

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. *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.

Lessons Learned from Lavan

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

"Go and learn," the *Haggadah* exhorts us, "What Lavan the Aramean attempted to do to our father Jacob! For Pharaoh decreed only against the males, Lavan attempted to uproot everything." The *Haggadah* then links Yaakov's sojourn with Lavan to his descent to Egypt years later.

What can we learn from Lavan and his actions? How was our descent to *Mitzrayim* a result? How do we deduce his evil intentions throughout when they are barely alluded to in his conversation with Yaakov? Lavan deceived Yaakov and gave him Leah instead of Rachel. Had he married Rachel first, Yosef would have been the firstborn, and there would have been no jealousy, as the brothers would have recognized Yosef's status. They would not have tried to get rid of him. Yaakov and his family would not have followed him to Egypt, and we would not have subsequently

been enslaved.

There is also a deeper explanation of how Lavan tried to uproot everything. Rabbi M. Wolfson describes that Yaakov knew by divine inspiration that Rachel would die young, so by marrying Rachel first, he would then be able to marry Leah after Rachel's death and complete the symbolic marriage of Hashem to *Kneset Yisroel*. For the bond to be permanent, the characteristics of both Rachel and Leah were necessary to be included in the character of *Am Yisroel*. Yaakov would then have been able to bury both of his wives near him in *Mearat Hamachpeila*, and the connection between Hashem and *Bnei Yisroel* would be unbreakable and manifest to all. Both the revealed and hidden aspects of the relationship would be known to all, and there would have been no concealment, no descent into Egypt, and no exiles. But this could only be

accomplished if Yaakov did not transgress the Torah prohibition against marrying two sisters while they both lived. Our forefathers lived by the dicta of the *Torah*, although it was not yet given, and the future of their descendants was dependent on this. Lavan, by his deceit, tore the very fabric of future Jewish history. By undermining the permanent relationship between Hashem and *Kneset Yisroel*, he tried to uproot it completely and created a gap between appearance and reality. While Hashem always watches over us, there would be times of concealment, when we would be distant and in exile, starting with our descent to Egypt.

Although the dark times seem bitter, we must recognize that they are opportunities for growth, says the *Yalkut Lekach Tov*. Rav Levenstein quoting the Vilna Gaon highlights some of these times. Yaakov left his father's

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house penniless, but he returned from Lavan's house wealthy, just as his descendants left Egypt. The Egypt experience also made us a great and sensitive people, for we now knew how a stranger feels in a strange land. Therefore, says *Halekach Vehalebuv*, there is a custom to kiss the bitter *maror* before we eat them, to acknowledge the good that often grows from the bitterness.

The entire purpose of Hashem's taking us out

of Egypt and our re-enactment of the event every year is to imprint upon us that we are a separate nation, children of the King. According to *Halekach Vehalebuv*, the four cups of wine represent the four kinds of separation we are grateful for. The wine of *Kiddush* separates the light from darkness. We thank Hashem for bringing us out of the darkness of Egypt into the light of *Torah* values. As Jews, we have the capability to elevate the physical to a spiritual level. As we eat our Passover meal and recite

both a *Hamotzi* and *Bircat Hamazon* and then drink the third cup of wine, we praise Hashem Who gave us this ability to fulfil his *mitzvot*. Finally, we come to the fourth cup that separates the *Sabbath* from the rest of the week as we raise our cup in anticipation of our final redemption, for the *Sabbath* day is filled with the aura of the world to come.

Shir Hashirim Perek 1: The Banished Bride

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

Our capacity for conceiving words and ideas creates limits. But there is a higher source that transcends limitations that brought everything into being. That source is accessible through song. A song is above words because it isn't constrained by concepts. Every individual, nation, and school of wisdom has its own songs, its unique connection to the root of all things.

Shir Hashirim is the Song of Songs. Rabbi Akiva said about it, "All the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the holiest of the holy." Holy means separate and above that which limits. Shir Hashirim can bring us to a level of infinite connection to Hashem. We read it on Pesach because redemption means reaching that place above limitation, the place of essential holiness.

Rashi translates, "L'Shlomo," as 'the King to whom peace belongs.' When a person's mind, body, heart, and speech are not in synch with each other he cannot be at peace. We often aren't where we believe we should be. Our feelings lag behind our minds. The opposite of *shalom* is *mirma*, deceiving ourselves into thinking that we have achieved integration. One form of *mirma* is rationalizing that *hefkerut* is freedom. Your mind might feel as if

it's adhering to an ideal, when in fact it's really your body saying, "I want to do what feels good." True *shalom*, says the Maharal, is integration. In an individual this means that all his attributes are unified. In the world it would mean that all the various forces are doing what they're created to do. The world is a place of parallel entities. When the different elements in creation function in harmony, we can say it is at peace.

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, because your love is better than wine." The Midrash says this refers to *Matan Torah* when the Jewish people achieved absolute unity with Hashem. There we received two kisses. *Anochi Hashem* was the kiss of connection. Hashem chose us from all the other nations. He saw beauty in us that we did not see in ourselves. *Anochi Hashem* connotes the positive *mitzvot*, while *lo s'iyhe* signifies the negative *mitzvot* and the kiss of exclusivity. By accepting this commandment, the Jewish people expressed their commitment to stay away from things that would impede their relationship with Hashem. We would bond with Hashem, and we would peel away all the things that prevent us from having real connection. These two commandments are the source of all the *mitzvot*. *Yayin* is the same numerical value as *sod*, secret. When we keep

the *mitzvot* with the intent of bonding exclusively with Hashem, then we can feel something of the sweetness of Hashem's love.

"Because of the fragrance of your goodly oil, oil poured forth is your name. Therefore the young women loved you."

The seven branches of the menorah parallel a person's two eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth. The light signifies the light of Hashem's presence projecting outward. A person's *menorah* is his inner life as manifested through the life he lives through his senses. Our eyes should be focused on seeing the hidden challenges and beauty concealed in every experience. Our ears should be focused on hearing good things, by discerning the positivity and blessing in our experiences. Our speech should be holy, directed, and focused.

Finding Hashem in this way requires transcendence, letting go of things that limit us, not listening to what distracts, and not speaking destructively. Hashem created us to bring light to dark places. When we transcend physicality and elevate our senses to follow Hashem's will we bring honor and glory to His name.