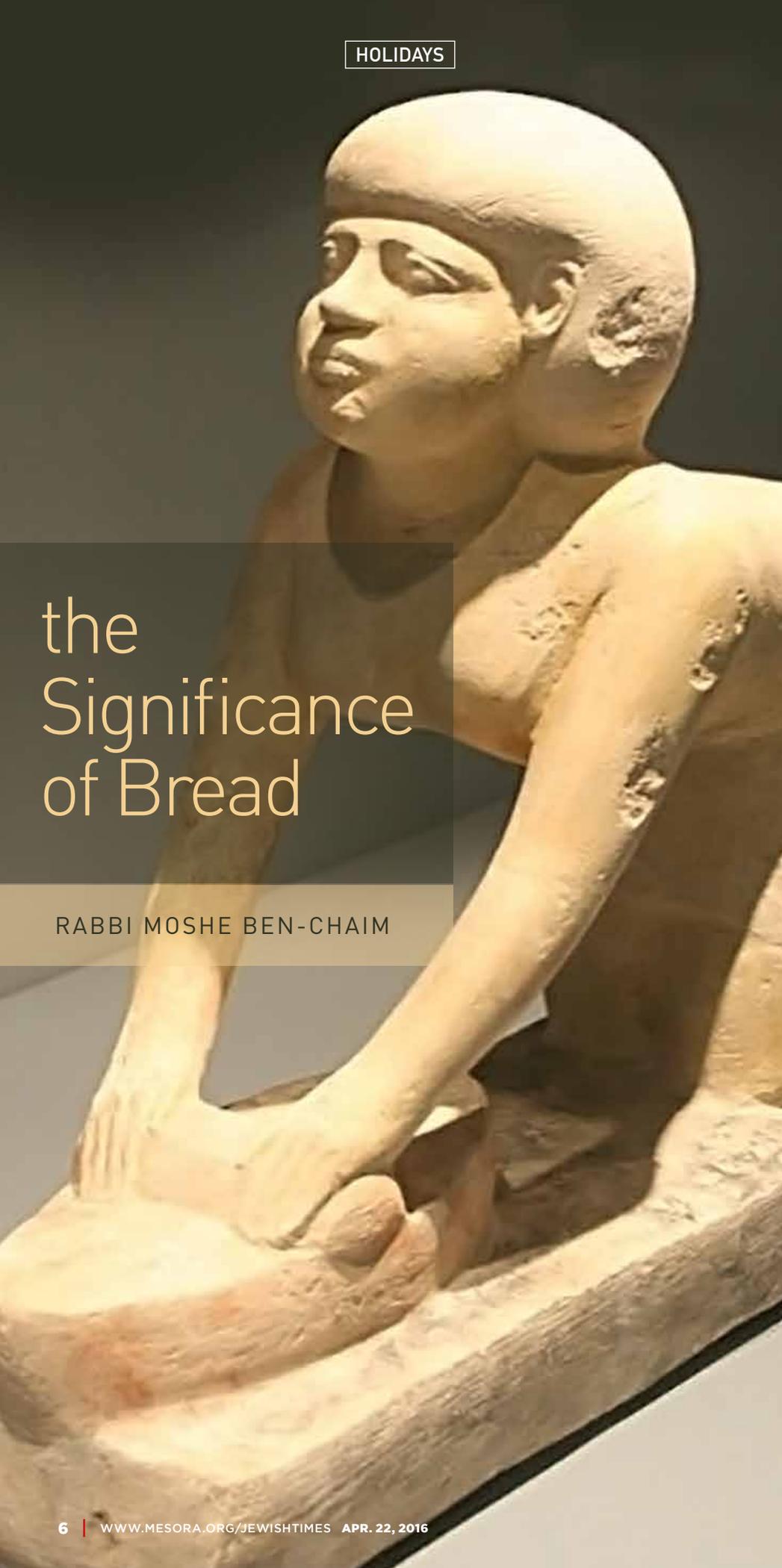
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# the Significance of Bread

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**W**hen studying Passover (Exod. 12), we note its distinction from the other holidays: Passover was celebrated in Egypt. That is, there were “commands” even prior to 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

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Ancient Egyptian mortar and pestle

holidays? What differences exist between the Passover of Egypt, and our Passover?

Reading the Haggadah, we note a conflict in the identity of the matza. The Haggadah 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 Haggadah, quoting the Talmud Pesachim 116b states that matza is commanded in memory of the dough which did not rise due to the Egyptians’ swift, panic-stricken oust of the Jews. (After the Death of Firstborns, the Egyptians panicked, “we are all dead!” and they hurried the Jews’ exodus.) We are obligated by Torah law to recall God’s swift salvation by eating the matza. The Jews were driven out 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, for the hastened exodus retarded the leavening process. 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 (R. Yossi HaGalili, Jer. Talmud 14a). The Torah laws describing those Jews’ obligation also appear to exclude any restriction of eating leaven. Certainly on the morrow of the Egyptian Passover, the Jews were permitted to eat 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 for there was

no prohibition on 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. Thus, 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). Now, if while still in Egypt, when there was yet no “swift salvation”, why were those Jews commanded in this matza? How could the 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. Why focus on this at all? And without orchestration, how were the Jews “collectively” drawn to this loaf? Oddly, Torah refers to their loaves in the singular, “And the people lifted up (carried) HIS loaf from the kneading troughs before it had risen, rolled up in their garments, placed on their shoulders (Exod. 12:34).” “And they baked THE loaf (Exod. 12:39)...” Why this “singular” reference to numerous loaves? Why so much discussion about the loaf? And of what significance is it that God intentionally recorded that the Jews “rolled up [the dough] in their garments, placed on their shoulders”?

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Finally, Rashi praises the Jews for not taking any provisions when they left: “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 [Exod. 12:39].” 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 in fact distrusted God! It is startling that a contradiction to Rashi is derived from the very same verse. In order to answer these questions, it is essential to gain some background...

The Egyptians originated bread. Certainly, as they tortured the Jews, the Egyptian taskmasters ate their bread, as their Jewish slaves gaped enviously, breaking their teeth on dry 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 that very same verse where Rashi derives praise for the Jews (who took no food), it clearly states they in fact took the loaves! Rashi’s source seems internally contradictory. I suggest that a new attitude prevailed among the Jews...

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BREAD

The Jews took that loaf from Egypt, and not for the purpose of consumption. This is Rashi’s point; they trusted God would provide food for their journey. 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 identification with the Egyptians, Rashi comments that when the Jews despoiled the Egyptians at Moses’ command, they valued the Egyptian clothing more than the silver and gold [Exodus 12:35].

The Jews’ attachment to bread is made clear in two glaring details:

“And the people lifted up [carried] his loaf from the kneading troughs before it had risen, rolled up in their garments, placed on their shoulders [Exod., 12:34].” The Torah records a strange act: the Jews carried this loaf in their garments, not in a bag or sack. They additionally placed it on their shoulders. “The suit makes the man.” In other words, as clothing is man’s expression of his identity, the Jews placed in their clothes the dough intended to become free man’s bread. They expressed this link between clothing (identity) and the dough. Furthermore, they carried it on their shoulders, as a

badge of sorts. They did not pack the dough away. It was a prized entity they wished to display, and form part of their dress. Torah records these details as they are significant of the problem God was addressing. I view these two recorded details — “rolled up in their garments, placed on their shoulders” — as intentionally recorded in the Torah to reveal the Jew’s value of bread. This idea, I find, is worthy of a few moments to appreciate.

## FREEDOM: NOT AN INHERENT GOOD

However, the Jews had the wrong idea. Their newfound freedom was not intended by God to be 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. Therefore, God 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. Matza was so significant, that the Torah recorded this “event” of their failed bread making. 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, “and provisions they made not for themselves [Exod. 12:39].” They did not prepare food, as they relied on God for that. This is Rashi’s point. The dough they took was not for provision; it was to express unrestricted freedom. This unrestricted freedom is a direct opposition 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. The matza they baked at Succot was not an accident, but God’s purposeful plan, that any expression of unrestricted freedom be thwarted.

## ONE ACT - TWO GOALS

Matza does not only recall God’s swift salvation, but it 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, enabling 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.

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

## GRATITUDE

We return to the command to eat matza in Egypt. Obviously, this command could not commemorate an event, which did not yet happen. God commanded them to eat the matza for what it did represent: servitude. While in Egypt, why did God wish the Jews to be mindful of servitude? Here I feel we arrive at another basic theme of the Passover holiday: contrast between servitude and freedom. In Talmud Pesachim 116a, the Mishna states that our transmission of the Haggadah must commence with our degraded status, and conclude with our 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 to arrive at an 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 ourselves as if we left Egypt.

In Egypt, we ate matza representing Egyptian servitude. Today we eat it as the Haggadah 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 versus 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 on 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. However, contrary to human feelings, “unrestricted freedom” is an evil...odd as it sounds. God’s plan in creating man was to direct us all in understanding and delighting in the truth of God, His role as the exclusive Creator, the One who manages man’s affairs, and Who is omnipotent (Ramban, Exod. 13:16). God had a purpose in creating man, and it is not to be free and live as we wish. Our purpose is to engage the one faculty granted to us — our intellect. And the primary use of the intellect is forfeited when we do not recognize God, as the Egyptians displayed. Therefore, God freed us so we may enter a new servitude according to His will: serving Him. But this service of God should not be viewed as a negative, as in serving man. Serving God is achieved by studying Him, His Torah and creation — a truly happy and beautiful life. We could equate the enjoyment and benefit in serving God, to serving a human master who gives us gold if we simply look for it. We need not physically “dig” for it, just the act of seeking the gold would be rewarded with this master giving us abundant treasures. So too is the service of God. If we merely learn and seek new ideas, He will open new doors of wisdom. I am always amazed that we are so fortunate.

Finally, what is the significance of chametz, leaven? Once leavened bread took on the role of freedom with no connection to 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 Egyptian 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. ■

# Experience the Exodus

PASSOVER

Rabbi Reuven Mann



**T**he most basic religious requirement of Passover, described as the “Season of our Freedom,” is to recount the story of the Exodus at the seder (Passover meal). We fulfill this through discussion and study and also by eating special foods that symbolize what took place in Egypt. During the seder, we must also comport ourselves in the manner of free people.

Reciting the story of the Exodus is not intended merely as a review of a significant part of our history. If that were the case, there would be no requirements to eat matzah and maror (bitter herbs), drink four cups of wine, and to assume a reclining position in the manner of “free” people.

The Haggadah emphasizes that “In every generation, one is obliged to view it as though he, himself, was a slave in Egypt and was redeemed on this night.” It is therefore clear that the Exodus is not merely a historical phenomenon that happened to a group of people who lived a few thousand years ago. Rather, it was a transformative experi-

ence that shaped the destiny of the countless generations who descended from the original slaves in Egypt.

We must therefore recognize the true purpose of the Exodus and understand how it relates to us. In that spirit, we rejoice as people who have just attained their freedom and sing songs of praise to the Almighty. In telling the story, we are enjoined to “begin with shame and conclude with praise.” The exact interpretation of this requirement is the subject of a Talmudic dispute.

The great sage Shmuel says that “shame” is the physical enslavement we endured and from which we were rescued by Hashem. This aspect of the Exodus is succinctly expressed in the paragraph recited immediately after the “Four Sons,” which begins “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.”

This is the theme of Passover that everyone can relate to and is the cause of the holiday’s great appeal to Gentiles as well as Jews. When Senator Ted Cruz, a leading candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination, visited a matzah factory in

Brooklyn recently, he seemed very much at home and proudly stated that he has attended many Seders. At the end of his visit, the Jews broke out into a rendition of “Dayenu,” and the Senator enthusiastically joined in the singing.

It is difficult to imagine a worse experience than being a slave to a cruel taskmaster. Slavery is an absolute violation of human dignity and the G-d-given right of every person to fulfill his life’s purpose. To enslave a human being is to cripple his soul, as he is reduced to a beast of burden. This state of degradation to which our ancestors were subjected in Egypt is the focal point of the narrative of redemption.

We are frequently told in the Torah to remember that we were slaves in Egypt. Many commandments are accompanied by this reminder. Most prominent is the warning not oppress the “stranger,” for “we were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

The experience of being enslaved and redeemed is fundamentally transformative. One who has gone through it may emerge as an entirely superior individual. He has tasted genuine evil and been saved from it. He can never again be a neutral bystander to human misery and degradation.

No people has suffered from human evil more than the Jews. Yet this has not embittered us or made us oblivious to the suffering of others. Indeed, Jews are the most kind and merciful people on earth. In the Middle East, the only country providing medical assistance to needy Arabs trapped in the Syrian fighting is Israel.

Though the Jews had descended to the lowest level of impurity in Egypt, Hashem revived and redeemed them so they could receive the Torah on Mount Sinai. Along with that gift came the charge to become a “Holy Nation” and a light unto mankind.

The ultimate cause of our national spiritual transformation was the “shame” of our enslavement and the glory of our redemption, which enabled us to accept the Torah and become the nation of Hashem. This is the formative experience that forged our character as a people.

We must actually experience the impact of this great story on the night of Passover, so we can emerge as freer, more compassionate, and holier individuals. May we merit to achieve this. ■

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**HOLIDAYS**

# **HALLEL HAGADOL: Take the Time to Respond**

**HAGGADAH**

**Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg**

**W**hen speaking to friends about one's seder, there are highlights that are universal. The insanely bitter maror, or the incredible hiding spot for the afikoman. Maybe some of the penetrating discussions throughout the magid section, or this year's cutest rendition of "ma nishtana". Let's not forget the sumptuous meal, or the four cups of wine. This author is fairly certain that a topic not discussed during the post-seder recap is the recitation of hallel hagadol (let alone hallel itself). Hallel is sandwiched in between the blessings over the meal and the songs at the tail end of the seder. There aren't reams of commentary in haggadot concerning hallel hagadol. It is quite possible to read that small section and not be aware of its tremendous importance. Yet, we see that there are many rabbis who maintained that hallel hagadol is of such importance that it should be recited on a fifth cup of wine. The mission today is to bring hallel hagadol out of the shadows into its proper place as a critical part of the seder experience.

Hallel hagadol refers to the twenty-six verses that are recited after the "regular" hallel on the seder night, immediately prior to the paragraph of "nishmat kol chai". We are familiar with its responsive format, where a praise or thanks is offered, followed by the rejoinder of "ki le'olam chasdo". When we turn to the source for this specific hallel, we find two applications (for this article, we will leave out the practice of reciting it during the

introductory prayers of Shabbat, as it is a custom only). The first is during a time of drought. If the Jewish people fast, and it then rains, there is an obligation to recite hallel hagadol. It is critical to note that ideally, one recites this hallel after being in a state of satiation – "only when the appetite is satisfied and the stomach is full" (Taanit 26a). The other time hallel hagadol is recited is during the seder. Why are these the only two instances we recite this hallel? What do they share in common?

The Talmud in Pesachim (118a) tells us why it is called hallel hagadol:

"And why is it called the great hallel? — Said R. Johanan: Because the Holy One, blessed be He, sits in the heights of the universe and distributes food to all creatures."

The Rashbam explains that the there is a great praise being offered here, noted in the second to last verse of hallel hagadol – "He gives bread to all creatures".

Further along, the Talmud questions why we recite the "regular" hallel if we are reciting hallel hagadol? The Rashbam deduces from the question that hallel hagadol is in fact a greater praise than the standard hallel we recite. If indeed this is true, then why recite the "regular" hallel at all? The Talmud answers that there are five themes discussed in the more familiar hallel, including the exodus and the splitting of the sea.

What does the concept of God providing sustenance to man have to

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do with the commandment of telling the story of the exodus? Why is hallel hagadol such great praise?

The Talmud discusses the origins of the prayer of hallel in a different place (ibid 117a):

“Rab Judah said in Samuel's name: The Song in the Torah was uttered by Moses and Israel when they ascended from the [Red] Sea. And who recited this Hallel? The prophets among them ordained that Israel should recite it at every important epoch and at every misfortune — may it not come upon them! and when they are redeemed they recite [in gratitude] for their redemption.”

There are two important concepts we can discern from the above statements. The first is the connection between the song recited by the Jews upon their exit from the Red Sea (commonly known as “az yashir) and Hallel. The second is the decree for all Jews to recite after experiencing a redemption (the issue of it being tied to misfortune is a separate topic). The format of hallel is as a prayer of response, rather than a prayer tied to a “normal”

state. When the Jews were faced with annihilation at the Red Sea, a miracle occurred, and they were saved. The witnessing of this Divine Revelation, and the subsequent removal of the threat of extermination at the hands of the Egyptians, demanded a verbal reaction. Therefore, under the guidance of Moshe, the special song was composed. The ideas of a responsive praise and thanks became the defining features of hallel. Therefore, the framework of hallel became part of the nation's arsenal of prayer. It wasn't until the time of King David that the prayer was objectified in Psalms, eventually becoming incorporated into our sidurim. All along, the idea of a responsive prayer has been the defining characteristic of this prayer.

This would explain the hallel we recite on the three festivals, Chanukah, and especially the night of the seder. When we tell the story of the exodus, we are engaged in the account of the great miracles and wonders performed by God. If we truly internalize the trajectory of slavery-to-freedom, this recitation of

hallel will be the organic result.

Why, then, would we recite hallel hagadol? What are we responding to with that prayer?

When we look to the other instance when hallel hagadol is recited, its rationale is quite clear. During a famine, our very existence as a species is under threat. We fast and repent, hoping to merit some type of merciful response. When it rains, we celebrate, we eat, and we become satiated. In that state of satiation, we can now respond properly to what occurred. When we are in danger, and the danger is removed, we respond with hallel. But the danger by the famine is more primal, and the state of satiation a greater quality of differentiation than “just” being saved. We went from the threat of death to a state of complete contentment and security. Our appreciation of God as being in complete and total control of the natural world, as expressed through His sustaining us, is clear to us. We thus recite hallel hagadol.

At least now we have some sense of the structure of hallel hagadol. As well, we know that we recite this prayer on the

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night of the seder after our meal, in a state of satiation. But the mystery has not been solved. A clue lies in an interesting statement concerning the meal of the seder by the Rambam (Hilchos Chameitz U'Matza 8:9)

“After we continue with the meal and eat whatever he wants to eat and drinks whatever he wants to drink...”

Why does the Rambam describe this meal in this unrestricted manner?

The festive meal of the seder night has a different quality to it. It is the meal of freedom, infused with the wondrous ideas spoken of prior to this moment. An expression of this autonomy is the ability to choose to eat what we want, rather than be dependent on a master for food, as in the time of slavery.

This could be the opening to understanding the recitation of hallel hagadol on the night of the seder. The meal is an experience of freedom, another expression of contrast to the state of slavery. When we partake of the meal, followed by the feeling

of satiation, we are now in a state of mind to offer a new type of responsive praise. The hallel directed towards the miracles of the night focuses on one aspect of the Divine relationship with man. We see God solely through the prism of overt examples of breaches of natural law. This is critical to understanding the scope of the story of the exodus, and certainly is a vehicle to a greater understanding of God. However, this is an incomplete awareness of the concept of Divine Providence. When we reflect on our meal of freedom, we see the most complete view of Divine Providence. God is not “just” the God of miracles; rather, His control of the world is absolute, from the fantastic breaches in natural law to the very creation of the natural laws themselves. As well, He acts in a manner of complete knowledge, apportioning sustenance to each person based on merit. This is as complete a description of Divine Providence one can have, and the verses in hallel hagadol bear this out. We can now understand why hallel hagadol is an

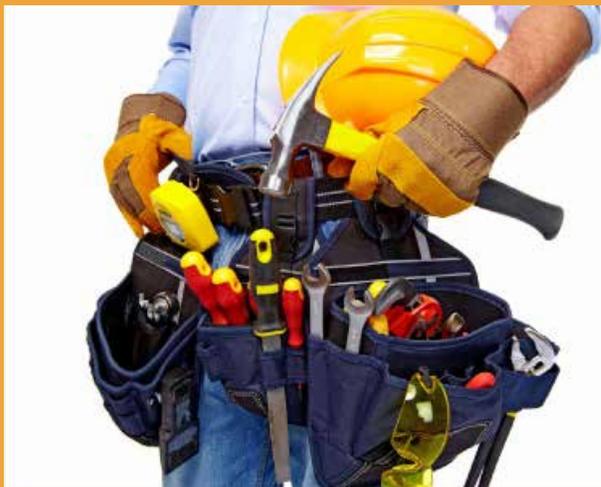
appropriate response recited on the night of the seder. When a person engages in reflecting upon and learning about God’s actions through miracles, he understands one facet of God’s relationship to man. However, once he partakes of this unique meal, he can appreciate to a greater degree the nature of this relationship. The first hallel responds to the miracles of the night. The second hallel responds to the meal of freedom, broadening the person’s perspective of God’s relationship to man. It is the pinnacle of praise and thanks of the entire seder experience.

Yes, there will be maror and “ma nishtana”, eating and singing. But there is also hallel hagadol, a unique responsive prayer that elucidates deep concepts regarding the totality of the Divine Providence. When we all recap our seder experience to friends and family, let’s bring this prayer to the forefront of the conversation, and reflect on the tremendous kindness afforded to us by God. ■



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# THE 10 PLAGUES: Moses' Staff

PASSOVER

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim  
& Dani Roth



**M**y best friend Dani Roth asked me this excellent question, which I never heard asked even by adults:

*“Why did Moses need to wave a staff when announcing the plagues? Couldn’t he just announce the plagues, since it was God who really made the plagues?”*

Once I heard Dani ask this, I said “That’s a great question!” I immediately started thinking and researching the Torah for clues. Dani is correct: God has no needs, so whether Moses waved a staff, or simply announced to Pharaoh the next plague, or even if Moses did nothing, God can cause the plague to start independent of Moses’ actions. Furthermore, what difference is it to Pharaoh and Egypt if they see Moses waving a staff or not? The plague alone is the impressive event!

To answer Dani’s question and learn the significance of Moses’ staff, we must study the first instance of the staff found in Exodus 4:2 during Moses’ first prophecy at

the burning bush on Mount Sinai. During this prophecy (which commenced in chap. 3), God outlines His plans to send Moses to address Pharaoh to answer the cries of Abraham’s descendants and deliver them to freedom, also giving them the land of Israel.

Moses was the most humble man on Earth[1], and therefore when God summoned him to lead the Exodus, he replied to God, “Who am I that I should address Pharaoh and take out the Jews?” God then assures Moses He will be with him. Moses then asks what name of God he should use, and God says, “I am, that I am.” God then instructs Moses to gather the Jewish elders and inform them of His plan, and God assures Moses “they will listen to your voice (Exod. 3:18).” God concludes that He knows Egypt’s king will not initially release the Jews, and that He will bring the plagues. Ultimately the Egyptian king will release the Jewish nation, and the Jewish women will ask the Egyptian women for gold, silver and clothes and they will despoil

Egypt. This apparently ends God’s address to Moses.

However, we notice that in God’s initial presentation to Moses about how these events will take place, God does not command Moses to use his staff. This is significant.

In the next verse Moses says, “...they [the Jews] will not believe me and they won’t listen to my voice for they will say ‘God did not appear to you’ (Exod. 4:1).” Moses says this, despite God’s earlier assurance that the Jews would in fact believe Moses (Exod. 3:18). Some Rabbis[2] critique Moses for this disbelief, while Maimonides teaches[3] Moses was merely asking “how” God intended His plan will cause the Jews to accept Moses’ words, as God stated in verse 3:18. (I will soon propose a third possibility.) Nonetheless, God responds, “What is in your hand?” Moses replied, “A staff.” God told Moses to cast it downward. Moses did so, and it became a snake. Moses then fled from the snake. God then told Moses to

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grab its tail and it returned to a staff. God explained this miracle was “in order that the Jews will believe that the God of the patriarchs appeared to you (ibid 4:5).” In 4:17 God commands Moses to use this staff to perform the miracles and the plagues[4]. But we must ask, as God already told Moses “they will listen to your voice (Exod. 3:18)” even without the staff, how can God now say that due to the staff miracle, “the Jews will believe that the God of the patriarchs appeared to you”? The Jews’ belief is independent of the staff’s miracle!

God then performed another miracle of Moses’ hand becoming leprous. God continued:

*“And if they do not believe you, and they don’t listen to the voice of the first sign, they will listen to the voice of the second sign. And if they don’t believe also to these two signs, and they don’t listen to your voice, then you shall take of the Nile’s water and pour it on dry ground and that water you take from the Nile will become blood on dry land (Exod. 4:8,9).”* What is this “voice” referred to here? Furthermore, Moses too says “will not believe me, and they won’t listen to my voice.” Why is “voice” in addition to Moses himself?

Now, while it is true, as Dani’s father said, God could have ultimately planned Moses to use the staff, regardless of Moses’ apparent initiation of the need, it is equally tenable that God’s instruction to Moses to

use the staff was only a concession to Moses and not part of God’s original plan. A few other considerations lead me to this assumption. First of all, after Moses pleads with God to find another emissary and God concedes to allow Aaron to speak instead of Moses, God includes in that concession the statement “And this staff take in your hand with which you will perform the miracles (Exod. 4:17).” Why is the command to take the staff joined to Aaron’s appointment? Secondly, in verse 4:20 the staff is mentioned again, but now Moses calls it the “Staff of God.”

### The Purpose of the Staff

Moses was most humble, viewing himself as no one special. He did not wish leadership. Perhaps Moses’ very humility made him perfect for this role in God’s plan. As God wished to display His greatness to the Egyptians, a humble man would ensure that the focus remains on God, and not allow leadership to corrupt him.

I wish to suggest the purpose of the staff is connected to Moses’ humility. Perhaps God gave Moses this staff to equip Moses with complete confidence. Holding the staff throughout the signs and plagues — the staff that turned into a snake and back again — Moses was thereby emboldened to carry out God’s mission confidently. He would be able to speak with a “voice” of confidence. Perhaps also, God grouped together His concession of sending Aaron with His command to take the staff (ibid 4:17) to say

in other words, that both were concessions — “for Moses” — not Pharaoh or others. And Moses’ reference to the staff in 4:20 as “God’s staff” is another way of saying that Moses viewed the staff as a surety from God: Moses’ sentiment of satisfaction that he will succeed.

This explanation of the staff also explains why the staff was a “response,” and not in God’s original plan: the staff was for Moses, not the Jews, as God already said the Jews will believe Moses “prior” to the staff’s miracle. When God says the staff will be used “*in order that the Jews will believe that the God of the patriarchs appeared to you (ibid 4:5)*,” God does not mean the staff is what convinces the Jews, for God said “*they will listen to your voice (Exod. 3:18)*” without the staff. Thus, the staff was to provide Moses with the necessary assurance, in order that “he” feels confident that the Jews will listen. The staff was to embolden Moses, and was unnecessary for the Jews or Pharaoh.

So Dani, thank you once again for asking me a great Torah question that has lead me to learn new Torah ideas. Together, we are sharing Torah with many other people who will read and learn from this article. ■

[1] Numbers 12:3

[2] Rashi, Ramban

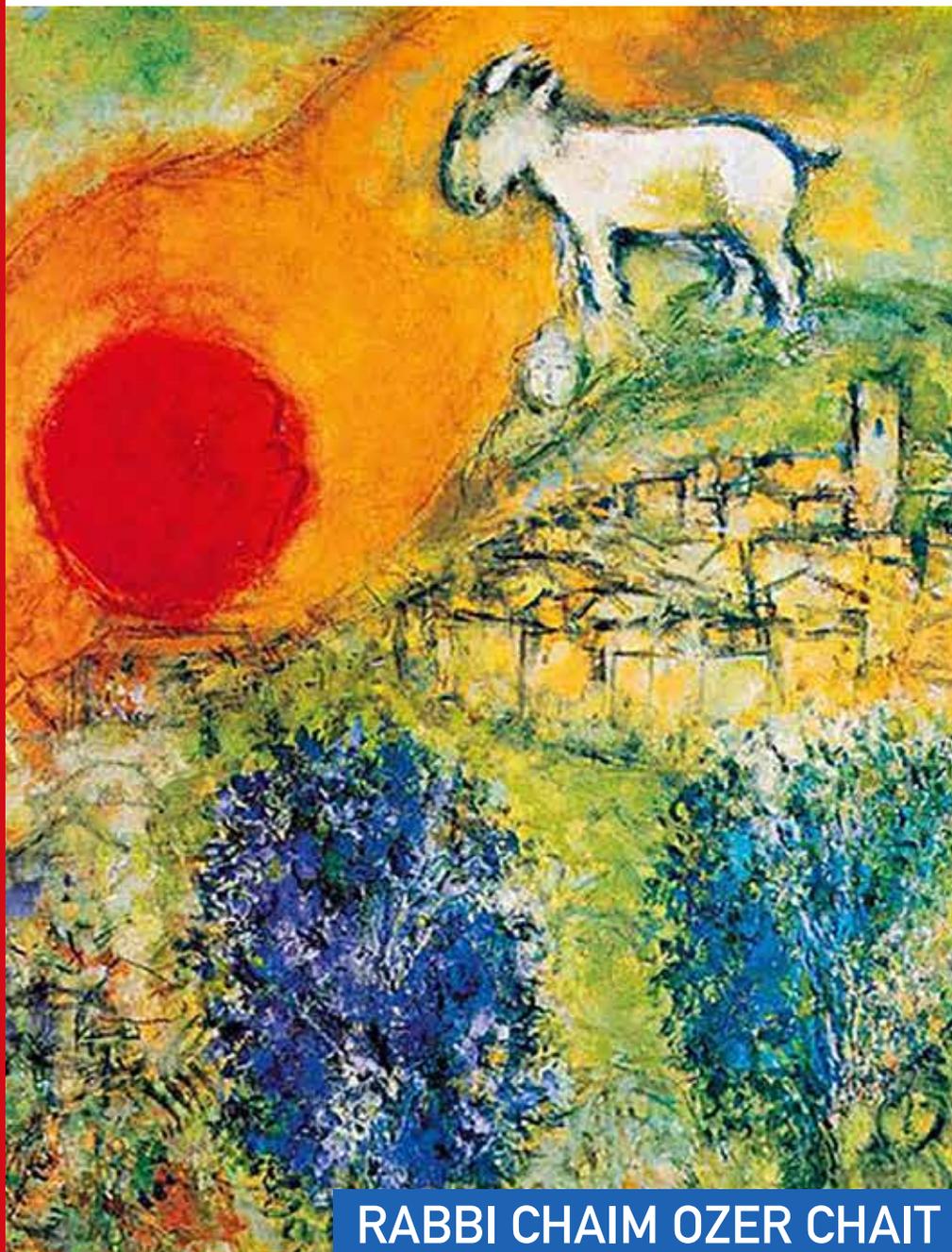
[3] Guide for the Perplexed, book I, chap. lxiii

[4] Ibn Ezra, Exod. 4:17



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# Understanding Korban Pesach



**RABBI CHAIM OZER CHAIT**

**K**orban Pesach presents a unique challenge in comprehending its important role it plays in Judaism. We find a very strong bond between Korban Pesach and the Mitzvah of Bris Milah (1), that would indicate not only a close relationship between the two but an intertwining and a strong connection between them. They are the only two Positive Commandments that are punishable by Kares (2), they both override Shabbos (even Pesach Sheini (3) overrides Shabbos, Korban Pesach is the only Korban Yachid that overrides Shabbos) and the lack of A Bris Milah (whether by the Father or of a member of the household) prevents the bringing of the Korban Pesach. (see my article "Celebrating this Pesach with a Korban") The similarities suggest a common theme or philosophical idea that runs through both of them. The Na've (Prophet) Ezekiel Makes a profound statement, that gives us a deeper understanding to this two Mitzvot, when he states (4) "and I said to you because of your blood you shall live and I said to you because of your blood you shall live". (It is customary to recite this verse both at a Bris Milah as well as the Sedar night as part of the Ha'Gadah reading) The words of Ezekiel obviously need further clarification to fully comprehend his profound thought.

The Rambam addressing the relationship between the uncircumcised and the prohibition of offering a Korban Pesach states as follows (5) "The reason of the prohibition that the uncircumcised should not eat of it (Ex. Xii. 48) is explained by our Sages as follows: 'The Israelites neglected circumcision during their long stay in Egypt, in order to make themselves appear like the Egyptians. When God gave them the commandment of the Passover, and ordered that no one could kill the Passover lamb unless he, his sons, and all the male persons in his household were circumcised, that only then he could come near and keep it (ibid. Xii. 47), all performed this commandment, and the number of the circumcised being large the blood of the Passover and that of the circumcision flowed together. The Prophet Ezekiel (xvi. 6), referring to this event says, "When I saw thee sprinkled with

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thine own blood, I said unto thee, Live because of thy [two kinds of] blood," i.e., because of the blood of the Passover and that of the circumcision". In other words Moshe Rabbenu (our teacher) was saying to Bnei Yisroel (the Jewish People) if you want to leave Egypt then you are only going to leave as one who is truly committed to accept the covenant of Avraham our forefather. What will save you from the Angel of Death the "Plague of the Firstborn" and allow you to leave Egypt is Korban Pesach and you can only bring a Korban Pesach if you performed a Bris Milah.

The Rambam furthermore explains (6) the meaning of Korban Pesach, as follows, "Scripture tells us, according to the Version of Onkelos, that the Egyptians worshipped Aries, and therefore abstained from killing sheep, and held shepherds in contempt. Comp. 'Behold we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians,' etc. (Exod. Viii. 26); Thus the very act which is considered by the heathen as the greatest crime, is the means of approaching God, and obtaining His pardon for our sins. In this manner, evil principles, the diseases of the human soul, are cured by other principles which are diametrically opposite."

"This is also the reason why we were commanded to kill a lamb on Passover, and to sprinkle the blood thereof outside on the gates. We had to free ourselves of evil doctrines and to proclaim the opposite, viz., that the very act which was then considered as being the cause of death would be the cause of the deliverance from death. Comp. 'And the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come unto you houses to smite you' (Exod. Xii. 23), Thus they were rewarded for performing openly a service every part of which was objected to by the idolaters."

We therefore see that in reality both the Korban Pesach and Bris Milah are of identical ideas, i.e. to bring man closer to the true ideas of God. Avraham our Forefather brought to the world the true idea and understanding of God. That is why we say everyday in our prayers, "The God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, the God of Yaakov". The Korban Pesach is the eradication of false ideas about God. This is what the Prophet Ezekiel is telling us. The blood is the essence of the subject. The Prophet is saying the essential idea of both the Korban Pesach and Bris Milah are the same. Both commandments

direct our thoughts to the true understanding of God. "And I said to you because of your blood you shall live and I said to you because of your blood you shall live." When the Children of Israel have the true ideas of God then we are deemed worthy of redemption and this is why we are worthy and we merit to live. That is why it was so imperative to offer the Korban Pesach before leaving Egypt so we should not leave with a false understanding of God. Otherwise B'nei Yisroel (The Jewish People) might attribute these great miracles to a false god, heaven forbid. It was therefore out of the greatest necessity that B'nei Yisroel exit Egypt with only the true ideas of God. This also explains why one who is uncircumcised cannot bring a Korban Pesach they are conceptually and mutually exclusive, that would be as if one enters the Mikvah holding an unclean reptile in his hand. Circumcision postulates the acceptance of the true ideas of God, the Korban Pesach denounces the false ideas that man may attribute to God

It is therefore evident why Korban Pesach is so crucial to the Seder Night. Not only do we have to relive and demonstrate the experience of the exodus of Egypt, "one must present himself as if he himself has left Egypt," but one must also commit himself to the true ideas of God for that was essential for our redemption.

This also sheds light on a very important episode that takes place at the beginning of the book of Yehoshua. The people crossed the Jordan River on the tenth day of the Month of Nissan and encamped in Gilgal. (7) At that point in Gilgal, Yehoshua commands the entire Jewish people to undergo circumcision (for the forty years that the children of Israel journeyed in the wilderness they did not perform circumcision (8)--due to the rigors of travel in the wilderness, circumcision was deemed dangerous and therefore not performed. Consequently, they did not offer the Korban Pesach all the years in the wilderness). Four days later, on the fourteenth day of the Month of Nissan they offered the Korban Pesach (9). Note, this was the first Korban Pesach since leaving Egypt.

It obviously was not coincidental that they entered Israel at the time of Pesach but it was part of a divine plan in conquering the land of Israel. Israel could only be conquered when Bnei

Yisroel have the true ideas and understanding of God. This is part of the covenant between God and Avraham. Only when we accept the God of Avraham do we merit to conquer and live in the Land of Israel. According to some authorities (10), our daily prayer, Alaynu, was written by Yehoshua at this point when he crossed the Jordan River. In this prayer he proclaims the oneness of God's kingship and he will one day remove the detestable idolatry from the world.

Korban Pesach exemplifies to the highest level the importance of having the true and lofty ideas of our Creator. May we all merit to offer and partake of the Korban Pesach speedily in our times. Amen. ■

#### Footnotes

1 circumcision

2 Literally the soul's being cut off, divine punishment in the form of premature death or loss of the world to come

3 The Korban Pesach brought on the fourteenth of Iyar

4 Ezekiel Chapter 16 Verse 6 hat

5 The Guide for the Perplexed Book 3 Chapter 46

6 ibid

7 Yehoshua Chapter 4 Verse 19

8 ibid Chapter 5, Verses 2-10

9 ibid

10 Kol Bo 16

# FF G I O R I V E R E

How Judaism  
compares  
to other  
religious  
views



# N E S S

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Shawn Bose, founder of Deily.org, invited me to offer Orthodox Judaism's response to Deily's "Forgiveness" video, which presented the major religions' views on forgiveness.

To open, it is vital that you know that the Bible — Judaism — is not a system of belief like all other religions, but a system of proof and reason. As it is true regarding science, all concepts we hold to be truths — including forgiveness — must be validated.

Now, as forgiveness falls into the category of morality (good and evil, i.e., what requires forgiveness) we must recognize that this is not determined by man. God alone defines all morality. Morality is of an "authoritative" nature, unlike the area of true and false, where man is equipped to independently determine what is a "truth:" for example, what is wet or dry, heavy or light, and tall or short. Man can determine truths, but man cannot determine morality, viz., whether one is morally correct to kill an embryo to save the mother, or spare the embryo, or which crimes deserve death or monetary penalty. Only God can determine these matters, as He determined when life begins, which life is of greater value, and which crime is capital or criminal. Man cannot determine if killing an animal is "as evil" as killing a man. There is no tool with which man can accurately evaluate either being. But as God created all life, He can permit man to kill beasts for his needs. But we require His word to know this. We also require God's word to know how to evaluate who to forgive, when to forgive, and if we should forgive.

God's Bible is God's only revealed religion. God communicated no other religion. And this is sensible, as there is but one mankind. Yes, there are claims of God's communications or prophets, but without mass witnesses as was so during Revelation at Sinai, one either believes in other religious claims or he does not...but he has no proof as we have regarding Sinai. Therefore, we can only rely on the Bible as God's proven words, and from here alone we may study His view on forgiveness. We must then dismiss the various religious views of forgiveness presented in the video based on the following considerations.

The Islamic leader said the Koran believes a "devil" is the cause of man's evil. However, that religious leader did not offer evidence that a devil exists. Nor does world history offer this evidence. And as God planted eyes in each of us, He desires we accept what we witness, and dismiss what has no evidence. Religion is not a free for all, but must be guided by God's will, evidence and reason, and a large part of His will

can be derived from His design of nature, human biology, human intellect, and our psyches. Let us not ignore this obvious lesson. The Islamic leader also suggested retaliation is permitted, but forgiveness is preferred. However, he did not qualify why this is morally correct. By what means was this conclusion made? This is a baseless opinion.

Christianity professes complete and unconditional forgiveness. Do Christians forgive their teenage children who constantly steal their hard-earned money for drugs and alcohol? Or should they teach them accountability by expressing clear disapproval, and suspend forgiveness until they end their self-destructive habits? Forgiveness sends the wrong message, making the teen feel his crime is not really "bad," empowering them to continue their destructive behaviors. If a man was to murder another man's wife, should the widower embrace the murderer and forgive him, endangering himself and others by not demanding death or incarceration to protect society? Is a man to deny his feelings of love for his lost bride in such a case? Does God ever ask this of us? No. God wishes man to live in reality and not deny his proper feelings. If a man repeatedly attacked a senior citizen, or repeatedly raped a child, is repeated forgiveness truly God's desire, or does God demand that disgust with such morally-decayed animals is warranted? Should a Jew, whose 4 year old daughter was shot dead at by an Arab terrorist forgive that terrorist? Or should the terrorist be killed, as God says in His Bible? Should we forgive and embrace ISIS butchers who have beheaded countless Christians? Should we befriend Hitler? I believe this illustrates just how morally and intellectually distorted, and how damaging Christian forgiveness is.

What does God say about forgiveness?

Regarding the person who rejects God's Biblical curses, feeling he will escape punishment, God says, "God will not forgive him for then God's anger and jealousy will kindle against that man and he will meet with all the curses written in this Book and God will erase his name from under the heavens (Deut. 29:19)." God does not forgive this man. This position to forgive anyone for anything is not God's position. God teaches that a robber must repay, and that repentance is not repentance if we remain in our evil ways. If God does not forgive in many cases, He does not wish man to veer from His Biblical lessons. Man is then morally correct not to forgive another unless the sinner corrected matters, and himself. As God teaches in Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be holy for I am Holy..." The lesson is that we are to mimic God, since His

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ways are perfect. Moses clearly tells us to “walk in His ways” (Deut. 28:9).

God plagued Egypt ten times and did not forgive them. God did not forgive Pharaoh but drowned him and his army in the Reed Sea. God killed many others like Korach, Amalek and other wicked people and nations. God Flooded the Earth, killing all but Noah and his family. But God did not kill the generation of the Tower of Babel; He dispersed them instead. Thus, God has parameters when forgiveness is correct, and incorrect. We learn that unconditional forgiveness clearly violates God’s Bible. It is then incomprehensible how Bible readers violate God’s words.

These Biblical cases are not written to record history, but rather, are God’s education of what is evil, and His systems of morality and reward and punishment. The Bible must be studied for years, as God’s wisdom is of immeasurable depth. But He embedded clues in the verses, making the Bible a unique book, and offering us the means through which we can determine His morality system. Simplistic formulations of morality and forgiveness as I saw on the video, block our understanding of God’s lessons. Such Biblical violations riddle God’s reputation and morality with corruptions. Just as a scientist and a doctor require decades of study to understand God’s natural laws, the Bible student too must study under the original recipients of the Bible — the Talmudic scholars and Rabbis — to learn God’s morality. I have personally studied the Bible and Talmud for about 40 years, and I am still awed by the brilliance I see each day. No other book compares, as no other book was authored by God.

Christianity also suggests Jesus died for mankind’s sins. Yet, this too violates God’s Bible. God says, “a father is not killed for his son’s sins, and a son is not killed for a father’s sins; each man in his own sin is killed (Deut. 24:16).” Thus, the opinion that “Jesus died for mankind” blatantly rejects God’s words. And since God also said to never alter His Bible (Deut. 13:1), this principle will never change. Additionally, God’s principle makes sense to our minds.

Would you deem it wrong to assist your enemy? Is it wrong to keep unjust weights in your home, as long as you don’t use them? If a man owed you money and his collateral is his only jacket, do you need to

return it to him at night? If a cow gores another person, after how many gores is the owner liable? If your father and teacher are drowning, who must you save first? Is homosexuality forbidden? What sexual partner is permitted, and when? Exodus 21-23 includes dozens of laws that we cannot conclude without God’s authoritative, moral and just instruction. King Saul spared the Amalek king Agag and was removed from his position due to relying on his own sense of morality. How much less are we qualified to posit morality, certainly when God says otherwise?

Humans err. But God allowed repentance to erase our stains of sin, if we are genuine. Ezekiel 18 teaches that God is so kind and merciful, that the truly penitent man is viewed as never having sinned. But he must first repent, admitting his error, regret it, and resign to never repeat his evil. Self-correction renders him a new man, one who no longer requires God’s punishments (corrective measures). Thus, forgiveness depends on man initiating his own correction. God does not forgive unconditionally.

Conditional forgiveness is expressed in God’s commandment that each year we fast and pray on Yom Kippur for 24 hours. For without correcting our flaws, we are not forgiven. This is in the Bible, and again, the Christian view of unconditional forgiveness disregards the message of this holiday.

To understand the objective standards that demand forgiveness, we must study God’s words alone. All religious views conflict and therefore they all cannot be correct. God’s only communication to man was Revelation at Sinai when He gave mankind his Bible. This is the sole source of instruction of religion and morality, and when forgiveness is a valid and warranted. All of God’s systems — natural or religious — have a design and guidelines. Gravity functions within certain frameworks, plant life grows only with certain conditions, and forgiveness is a just, moral and obligatory response, but only when specific parameters are met. God alone determines these parameters, and His Bible is the sole guide.

It behooves us all to spend the necessary time studying the many Biblical lessons — not only of forgiveness — but of all of God’s ways and laws. In this manner, we can attain the goal God has mapped out for us all, to live morally correct, helping others, accepting truths and rejecting fallacy. And along this amazing journey of Bible study, we will be awed by the brilliance of our Creator, realizing this book is unique. ■



# **PASSOVER** The Splitting of the Reed Sea

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**P**arashas Beshalach commences with the Jews' journey immediately following their Egyptian exodus, (Exod. 13:17) "God did not guide them via the path of the land of the Philistines, as it was near, lest the people repent when they see war and return to Egypt." As Maimonides teaches in his great work (The Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XXXII) God's initial plan was not to lead the Jews towards the Reed Sea, rather towards the Philistines. A separate consideration demanded that this route be avoided. We also wonder: why would the Jews return to the very place from which they were now fleeing? Nonetheless, we are taught to prevent the Jews' return to Egypt, God circumvented their route.

We then read that God clearly orchestrated events to make the Jews appear as easy prey for Pharaoh, enticing him to recapture his fleeing slaves. God told Moses to encamp by the sea. What was the purpose? "And Pharaoh will say about the Children of Israel that they are confused in the land, the desert has closed around them (Exod. 4:3)." The purpose of not traveling by way of the Philistines, but towards the Reed Sea now appears to have a different objective; to lure Pharaoh and his army into the Reed Sea, ultimately to be drowned. It does not appear this was the original plan. Had it been, God would not have expressed His consideration regarding the Philistines, and that nation's war would not have entered into the equation.

The ultimate purpose in the death of Pharaoh and his army is stated in Exodus 14:4: "And I will strengthen Pharaoh's

heart, and he will chase after them, and I will gain honor through Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know that I am God..." God sought to gain honor by leading the Jews to the Reed Sea, luring Pharaoh, and creating the miraculous partition of waters. We are confused: did God lead the Jews to the Reed Sea to circumvent the Philistines, or to lure Egypt to their death and gain honor? Furthermore, does God truly seek to "gain honor" for Himself?

Upon their arrival at the Reed Sea, the Jews soon see Pharaoh and his army in pursuit. Moses prays to God, and God responds, "Why do you cry unto Me?" This is a surprising response. A basic principle in Judaism is to beseech God's help when in need, and the Jews most certainly were. So why does God seem to oppose such a principle at this specific juncture?

Another question apropos to this section is this; what was the goal of the Ten Plagues? Is this in contrast to the parting of the Reed Sea? If the Reed Sea parting was merely to save the Jews and kill Pharaoh and his army, God could have easily spared this miracle and wiped out the Egyptians during one of the Ten Plagues. God prefers fewer miracles: this is why there are natural laws. Our question suggests that the destruction of Pharaoh and his army had a different objective, other than mere destruction of the Egyptians. What was that objective?

There is also an interesting Rashi, which states a metaphor taken from Medrash Tanchumah. Rashi cites that when the Jews "lifted their eyes and saw the

Egyptian army traveling after them, they saw the 'officer of Egypt' traveling from heaven to strengthen Egypt (Exod. 14:10)." What is the meaning of this metaphor?

Looking deeper into the actual miracle of the Reed Sea splitting (Exod. 14:28-29) we read, "And the waters returned and they covered the chariots and the horsemen and the entire army of Pharaoh coming after him in the sea, and there was not left of them even one. And the Children of Israel traveled on dry land in the midst of the sea and the water was to them walls on their right and on their left." Ibn Ezra states that Pharaoh and his army were being drowned simultaneously with the Jews' crossing through on dry land. This is derived from the Torah first stating that Pharaoh was drowned, followed by the statement that the Jews traveled on dry land. Meaning, although one section of the sea turbulently tossed and submerged the Egyptian army, "...and God churned Egypt in the midst of the sea," the adjoining section contained calm waters parted in two, with walls on both sides of the Jews, creating the dry seabed. Ibn Ezra calls this a "wonder inside a wonder." We must ask why God deemed it essential to combine salvation and destruction in one act. God could have allowed the Jews to exit completely, before allowing the Egyptians to enter into the sea. What is learned from God's plan of Jewish salvation with Egyptian destruction occurring simultaneously?

Moses pondered an unavoidable question: Why were the Jews subjected to Egyptian

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bondage? To recap, Moses once saved the life of a Jew, beaten by an Egyptian. Moses carefully investigated the scene, he saw no one present, and killed the Egyptian taskmaster and buried him in the sand. The next day, Moses sought to settle an argument between the infamous, rebellious duo, Dathan and Aviram. They responded to Moses, “will you kill us as you killed the Egyptian?” Moses feared that the matter was known. But how was this matter made public? The Torah described the scene just before Moses killed the taskmaster: “And he turned this way and that way, and there was no man (present)... (Exod. 2:12).” So, if there was clearly no one present, who exposed Moses? A wise Rabbi once taught there is only one possible answer: the Jew who Moses saved exposed Moses. We are astounded that one whose life was saved, would be the informant of his savior. What caused such unappreciative behavior? The Torah’s literal words describing Moses’ astonishment are “(Moses said) therefore the matter is known,” referring to the disclosure of Moses’ murder of the Egyptian. Rashi quotes a Medrash on the words “the matter was known,” paraphrasing Moses’ own thoughts, (Rashi on Exod. 2:14) “The matter has been made known to me on which I used to ponder; ‘What is the sin of the Jews from all the seventy nations that they should be subjugated to back-breaking labor? But now I see they are fit for this.’”

Moses now understood why the Jews were deserving of Egyptian bondage. This ungrateful Jew’s backstabbing answered Moses’ question. This ungrateful nature is not its own trait, but a result of another trait: the inability to question Egyptian authority. “Even if my Jewish brother saves me, Egypt is still the authority I must respect.” It wasn’t aggression against Moses, but an unconditional allegiance to Egypt. The Jews’ minds were emotionally crippled by their decades of servitude. The famous Patty Hearst case teaches us of the Stockholm Syndrome, where victims sympathize with their captors. Israel too sympathized with Egypt. Such identification would cause one to betray his own friend, even his own savior Moses. Moses witnessed this corrupt character trait firsthand and realized that Israel justly received the Egyptian bondage. But how does the punishment fit the crime? (You may think that this is reverse reasoning, their ungrateful nature came after bondage, not before. But I answer that Moses too knew this, yet Moses saw something in this ungrateful act which he knew predated Egyptian bondage, answering Moses’ question why Israel deserved this



punishment.) So what was Moses’ understanding of the justice behind Israel’s bondage? Seeing that the Jew turned on him even after saving his life, Moses said, “the matter is known,” meaning, “I understand why the Jews deserve bondage.”

In approaching an answer, our very first question highlights the central issue: the cause for the splitting of the Reed Sea. The two reasons why God redirected the Jews’ journey are not unrelated. The drowning of Pharaoh and God’s gaining honor was in fact a response to the former: the Jews’ security in Egypt fostered by their extended stay.

God wished to take the Jews directly to Sinai. This is His response to Moses’ question of the merit of the Jews to be saved: “they are to serve Me on this mountain.” Meaning, their merit deserving the Exodus is their future Torah acceptance at Sinai and their adherence. But due to a peripheral concern of the Philistines, a new route was required. Not just a ground route, but a route that also addressed their inclination to return to Egypt. God initially wanted only to bring Israel to Sinai, but now He sought to address the Jews’ attachment to Egypt. God drowned Pharaoh and his army in response to the Jews’ current mentality. The Jews preferred Egyptian bondage rather than going to war against the Philistines to maintain freedom. This was unacceptable to God. God enacted the miracle of the Splitting of the Reed Sea primarily to remove the security Egypt provided these former slaves. Destruction of the Egyptian empire was a necessary step in Israel’s development.

This answers why God responded to Moses’ prayer when the Egyptian army drew near, “Why do you cry unto Me?” In other words, God was telling Moses that prayer is unnecessary. The very act of traveling to the Reed Sea was in fact the solution to Moses’ prayer; the destruction of Egypt. God was informing Moses that what you pray for is already in the works, and therefore your prayer is unnecessary.

Egypt’s destruction was not an end in itself. It had a greater goal; to replace Egypt’s authority with the true authority: God. This dual goal is displayed in the specific formulation of the Reed Sea miracle. Moses tells the Jews “as you see Egypt today, you will never again see them. God will war for you, and you will be silent.” There are two ideas here. The first is the termination of the Egyptians. The Jews

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had to escape from their Egyptian allegiance. Seeing them dead on the seashore emancipated them psychologically: there were no more Egyptian taskmasters to direct their lives. The phenomena of a slave can be created by nature, or nurture. In Egypt, the Jews were nurtured into a slave mentality, with dependency on the dominating authority. This mind set actually affords some psychological comfort, despite the physical pain. When one prefers slavery, he prefers not to make decisions, and relies heavily on a leader. Perhaps for this reason, the very first laws given (in Parashas Mishpatim) address slavery. They outline this institution as a simple, monetary reality. One has no money, so he pays his debt via servitude. In no way is human respect compromised when he is a slave. The master must give his slave his only pillow and suffer a loss of comfort himself to accommodate another human. The slave remains equal to the master in all areas and deserves respect as any other man. Slavery is simply an institution under the heading of monetary laws. This taught the Jews that the slavery they experienced was not a way of life, but a temporary status. God does not prefer slavery for man and He states that "you are servants to Me and not to man." The Torah law of boring a slave's ear physically brands him of his corruption of not "listening" to God's command at Sinai, "servants to Me are you, and not servants to servants (man) (Rashi on Exod. 21:6)."

The second idea derived from "God will war for you, and you will be silent," is that God alone delivers salvation. Your "silence" means God alone will bring salvation. Another cause cannot share God's role as the "Go'ale Yisrael" – the Redeemer of the Jews is God alone. Why is this necessary? This underlines the primary concept of the miracle of the sea. The goal was to instill in the Children of Israel an appreciation for God, and an acceptance of His authority. This authority would remain compromised, had Egypt survived. Respecting God's exclusive authority is also a prerequisite for the Jews' impending acceptance of the Torah at Sinai. For this reason, many of God's commands are "remembrances of the Exodus" with the goal of engendering appreciation for the Creator's kindness. When man's relationship to God is based on appreciating Him – as guided by the commands – man is thereby reminded that God desires the good for him. As

man acts to fulfill his Torah obligations, he will not view them as inexplicable burdens, he will seek to understand God's intended perfection in each command. Man will then arrive at his true purpose, and find the most fulfillment in his life. Man will be guided in all areas by Divine, rational and pleasing laws which conform perfectly to man's mind. All conflicts will be removed.

The males and females of the Children of Israel verbalized identical, Prophetic responses to God's triumph, "God is greatly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea." God's objective of not only eliminating Egypt's authority, but gaining honor for Himself was achieved. This identical song of praise (Az Yashir) of both the male and female Jews displayed the newly instilled appreciation for their victorious God. The destruction of the Egyptians and the acceptance of God were the two primary issues that were addressed successfully. This explains why the Jewish salvation and the Egyptian destruction happened simultaneously. They formed one goal. Had God desired simple destruction of the Egyptians as an end, He could have done so in Egypt. It was only in response to the Jew's overestimation of Egypt, that God destroyed them in the Reed Sea, together with the Jewish salvation. The death of the Egyptians was a means for the acceptance of God, not obscured by any other master. Subsequent to the parting of the sea, the Jews in fact attested to God's success in His plan, as it is said, "and they believed in God and in Moses His servant."

Additionally, God's desire that the Jews glorify Him, is not "for" God. Nothing man can do may benefit God, nor does God share man's nature of "need," as in needing to gain honor for Himself. All that God does to man, benefits man. This is most clearly witnessed in the great holiday of Passover, where the Creator of the universe educates man (both Jew and Egyptian) with the hopes that they conform with reality, with monotheism. Only after the Egyptians disobeyed and ignored the fundamentals taught through the Ten Plagues, did God have no recourse but to destroy them. God then continued His acts of mercy towards man, and delivered the Jews to freedom so they could accept the Torah.

How do we explain the Medrash regarding the "officer of Egypt?" It now fits precisely with our theory: the Jews felt unconditionally bound to Egypt as inferi-

ors. At the shores, they did not actually see any "officer of Egypt traveling from heaven." This metaphor means they viewed Egypt as "invincible," as if some heavenly force defended Egypt over which they could not prevail. This is the meaning of the Medrash. It is a metaphor for Israel's vanquished state of mind.

In summary, the plagues of Egypt served to spread God's name, "And you will speak of My name throughout the land." The splitting of the Reed Sea had a different purpose, "And I will gain honor through Pharaoh and his entire army." The honor God acquired is for the good of Israel, not just Egypt. The Jews will view God, as One who is incomparable, the true Creator, and the One who takes notice of man and manages his affairs. (Ramban, Exod. 13:16) The Reed Sea miracle was executed as a response to the crippled mentality of the Jews, as God stated, "lest they repent when they see war and return to Egypt." The circumvention from Philistine to the Reed Sea was to avoid an inevitable return to Egypt, and to also correct that dependent mindset by the Jews witnessing God's triumph over Egypt, simultaneously instilling tremendous appreciation for God. In one act, the corruption of Israel's mentality was removed and a new faith in God was born, "and they believed in God and in Moses His servant." This simultaneous termination of Egypt and salvation for themselves was reiterated twice in the Az Yashir song, "God is greatly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea." This response displayed how effected the Jews were by God's miraculous wonders and His salvation.

In all honesty, the Jews do revert to "fond" recollections of Egypt not too long after these events, and in the Book of Numbers. However, we cannot judge any acts of God as failures, even if His people err later by their free choice. God's method and perfection offers man the best solution at a given time. This is a tremendous kindness. Man has free will and can revert back to his primitive state even after God steps in to assist him. This human reversion in no way diminishes God's perfect actions. Our appreciation of His Divine wisdom and His precise actions remains firm. All of God's actions display His perfection. The honor He sought was not for Him. He does not need mortal praise. He does it for us, so we may learn new truths and perfect ourselves in our one chance on Earth. ■

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