



Pesach: The Journey from *And You Shall Know That I Am Hashem* to *The World Will Be Filled* with the Knowledge of Hashem

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The Torah tells us that there was a dual purpose in Hashem bringing the ten plagues upon Egypt. Hashem tells Moshe, "I'll harden the heart of Pharaoh and make many miracles... so that all of Egypt will know that I am Hashem..." This is also said about *Klal Yisrael*. "So that they will know that Hashem took them out of Egypt..." This seems confusing. Didn't Pharaoh already know Hashem? We see this at the beginning of Shemot where he tells his advisors, "*Hava nischakma lo-* Let us outsmart Him (Hashem)." However, when Moshe and Aharon go to Pharaoh to ask him to let out the Jews, Pharaoh says, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice?" Did he or did he not know Hashem?

The Ramban explains that of course Pharaoh knew of the existence of a Higher Being. However, he only knew *Elokim* but not Hashem- *yud keh vuv keh*. This signifies *hayah hayah v'hyiyeh*, He was, is, and will be. Everything in creation depends on Him.

There's no existence unless Hashem wills it. Pharaoh believed in Hashem as a deity among many other deities. He didn't think Hashem was the only one or that there was no power other than Him. Therefore, he said, "Who is Hashem that I must listen to His voice?" We see that his knowledge of Hashem or what he wanted to accept was limited. He didn't want to affirm the truth. The plagues came to teach him that Hashem was absolute.

So too the Jewish people already knew Hashem. Yet the *Beit Halevi* explains that when Yaakov went down to Egypt, he was very afraid. He knew there would be an exile and he accepted it upon himself. He was ready to pay the price to father the chosen nation. But he did not know that the exile would be in Egypt, a land filled with idol worship and impurity. He was afraid the Jewish people wouldn't survive. Hashem reassured him, "I will go down with you and bring you out." And He also gave us a special promise. "*Vishmicha hagadol aleinu karata-* You called us in your

great name." Hashem will never do something beyond nature. But for the sake of saving the Jewish people, He sometimes will. The knowledge of Hashem in this world is meant to be revealed via the miracles He will do for the Jews. Without this, the world cannot exist. And being that the Jewish nation is bound up with this plan, they must continue to exist.

The world depends on us. Without us, there's no purpose to creation. The reason for the ten plagues was not to take the Jews out of Egypt but to show the world the profound relationship between Hashem and His beloved nation. Of course, the Jews knew of the existence of Hashem. What they learned was how dear they were to Him. So much so that Hashem attached His name to us in a way that it could never be torn asunder. It was a new and higher level of knowing Hashem which was revealed through the Exodus and the splitting of the Red Sea.

Yearning to be Ourselves Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The prophet Yeshaya tells us, "Zion will be redeemed through justice." The government of a country is a reflection of its people. The Rambam says a nation is accountable for its government because a leader cannot rule against the people's will. To be worthy of redemption we must seek justice. We need the leadership of people who aspire to truth. At the present, to a large degree, we have the blind leading the blind. Our leaders may know what they are not and they may mean well, but their clueless with no sense of who they are. We ask Hashem to bring us back to a place where we can have leadership like King Shlomo and courts like the *Sanhedrin*. We ask Hashem to bring back our judges and those who give counsel as it once was.

Therapy has become very popular in the 21st century. It's good in that it puts people in touch with themselves and makes it possible

for them to unravel a lot of nonsense inside of them. However, there's a line that's often crossed. The therapist should help the client towards self-discovery. But many times, they have their own view of life and may guide their client either consciously or subconsciously to be a clone of their own values. For some therapists, OCD and careful religious practice are the same thing. For others, self discovery and inner independence is the same as rejection of parental authority.

We live in a time in which the roles of men and women have become very interchangeable. Yet the human longing for connection is still there. There is an unprecedented level of young people escaping into the media and entertainment. There are all sorts of artificial ways to live vicariously. The suicide rate is unprecedented. We need people who can give us counsel, who will admit to the reality of

human needs, and help us discover ourselves. We yearn for connection and achievement. Connection can be attained through fulfilling the positive *mitzvot*. Achievement is about self-conquest which means observing the negative *mitzvot*. We need people who will give us good counsel and help us discover our desire for connection and achievement in a way that is legitimate. We end the blessing, "Blessed are you Hashem, the King who loves both charity and justice." This refers to the positive that is expressed with compassion and the negative that keeps us in line.

The next *bracha* was composed much later than the rest of the *Shemone Esrei* as a response to the rise of Christianity. Some Jews became so spiritually assimilated that they began surrendering their fellow Jews to the Roman authorities. According to Jewish

[Continued on page 2](#)

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Continued from page 1

law it is forbidden to go to the civil authorities for reasons of gain. When one's motivation is to protect one's property, one may call the police. However, if one is involved in a conflict with a neighbor, where one stands to gain and the other may lose, one must go to a Rabbinical court of justice so that they can rule according to what the *Torah* says.

There are problems with this. In many places, the Rabbinic court has no teeth to enforce their judgement and it may come to a point where there's no choice but to go to the civil authorities. In other cases, one party may be willing to go to a Rabbinic court while the other may not. Many times, civil justice does

not jive with *halacha*. Hashem created a world in which His justice is often concealed. We often don't see or understand the full repercussions of halachic and secular justice. The forces of evil that conceal Hashem may drive us towards alternative paths.

"*V'lamshlinim* -Those who use their tongues to betray their fellow Jews... let them have no hope." "*V'chol haminim*... -And may all the atheists instantly perish..." Today most atheists aren't out to deny Hashem or gain something for themselves. Most are ignorant and were trained that way from the time they were young. A real atheist is someone who denies Hashem in order to empower himself. "May

You quickly uproot, break, and subdue the reign of wickedness speedily in our days..." We don't ask for the wicked people to die. We ask for their belief system to be destroyed. We want the forces of evil to be eradicated but we don't want the people who've fallen into their trap to be eliminated. We want them to repent. It's very easy when one hasn't suffered to stand back and say there are no evil people, they are just misguided. But people sometimes experience terrible things and it's very easy to lose perspective. In this blessing we acknowledge that Hashem is all knowing and has the ability to bring about justice in the ultimate sense

Matza: the Essence of Faith

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Shem Mishmuel discusses the paradox of *matza*. On the one hand, the *Torah* calls it *lechem oni*- the bread of affliction. *Matza* takes much less time to bake and digests more slowly. Slave owners preferred this type of bread as it was cheaper and would keep the slaves satiated for a longer time. On the other hand, its also called *lechem cheirut*, the bread of freedom. We say this in the *Hagada*, "*Matza zu al shem mah* -Why do we eat this *matza*?... For the dough had no time to rise before Hashem revealed Himself to them in order to redeem them." One the one hand, it symbolizes poor man's bread. It cannot be eaten whole and must be broken. On the other hand, we must eat it in a reclining position, signifying freedom. How can we understand this paradox?

There is a disagreement among the commentators. Some focus on the slave aspect of the *matza* and some focus on the freedom. The Shem MiShmuel attempts to unite both views and shows how it symbolizes both slavery and freedom. In fact, it is not a contradiction as the essential expression of autonomy that the Jewish nation achieved in Egypt was not the freedom to run after their passions, but to serve Hashem.

The persecution in Egypt was on a physical, emotional, and intellectual level. The Egyptians aimed to eradicate the *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama* of the Jewish people. But the most painful part of their subjugation was that it stymied the *Tzelem Elokim* (Divine image). Being a Jew means being a descendant of the *Avot*. At our very core and pervasive throughout our life, is the goal to serve Hashem. This was Avraham Avinu's essence. Yitzchak too embodied this when he offered himself up at the akeida. Yaakov traversed the same path, serving Hashem wherever he found himself. While the gentile nations strive for nationalism and self-advancement, a Jew's *raison d'etre* is following the will of Hashem. Losing this connection with the Almighty and being unable to express the *Tzelem Elokim* was one of the most painful aspects of the Egyptian exile.

The Jews in Egypt experienced a sense of aniyut, a reality bereft of the *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshama*, and *Tzelem Elokim*. They lost these special qualities and with that the ability to be a free, inspired, nation. They knew that they had no hope of escape using their own strength. They were in bondage under an overwhelming physical force. Their only hope

for salvation was Hashem. The *matzo* embodied this, "I have no strength of my own. Hashem is the only one that I can reach out to and pray to. He is the only power that can break the bondage of Egypt." Their tears and yearning mingled with the *matza* and transformed their slave food into hope food, hope that Hashem would see their misery and step in and save them. Ultimately, they believed in Hashem's promise to Avraham that they would be redeemed. The bread of slavery became the bread of faith and freedom.

Do free men have the wherewithal to make their new -found autonomy positive and everlasting? Would their freedom be squandered and turn into the law of the jungle where everyone fights for limited resources and unbridled passion rules? Therefore, the *Torah* commands us to eat the *matza* of slavery, that embodied one hope, that only Hashem could save us. Despite our new-found freedom, it is only Hashem who can give us the capacity to succeed. We constantly need His help to receive blessing in this world and the next.

This was the message of the *matza*, the bread of slavery, which was transformed into the bread of freedom.