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PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

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PARSHAT BO

*And so that you may relate in the ears of your son
and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt. (10:2)*

The *Torah* places emphasis upon relating the miraculous nature of the ten plagues to one's children/descendants - specifically concerning the plague of locusts. What is the significance of the plague of locusts that it has become the focus of transmission to future generations? Horav Simcha Zissel Broide, shlita, observes that the dialogue which ensued between Moshe and Pharaoh was not limited to *Bnei Yisrael's* release from Egypt. Moshe was also using this forum to demonstrate to Pharaoh the identity of the Master of the world. It was Pharaoh who audaciously challenged Moshe with the words, "*Who is Hashem that I must listen to His voice?*" Pharaoh denied the existence of a Supreme Being who directed the world. The miracles and wonders that occurred in Egypt were "lessons", with which Moshe sought to imbue Pharaoh with an awareness that Hashem is the Creator and Ruler of the earth.

The first plagues did not seem to have a great effect upon Pharaoh. He remained resolute in his denial of Hashem, renewing the zeal with which he enslaved the Jews. As the plagues progressed, the pain and affliction which he and his people suffered became increasingly difficult to endure. Thus, Pharaoh summoned Moshe and Aharon to put a stop to the plagues. His pleas were always accompanied by the same false, vacuous promises of freedom for the Jews. As soon as each plague ended, Pharaoh would renege on his word and persecute the Jews once again.

Pharaoh appeared to his nation to be an all-powerful king whom no one could vanquish. Even if he "seemed" to give in to the effects of the plague, it was only a transitory change. Indeed, immediately after the plague had ceased, Pharaoh returned to his previous stance.

This ruse continued for the seven plagues which preceded the plague of locusts. Now, in the aftermath of the plague nothing was left! All of the grain had been totally obliterated. No longer did Pharaoh have to beg Moshe to rescind the plague; the locusts retreated of their own accord because nothing was available for them to eat. Pharaoh no longer had reason to display a show of strength, for he had nothing to gain. The plague had run its course, and he and his people were devastated. Now Pharaoh retreated, meekly crying out, "*I have sinned to Hashem.*" Pharaoh had seen the effects of total destruction. He could only hope that his repentance would avert a new calamity. He was like a child who has been hit by a stick many times. The fear of an upraised stick was sufficient to frighten him into submission.

The idol had fallen! Pharaoh's subterfuge had come to an abrupt halt. The mighty ruler who feared no one was now scared of his own shadow. The plague of locusts had finally put Pharaoh in his place. It forced him to shed his arrogance, exposing the fraud that he had perpetrated against his people.

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*"So shall you eat it: Your loins girded, your shoes on your feet,
and your staff in your hand; you shall eat in haste." (12:11)*

The manner in which they ate the *Korban Pesach* reflected *Bnei Yisrael's* readiness for immediate journey. In his commentary, the *Sforno* emphasizes their *bitachon*, trust in Hashem. He writes, "They demonstrated their implicit trust in Hashem by preparing themselves for the road while they were still in prison." Horav Moshe Schwab, z"l, takes note of this remarkable trust in the Almighty. *Bnei Yisrael* had been subject to such inhuman servitude for hundreds of years, that they no longer knew the meaning of the word "freedom." Even after Moshe had notified them of their imminent redemption, they still continued to function under the same conditions of harsh slavery as they had before.

The miracles that appeared and disappeared did not seem to leave a permanent impression upon Pharaoh. Obviously, *Bnei Yisrael's* trust in Hashem was not a result of anything they perceived; it was the product of pure *bitachon* in the Almighty. Moshe relayed Hashem's message to *Bnei Yisrael*. They responded immediately, preparing for the *geulah*, liberation, while they were still incarcerated in Egypt.

This implicit trust, this unequivocal reliance upon Hashem, is the touchstone of *bitachon*. This attitude imbues us while we are in the final *galus*, as we await the advent of *Moshiach*. Everything we do, wherever we go, we should reflect the same "*chipazon*," haste, as we exhibited when we prepared for the auspicious moment of our redemption from Egyptian slavery.

All too often, we forget our real purpose on this earth. *Horav Schwab* cites an anecdote from the *Chafetz Chaim* which clearly communicates our mission in this world. A Jew once came to visit the *Chafetz Chaim* and was surprised by the overwhelming poverty in the house. He asked the *Chafetz Chaim*, "Pardon me if I am presumptuous, but where is your furniture?" The *Chafetz Chaim* responded by questioning the visitor, "And where is your furniture?" "I," responded the guest, "am only a visitor here." The *Chafetz Chaim* retorted, "So too am I only a visitor on this world. Therefore I do not concern myself with setting up more than temporary accommodations." We must all remember that we are on this world only with "visitor" status, as we await that clarion call of the *shofar* which will sound our final redemption.

*And you shall say, "It is a Pesach-offering to Hashem,
Who passed over the houses of the Bnei Yisrael in Egypt." (12:27)*

The festival commemorating our exodus from Egypt, our liberation from the most cruel bondage, is called *Chag Ha'Pesach*, the Festival of Passover. This name recalls how Hashem "passed over" the Jewish homes during *makas bechoros*, when the Egyptian first-born were killed. Considering the nature of the festival and the focus of its commemorating, the name seems like a misnomer. Would it not have been more appropriate to call the festival, *Chag Ha'cheirus*, the Festival of Freedom? This was no ordinary redemption. It was a liberation from a cruel and intense slavery. The Jews were ensnared by the guile of the Egyptians. First, Pharaoh promised a reward for each brick that they made.

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The Jews set about, resourcefully, to make as many bricks as they could, only to find out that this had become their daily quota! Then Pharaoh stopped giving them straw with which to make the bricks.

Every move that Pharaoh made was intended to destroy Jewish pride and dignity, to transform a holy people into dispirited and crass beggars, who had no purpose and no future. Why then, do we not call the festival dedicated to commemorating the Jews' release from the abyss of Egypt the Festival of Freedom?

Nesivos Ha'mussar derives a profound lesson from the alternate choice of name--*Chag Ha'Pesach*. There is no greater *chesed*, kindness, than sparing an individual from death! Once the destroyer had been granted permission to strike, no distinction existed between Egyptian and Jew. When the *middas ha'din*, attribute of judgment, reigns, no human can stand before it and live. This is consistent with the words of David *Ha'melech* in *Sefer Tehillim 130*, "*If you preserve iniquities, oh G-d, Hashem, who could survive?*"

The kindness of sparing an individual from death is so great, that it overshadows all of the miracles, wonders and salvation that occurred in Egypt. Even the actual liberation pales in comparison. Being given access to life, being spared from a premature demise, incorporates within it all of the preceding benefactions. What value is freedom when one has no future?

Those who do not appreciate the true meaning of life may grasp its peripheral aspects but remain totally oblivious to its essence. We view life as a medium--as a vehicle for attaining joy and pleasure. We talk about various goals for which life is worth living, while we fail to recognize that the greatest joy is inherent in life itself. This idea is best reflected in the words of David *Ha'melech* in *Tehillim 118*, "*Hashem has caused me to suffer terribly, but He has not given me over to death.*" In this psalm, David *Ha'melech* looks back on a life filled with pain and suffering. Yet, he is able to thank Hashem for the greatest gift--the gift of life.

Horav Chaim Shmulevitz, z"l, points out two aspects of life that constitute its essence. First, only by living and performing mitzvos does one have the opportunity to receive reward in *Olam Ha'bah*. The greatest pleasure that one can attain is closeness to Hashem. Only through our humble existence on this world can this potential be realized. A second aspect of life which is invaluable is the opportunity to interface with one's fellowman, to share in his joy, to help shoulder his sorrow. The opportunity to give of oneself to others is man's greatest gift. Indeed, it gives the greatest meaning to life.

For a seven day period you shall eat matzos. (13:15)

The *Rambam* writes that *matzoh* is a reminder of our bondage, representing the *lechem oni*, bread of affliction, which our ancestors ate while they were slaves in Egypt. It also commemorates the speed with which the redemption was brought upon them. They had no time to bake bread to take with them for this journey. They were, consequently, forced to make matzos, to avoid the delay inherent in preparing leavened bread.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, z"l, views these two reasons as complimentary to one another. It is significant to note that *Bnei Yisrael* played no role in their own liberation. They did not fight; they could not even leave their homes. They simply waited for their freedom. What did they do to earn their freedom? What was it that made them worthy of liberation? Their freedom was attained through their devotion to Hashem. By sacrificing the god of the Egyptians as the *Korban Pesach*, they demonstrated

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their total subservience to the Almighty. Yet, they still took no part in their own deliverance. They did not eat the *matzoh*, which represented their slavery, until the very last moments. During that final moment of redemption, when they were "summoned" to leave, they grabbed whatever food they had and left. They had no bread because they had no time to prepare it. Hence, the *matzoh*, the unleavened, uncompleted bread, serves as external testimony of the Divine nature of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. The *matzoh* is a tribute to the fact that it was Hashem--only Hashem--Who effected our release. To paraphrase *Horav Hirsch*, "How could a people, incapable of preparing itself with proper provisions for such a great journey, think that they were instrumental in obtaining their own freedom?"

The *Bnei Yissaschar* cites the *Zohar Ha'kadosh* who expresses a similar view. *Matzoh* is referred to as the food of trust (in Hashem). Dough which has a leavening agent in it continues to rise on its own, even after it has been kneaded. Unleavened dough has no power of its own. It rises only when man kneads it. The inertness of unleavened dough symbolizes our liberation. We did nothing to effect our freedom. It was the exclusive work of Hashem. During the Festival of Freedom, we eat the food that best describes Hashem's Hand in our deliverance.

Horav Eli Munk, z"l, suggests another reason that *matzoh* is ideal to symbolize our Festival of Freedom. We are enjoined to rid ourselves of *chametz*, leaven, which is *matzoh's* counterpart. Leaven initiates fermentation by decomposing the dough. In this process, a pure, static, natural material is subjected to the work of man who kneads, molds and shapes it to fit his own taste. This represents man's mastery over nature. Likewise, in the spiritual dimension, the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, causes the human soul to ferment through its "ability" to decompose the soul's natural purity by provoking it to oppose the forces of good. The *yetzer hora* creates discord within the human personality in the same manner that leaven distorts the wholesomeness of the flour and water. Indeed, as *Horav Munk* notes, the numerical equivalent of leaven, is 138, the same number as blemish/defect.

As *Pesach* approaches, we are adjured to search for and destroy all *chametz*. This requirement gives the Festival of Freedom, the holiday commemorating our people's birth as a nation, a feeling of complete moral, physical and national renewal. As we rid our homes of *chametz*, we must similarly rid ourselves of any vestige of envy and hatred. This festival is consistent with the season of *Aviv*, Spring--the time of nature's renewal.

With this in mind, it is truly appropriate that the "national" food for this holiday is *matzoh*. It represents our return to national purity. Our inauguration as the nation of Hashem is imbued with purity and integrity. After the seven-day festival is over, we return to our usual eating patterns epitomized by leavened bread. Our abstinence from *chametz* at the beginning of the year inspires us to be resolute in ridding ourselves of the vestiges of evil which plague us. Hence, the taste of *matzoh* remains with us all year long.

*And there was a thick darkness throughout the
land of Egypt for a three-day period. (10:22)*

Rashi cites the Midrash that suggests one of the reasons for the three-day darkness. He posits that it occurred so that the Jews who were too assimilated into the Egyptian culture would die. As a result of the darkness the Egyptians did not see their deaths. Therefore, they could not assert that the plagues affected the Jews as well as the Egyptians. We may question the need for a complete change in

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nature just to purge Klal Yisrael of an element so alienated that it had no hope of ever returning to the Covenant. If the purpose was that those Jews would perish in a manner that did not engender any publicity, they could have died from various causes over an extended period of time. Why did they have to die specifically during the three days in which Klal Yisrael was preparing for the final act-- Yetzias Mitzrayim?

Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl, infers an important lesson in human nature from this pasuk. People frequently talk about the great things they hope to do. In the same breath as they expound their glorious plans, they offer all kinds of excuses to justify their inability to bring their plans to fruition. The moment that the "excuses" are addressed and the obstacles that robbed them of success are removed, the truth becomes apparent. They never had any valid plans; their idealistic projects were nothing more than talk. Why is this? What is it about the moment of truth that suddenly causes the person to abandon his lofty plans? Horav Levinstein contends that it is the yetzer hora, the evil inclination, that suddenly rises to the occasion to sway the person from realizing his goals. Why not earlier? Why does he wait until the moment of decision before reacting? Obviously, the yetzer hora is not concerned with conjecture, with a person's plans. He only responds to reality, when a person is no longer delaying his intention, when he is about to take action. The yetzer hora challenges those who are on the verge of action, --not those who are thinking about moving forward.

As long as the Jews were in Egypt and the Exodus was not imminent, the Jews offered no opposition to leaving. The reshaim, evil ones who had assimilated and had acclimated into Egyptian culture, found lame excuses for staying, but nobody actually protested. When Pharaoh's resolve weakened, so that he evinced a more positive attitude towards the Jews' release, then these Jews came forward in protest. They did not want to leave. The yetzer hora took hold of them when it was evident that the redemption was near. When these recalcitrant Jews demonstrated their true colors, their actions warranted the ultimate punishment.

*They shall eat the flesh on that night, roasted over the fire,
and matzos; with herbs they shall eat it. (12:8)*

It seems almost paradoxical that one should eat the matzoh, which symbolizes our freedom, together with the marror, bitter herbs, which represent our affliction. That is not the only anomaly of the Seder night. The night of the first Seder occurs on the same day of the week as Tisha B'Av of that same year. On the night that we celebrate the fortune of our redemption from Egypt, we are to remember Tisha B'Av, the day of the year set aside for the commemoration of the churban, the destruction of our Batei Mikdash. Why is it necessary to integrate misery with joy? Are we not taught that everything has its own time and place? Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita, suggests two reasons for this. First, at the moment of heightened spiritual joy, when we experience the freedom from bondage and the accompanying kedushah, holiness, it is incumbent upon us to reflect simultaneously upon the bitterness of exile. Thus, we will appreciate our present condition to a greater extent.

We note a second--more profound--aspect to this reflection. We must realize that until the final moment of the geulah, freedom, we were still tottering at the brink of destruction. The yetzer hora, evil inclination, who challenges us every step of the way, works "timelessly" to bring about our destruction. The source of churban is there waiting to grab hold of us, preventing our liberation, hindering our triumph. That same night that resulted in "matzoh," freedom and joy, could just have easily been

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transformed into "marror," bitterness and destruction.

One must always realize that the derech aliyah, road to spiritual ascendancy, is fraught with the blandishments of the yetzer hora every step of the way. We cannot falter, even for a moment, or the fangs of the yetzer hora will pull us down to ruin and oblivion.

Rather than focusing upon destruction as the catalyst for appreciating freedom and joy, we suggest an alternative approach. In order to accurately assess the magnitude of the loss of an object, one must first appreciate that which he has had in his possession. Only after one is sensitive to the vibrancy and beauty of the Bais Hamikdash service is he able to truly recognize the meaning of its destruction.

Horav Levi Yitzchok Horowitz, Shlita, the Bostoner Rebbe, distinguishes between the two forms of remembrance which Chazal have instituted: zeicher l'churban and zeicher l'Mikdash. The latter recalls the vibrancy and sanctity that permeated the Bais Hamikdash, while the former commemorates the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. The zeicher l'churban represents a passive approach to remembrance. We are to refrain from participating in unbridled joy. Upon decorating our homes, we leave a small corner unfinished as a reminder that as long as the Bais Hamikdash remains destroyed, our lives are no longer complete. When we prepare a meal, we leave one condiment off the table; ashes are placed upon the heads of a chasan and kallah, all zeicher l'churban. In regard to being zeicher l'Mikdash, however, the emphasis is upon the positive. We recall the Bais Hamikdash and the Jewish life that flourished during its tenure.

Consequently, the Jew mourns in an unusual, almost paradoxical, way. The same Jew who rises in middle of the night to cry as he recites Tikkun Chatzos, the prayer commemorating the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, also dances joyfully with the lulav and esrog on Sukkos--all to memorialize the Bais Hamikdash. He cries in remembrance, and he dances and sings in remembrance. The Jewish family who sit on the floor erev Tisha B'Av mournfully eating eggs and ashes will sit down to a table bedecked in finery in order to eat a scrumptious Pesach meal several months later. They eat matzos and marror wrapped together to commemorate the Mikdash. Indeed, the entire Seder is a paradox! The white kittel is the garment that is worn by nobility. It is also used as shrouds for the dead. The marror commemorates the bitterness and affliction, while the matzoh is the symbol of freedom.

We do not minimize our happiness by remembering the destruction, because our tears for the Bais Hamikdash are not relevant to the Seder. We remember the Bais Hamikdash in a positive, constructive mode. Our entire festival cycle recalls the service in the Bais Hamikdash in all of its splendor. We do not recall destruction. We remember the functioning of the Bais Hamikdash. The lesson is simple: The Jew does not constantly focus upon the loss and devastation. To do so would be counterproductive to Judaism, in addition to emotionally draining for the individual. The proper approach towards venerating the past is to mourn with dignity at the appropriate times and to honor in a positive, resolute manner at other times.

The Seder night is a night of education. It is a night in which we raise our awareness regarding joy, freedom, and hope, as well as--in contrast--servitude, persecution, and depression. The Jewish calendar is filled with times which commemorate both. How do we relate to this moment? How do we express ourselves during these times? On the Seder night, we wrap together the matzoh of freedom and the marror of affliction to teach us that they go hand in hand for the Jew. We cannot mourn a destruction unless we are aware of what we have lost. We are obligated to remember our loss in a positive, active manner. This way we will merit to bring it all back -- bimheirah b'yameinu -- one day soon!

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*But on the previous day you shall nullify the leaven from your homes;
for anyone who eats leavened food, that soul shall be cut off from Yisrael. (12:15)*

Among all of the mitzvos connected to the festival of Pesach, none is so stringent as the prohibition of chametz. One who does not recount the story of the Exodus, one who does not eat matzoh or marror has "only" neglected performing a mitzvah. One who eats chametz, however, is liable to the Heavenly punishment of kares, premature death. This harsh punishment seems to underline the significance of the mitzvah of matzoh. The prohibition against eating or keeping chametz in one's possession indicates the crucial importance of the haste in which the Jews left Egypt. They departed in such a hurry that the dough which they were making did not have the opportunity to rise. Imagine, in the space of eighteen minutes, the amount of time it takes for dough to become chametz, all of Klal Yisrael left Egypt! Does this speed minimize the miracle of the exodus from Egypt? Would the significance of Yetzias Mitzrayim have been diminished if the Jews had left Egypt in an hour or even two? Did eighteen minutes really make such a difference?

Horav Avigdor Ha'Levi Nebenzahl, Shlita, suggests that the concept of chametz is spiritual in nature. Bnei Yisrael were totally absorbed in the degenerate Egyptian lifestyle. They were so mired in the contamination of Egypt that had they remained just a bit longer, they would never have been able to leave. Bnei Yisrael had descended to the forty ninth level of spiritual impurity. They were at the brink of ultimate disaster. They were about to become Egyptian citizens--forever!

This is the critical concept that the Torah seeks to impress upon us. The underlying motif behind the prohibition against eating chametz is that the Jews were almost at the brink of spiritual annihilation. We were "raised up" from this nadir of degeneracy, to cheirus pnimis, internal liberation, and spiritual freedom. Never would Bnei Yisrael return to that lowly position of near-spiritual extinction. As they viewed Egypt then, they would no longer see it again. True, they would err and sin, but they would never sink to the point of utter depravity that they displayed in Egypt.

Klal Yisrael's deficient level of spirituality became apparent during the makas bechoros, when the firstborns of the Egyptians were killed. The Baal Haggadah tells us that it was Hashem Who passed through Egypt on that fateful night. Only Hashem--not an angel--could have discerned between Egyptian and Jew. The realm of distinction between Egyptian and Jew had narrowed so much, as a result of the Jew's spiritual degeneration that an angel would not have been able to distinguish between the two.

We find that at the Yam Suf, the angels complained to Hashem. "Why do You spare the Jews while the Egyptians are drowning? These are idol worshippers, and those are idol worshippers! What advantage do the Jews have over the Egyptians? They are both sinners."

This idea, claims Horav Nebenzahl, is the Torah's message for us. The halachah is stringent regarding chametz, prohibiting leaven which distinguishes itself from matzoh in a matter of minutes. Between leaven and non-leaven--between the matzas mitzvah and the prohibited chametz--is a mere minute! The Torah seeks to impact upon us a profound message. Between nitzchiyus, eternity, and spiritual oblivion; between kedushah, holiness, and taharah, purity, there is a distance of only one

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minute. One ma'shehu, minuscule drop, determines the essence of an individual. Had Klal Yisrael remained in Egypt for one more minute they would have been relegated to spiritual oblivion. A geulah, redemption, could not have occurred. One more minute! That is the difference between chametz and matzoh. Eighteen minutes constitutes the creation of matzas mitzvah. One more minute, and the individual becomes liable for kares!

This is consistent with Chazal's famous dictum: The letters of chametz and matzoh are the same except for the "ches" of chametz and the "hay" of matzoh. What difference is there between a "ches" and a "hay"? One little line. One more minute! That minute marks the distinction between chametz and matzoh. That minute determines spiritual success or its unfortunate counterpart.

The Midrash, Toras Kohanim, expresses a similar idea. The pasuk in Vayikra 20:25, 26, reads: "You shall therefore separate between the clean beast and the unclean and between the unclean fowl and the clean...And I have set you apart from the nations that you should be Mine." Chazal attribute the juxtaposition of the pesukim to the relationship between the two "separations." If we distinguish between the clean and unclean animal, between the kosher and non-kosher, between the animal whose two simanim, vital organs, foodpipe and windpipe have had the majority of their width ritually slaughtered, Hashem will take us to Him. For the shechitah of an animal to be considered kosher, it is necessary that the majority of both the foodpipe and the windpipe are properly slaughtered. Imagine the amount necessary to make the shechitah kosher is nothing more than a ma'shehu, a tiny drop, insignificant in size, but greatly significant in impact. That tiny hairbreadth distinguished Bnei Yisrael from the Egyptians. That minuscule amount delineates between matzoh and chametz.

On the night of Pesach thousands of years ago, Hashem chose us over the Egyptians, as He has chosen us above all the nations of the world to be His am segulah, treasured nation. This selection separates us from all of the rest. We must continue to strive to earn this distinction.

And he left Pharaoh's presence in a burning anger. (11:8)

Moshe Rabbeinu left Pharaoh angrily. Previously, the Torah had related how Pharaoh told Moshe to leave and never return. He broke the bridge of contact between himself and Moshe. Moshe responded with anger. Why? Was Moshe in need of Pharaoh's kavod, respect? Did Moshe think Pharaoh would offer him any gratitude?

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, offers an interesting explanation for Moshe's anger. Ha'koras ha'tov, recognizing and appreciating the benefit one has derived from others, is a basic character trait of the Jewish People. Moshe Rabbeinu, their quintessential leader, was paradigmatic in his demonstration of this trait. Indeed, he showed appreciation to inanimate creations such as the water and earth of Egypt. He did not personally strike the earth or water, to catalyze the plagues of blood and lice, as a result of his gratitude for their part in helping him when he was in need. He had been hidden in the water for three months, and the earth covered up the Egyptian that he had killed. Although striking the ground and water, in the course of performing Hashem's, will was a mitzvah of the highest order which would obviously not be held against him, Moshe would still not do anything that might be deemed inappropriate.

Moshe was appreciative of Pharaoh's "care" as he was growing up. After all, he did grow up in Pharaoh's palace at a time when Pharaoh's decree to kill the Jewish boys was an attempt to prevent Moshe from becoming the savior of the Jewish People. Because Pharaoh had treated him as royalty as

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he grew up in Pharaoh's home, Moshe felt a debt of gratitude to Pharaoh. Every time Moshe left Pharaoh after notifying him of the next plague, he must have left with a slightly heavy heart at Pharaoh's recalcitrance. He surely would have liked to see Pharaoh capitulate in order to spare himself and his people from the impending hurt.

Moshe still had one hope left - the last plague, the plague that addressed the firstborn, a category in which Pharaoh himself was included. That plague would bring Pharaoh to his senses, as that he would finally be able to dialogue with Pharaoh. Moshe knew he could convince Pharaoh that it was all folly. Pharaoh had closed the door to Moshe by evicting him from the palace with orders never to return. Moshe was angry because of the lost chance for Pharaoh. He was angry because it was now over. He could no longer help the man who, unbeknownst to him, was Hashem's agent for sustaining Moshe.

There is a profound lesson to be derived from here. Until now we might have thought that while we are obliged to demonstrate our gratitude towards those from whom we have benefitted, we are not required to force this favor upon them. "We tried", has been the popular refrain in many circumstances when the assistance we have been prepared to offer has been refused. We see now that, regardless of the situation, we must feel bad for the person who is erroneously rejecting our favor. Just because they are foolish does not mean that we should not feel bad for them. This is especially true in Pharaoh's case, when his stubbornness was responsible for the destruction of his own people.

This month shall be for you the beginning of the months. (12:1)

The Torah introduces the concept of Rosh Chodesh, the New Moon, with Chodesh Nissan as the first month. Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, cites a Midrash Peliyah, a Midrash that is seemingly ambiguous, defying explanation. The Midrash states: The angels asked Hashem, "Why did You forbid Adam Ha'rishon from eating of the Eitz Hadaas, saying that if he would eat of it he would die?" Hashem responded that one day Adam would have a descendant, David Ha'Melech, who would say, "Rigzu v'al techetau...v'domu, Selah." "Tremble and sin not...and be utterly silent, Selah." (Tehillim, 4:5)

Obviously, this Midrash has a deeper meaning. Horav Alpert renders the following interpretation of the Midrash. The midas ha'din, the attribute of strict justice, complained about Klal Yisrael's imminent release from Egypt and subsequent victory over the Egyptian army. How were they better than the Egyptians? Hashem responded that the new moon would introduce a new concept: the concept of renewal and rejuvenation. As the moon renews itself, as it changes phases, so, too, do Klal Yisrael have the ability to be reborn, to transform themselves from idol worshipers into G-d - fearing Jews. The sheep they had worshiped as an Egyptian deity would now become the Korban Pesach, the symbol of commitment, devotion and liberation. The angels asked: If man can renew himself, why was Adam not given this opportunity? Why was he told that his sin would write the final chapter in his life? Hashem responded that David Hamelech, a descendant of Adam Ha'rishon, the individual who was bequeathed seventy years of Adam's life, would give the answer to their question.

True, renewal, teshuvah, repentance, is a significant gift. In order to appreciate the power of teshuvah, however, one must be motivated to repent. What is there that inspires a person to repent, to change his lifestyle, to seek forgiveness for his errors? David Hamelech tells us, "Rigzu v'al techetau," - "Tremble and sin not." In response, Chazal in the Talmud Berachos derive that a person should enrage the yetzer tov, good inclination, over the yetzer hara, evil inclination. He should literally overpower it.

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What is the key to success? "v'domu Selah," the inspiration comes from "v'domu" - death - the yom hamissah - confronting one's mortality. When one comes to grips with the fact that his sojourn on this world is but a temporary trip, that he will one day be called to task for his actions, he will emerge victorious over the yetzer hora and repent.

Adam Ha'rishon was granted the opportunity for renewal through the idea that the last seventy years of his life were given to David Ha'melech. Adam's "death" was his rebirth, as David Ha'melech would inspire us as to how one becomes renewed, how one is motivated to repent, to mend his ways and become a new person. Ironically, Adam Ha'rishon's premature death was the source of life for so many.

Speak to all of the assembly of Yisrael...and they should take for you each man a sheep for the father's house a sheep for each house. (12:3)

Pharaoh did everything to destroy the Jewish home. He attempted to dismantle it piece by piece. In response, Klal Yisrael exhibited extraordinary unity in rallying around the heads of the home, their fathers and heads of the family, so that all became one, as the "hearts of the fathers were returned to the sons, and the hearts of the sons were (returned) to their fathers."

Horav Y. A. Hirshovitz, zl, claims this was the underlying motif behind makas bechoros, the killing of the Egyptian firstborn. The Jewish People now perceived the source of Egyptian evil, the origin of their insidious behavior - in the leaders. At that time, as the bechorei Mitzrayim were dealt their personal blow, Klal Yisrael was enjoined to sit down with their families, to share in the educational experience of children learning from parents. The parents were to serve as paradigms for their children, so that the children would emulate them in the next generation.

Hashem instructed them to open their homes to the poor, to those who had no seder, who had no home of their own. They should not sit down to partake of their Korban Pesach until they have seen to it that their underprivileged neighbor also had food to eat. Their family was not complete until their poor neighbor had been included. The blood of the Korban Pesach was the sign by which the Jewish family was sealed. It coincided with the blood of the Bris Milah, the sign that was the seal of the Jewish body.

It was now plain for all to see exactly what is the primary unit in Judaism in which Hashem rests His Shechinah. It is neither in the House of Prayer nor in the House of Study. Rather, it is in the Jewish home, the family unit. Now that the primary unit had been established, Hashem made known to them the manner of service that He sought from Klal Yisrael. He does not seek a life of abstinence, of fasting, affliction and depression. Hashem wants us to enjoy, to take pleasure in His beneficence, to share our bounty with others, to live as human beings - to be menchen.

On that day, Klal Yisrael consecrated the Jewish home - not the wood and brick, but the essential Jewish home - its values, its unity, its harmony and direction. Parents inculcating their children with the derech Hashem, way of G-d, with emunah and bitachon, faith and trust in the Almighty, devoted to a lifestyle of service to Hashem b'kedushah u'betaharah, with holiness and purity - that is what defines Judaism.

On that fateful night, the night of Pesach Mitzrayim, the Jewish family/home was inducted into its pivotal role in Judaism.

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An uncircumcised male may not eat of it. One who is uncircumcised may not partake of the Korban Pesach. The sacrifice celebrating our liberation from bondage demands that one be aligned with the Jewish People if he is to share in their freedom.

The story is told that Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, once came to an inn at St. Petersburg to join in a halachic conference. The question arose regarding the acceptability of children whose parents did not circumcise them. The majority of rabbonim held that a child who was not circumcised may not be included in a community's Jewish register. It was their way of censuring those assimilated Jews who rejected Bris Milah as their way of showing disdain against what they felt was an archaic religion. The consensus of opinion was that by excluding these children from the public register, their renegade parents might change their minds regarding circumcision.

Hearing their decision, Rav Chaim arose and emphatically demanded, "Show me where it says that an uncircumcised child is not a Jew! I understand that an 'areil,' uncircumcised Jew, is prohibited from eating Kodoshim and Terumah. He may also not eat of the Korban Pesach. But, where does it say that he is not Jewish? Why blame the child for the fault of the father?"

One of the speakers at the conference recounted that, in the city of Warsaw, a certain Jew refused to circumcise his son. After awhile the child became ill and died. The community leaders did not permit this child to be buried in the Jewish cemetery. Indeed, most of the attendees at this conference agreed with the decision of the Warsaw community who took a stand for the Torah. The only one who issued a declaration of protest was Rav Chaim Brisker. "There is no halachah that forbids an uncircumcised child from being buried in a Jewish cemetery. While there are certain areas that exclude an "areil" - burial in a Jewish cemetery is not one of them. If you are concerned about making a safeguard to serve as a deterrent against assimilation - do not take it out on the children. Take it out on the parents. Do not bury the father who refuses to have his child circumcised! This reaction was applauded by many people - even those who had become alienated from Torah and mitzvos. Rav Chaim had the courage to place the blame where it belonged. It would serve us well to attempt to conjure up some of this same courage.

*Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first issue of every womb
among the Bnei Yisrael, of man of beast, is Mine. (13:2)*

Why does the Torah demand that we redeem the firstborn? If they are born holy, then they should remain holy. Otherwise, why were they born holy? Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, derives a profound lesson from here. Hashem wants us to achieve kedushah on our own. He wants us to work for it, to strive for it, to accomplish kedushah, holiness, on our own. Consequently, we are enjoined to redeem that G-d -given kedushah - and work to regain it. We now have a realistic goal to achieve. Hashem granted us kedushah, which we must strive to realize through our own hard work. What comes easily, regrettably, is lost just as easily. Those attributes that we achieve through effort and hardship will be ingrained in our psyche and remain with us.

We see this idea reflected when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt. They had been granted enormous visions of prophesy. Indeed, the maid-servant at the Red Sea saw greater revelations of the Almighty than the sainted Navi Yechezkel. Yet, as Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, was wont to say, "She still remained a maidservant." It did not change her. Having access to such stunning revelations left no impression upon her. Bnei Yisrael saw and heard what no people had ever witnessed. Yet, they

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complained about foolish things, like the cucumbers and melons which they had in Egypt. Why? Why were they different from the neviim, prophets, who were saintly and virtuous and inspired Klal Yisrael for generations? Apparently, the prophets of old were more developed in their spiritual achievement, as a result of the fact that they earned it through hard work and toil. The generation of the wilderness, the dor ha'midbar, were granted a unique gift in order to prepare them for Kabbolas HaTorah, receiving the Torah. Their essence, however, remained the same. Without their own contribution, their gift from Hashem would have dissipated. This is how a people who had seen the greatest revelations of the Almighty, could digress to the point that they complained about the "lack" of vegetables - compared to their sustenance as slaves in Egypt.

And Moshe said, "With our young and our old we will go; with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds we will go; for we are to hold a festival unto Hashem." (10:9)

What message did Moshe Rabbeinu seek to convey to Pharaoh with such a verbose response? He could have simply said, "We must all go because it is a holiday to Hashem for us." Kli Yakar explains that Moshe's response reflects the essence of Jewish observance. Indeed, if they had just been going to the wilderness to offer sacrifices, then the only individuals that should have gone would have been those who were to sacrifice. Moshe explained to Pharaoh that our religion does not work in this manner. If this was to be a festival for G-d, then simchas ha'chag, the joy inherent in celebrating the holiday, would have been obvious. How can one express joy without his family's presence? How can one experience true happiness without his possessions? He can have no joy if his wife and children are being held "hostage" in Egypt; if his material assets are subjected to be held as a guarantee that he will return from the wilderness. His holiday with G-d is deficient. It is lacking a primary component.

The halachah states that one is obligated to be happy with his wife and children during the festival. In other words, one must see to it that his family is happy in order for his simchah, joy, to be complete. Thus, a simchah which does not include one's family, is lacking. If one is to have a "relationship" with Hashem he must be b'simchah, at peace with himself, without worry or concern about family or possessions. Moshe told Pharaoh that Klal Yisrael must cooperate as a single unit -- including family and possessions -- if this holiday experience in the wilderness was to have the proper effect on them.

Horav Simchah Shtetner, Shlita, explains this concept further. Pharaoh was under the impression that Judaism is an aggregate of religious observances. He thought that we are required to perform certain actions as part of our service to the Almighty. These are individual, isolated activities that are not related to a Jew's lifestyle or essence. In other words, Pharaoh ascribed to the infamous progressive axiom that was so common among the assimilated Jew of pre-World War II Europe, "Be a Jew at home and a German in the street." Religion does not govern our lives; it does not change us. Accordingly, Pharaoh felt that the only individuals that should be allowed to leave Egypt were those who were going to perform the actual worship.

Moshe explained to Pharaoh the fallacy of this belief. Judaism is not simply a set of commandments that one observes. Judaism is a way of life that encompasses every area of human endeavor, for both the individual himself and the nation collectively. Hashem's command is not a process in which He decrees, and we follow with action. It is a relationship that brings us closer to Him, to fear and, ultimately, love the Almighty. This is only perceived in the context of the mitzvos which encompass our entire lives - spiritual and physical. Not simply the sacrifice, but everything

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involved in its offering, comprises Jewish worship. Pharaoh could not perceive this, for he was a pagan.

We do not know with what we must serve Hashem until we come there. (10:26)

From the dialogue between Moshe and Pharaoh, we are able to develop two perspectives on religion: Pharaoh's and Moshe's. The latter constitutes the essence of Judaism. It was no longer a question of freedom from slavery. The negotiations were focused upon serving Hashem in the wilderness. Moshe beseeched, "Let my People go, so that they may make a feast for Me in the wilderness." Pharaoh responded that if it was only a question of serving Hashem, of offering sacrifices, they could go, but their flocks of sheep must remain. Moshe countered that even their cattle were to go along. Nothing was to remain in Egypt because "we do not know with what we must serve Hashem until we come there." Rashi comments, "We do not know how arduous the worship will be, He might ask for more than we have in our possession." Moshe explained to Pharaoh that Hashem might ask more than we possess. We must, therefore, be prepared for anything.

Let us ask ourselves: How would they have been able to give more than they possessed? Surely, in the wilderness they would not have been able to go out and purchase more supplies. Horav Moshe Swift, zl, explains that in this statement lies the essence of Jewish commitment. To serve Hashem with dedication means to somehow find the supply - to give up what we have - and more! If serving Hashem means prayer, we must somehow find the time, regardless of our prior commitments. If service to Hashem means Torah study, we must carve out the time. If it means shemiras Shabbos, Sabbath observance, then we must create the time, regardless of the hardship involved. If we serve Hashem through charity and acts of lovingkindness, then we must find the resources and the strength to execute these good deeds. This is the nature of the Jew. We have faced every new Jewish venture, undertaken every endeavor, with the position that whatever Hashem asks of us, whatever possessions He might require us to surrender, we stand ready and willing to serve s Him.

Horav Swift distinguishes between the theoretical Jew and the practical Jew: The Jew in theory must know the meaning and grasp the reason before he chooses to serve. In contrast, the practical Jew serves, studies and prays without fanfare, with devotion and conviction, even if he does not grasp the full meaning or understand the reason. This attitude has shaped our relationship with the Almighty. If one believes with conviction, he realizes that not everything is comprehensible to his limited human mind. His belief stems from his love. His relationship will endure. Regrettably, those who have placed emphasis upon the theoretical aspects of Judaism, ignoring the practical observances, are ultimately bereft of both.

Hashem told Klal Yisrael that the miracles of Egypt should be related "in the ears of your son and your son's son, that you may know that I am Hashem." It is important to transmit our glorious history to our children. By all means, we must teach them whatever there is to know about our culture in order to infuse them with pride. All of this is useless if the theory is the end product. The theory must lead to "v'yedaatem ki Ani Hashem," a knowledge of Hashem. It must have a practical bearing on our everyday life. We will survive as a nation only through a commitment to practical Judaism.

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Speak now in the ears of the people, and let them ask every man of his neighbor, and every woman of her neighbor, jewels of silver and jewels of gold. (11:2)

During the Bris Bein Ha'besarim, Covenant Between the Parts, Hashem promised Avraham Avinu, "Acharei kein yeitzu birchush gadol." "Afterwards, they will go out with a great substance / treasure." Klal Yisrael would be enslaved in Egypt for many years, but they would not leave empty-handed. If they had been promised wealth, why did the Torah instruct them only to borrow gold and silver? Why not take it? Furthermore, even in order to borrow these gold and silver jewels, it was necessary for the Jews to have found tremendous "chein," favor, in the eyes of the Egyptians. Could this "favor" not have been increased a little so that they could have taken the vessels? It seems that the emphasis was specifically upon the act of borrowing. Why?

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, renders this pasuk homeliterally. He first explains the meaning/concept of "rechush gadol," great substance/treasure. A number of commentators suggest that this refers to a spiritual, rather than material, treasure. The Jewish people were being prepared for the Torah which would be given to them as a result of their "stay" in Egypt. This pshat, exposition, however, is not consistent with the text, which implies that they were specifically to borrow jewelry. When we think about it, what is a treasure? For that matter, how do we define wealth? Simply, we see that a wealthy person is one who has enormous material assets, who certainly has no debts, and is never in need of financial assistance. Accordingly, a wise man is one who has amassed great knowledge, who is erudite and learned. We note that our barometer for measuring wealth and wisdom is much different than the Torah's. Indeed, a wealthy man can be really poor and vice versa.

Chazal teach us that "he who has one hundred (coins) wants two hundred." In other words, the more one possesses, the more he wants. This occurs when he lacks the middah, attribute, of sameach b'chelko, being happy with his lot. One who maintains the position that whatever he has is what Hashem wants him to have, goes through life happy and satisfied, never in need of anything. He is truly a wealthy man. He possesses everything, because he views his possessions as encompassing everything. This same idea applies to the concept of wisdom. One whose wisdom is based upon accumulated knowledge will be disconcerted when he finds others who know much more than he does. Suddenly, he no longer feels wise. When the barometer for measuring wisdom is determined by how much knowledge one has acquired, it is subject to constant change, frequently due to one's envy of another. Once again, a lack of self-satisfaction plays a dominant role in defining success. Who is truly a chacham, wise man? One who is "lomeid mikol adam," learns from all men, who never stops learning, whose thirst for knowledge is never quenched. This defines the Torah's concept of wisdom.

Hashem told Moshe to tell the people that they should borrow; this was the lesson with which they would leave Egypt. This was the rechush gadol, great treasure, they would take with them. They should borrow. The act of borrowing, forces the individual to realize that what he needs -- he already has, and what he does not have -- he does not need. Egyptian culture taught that he who has amassed much wealth is wealthy, and he who does not have material assets is considered a slave. The Jews saw that what the Egyptians had was worthless to the Jews, because in the long run they lent it to the Jews. The Jews were told to borrow, so that they would understand that a lack of material assets did not mark

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them as poverty-stricken slaves. They did not have because they did not need. Had they needed, Hashem would have provided them with it. Avraham Avinu felt comfortable with this lesson / treasure.

And it shall be when your son will ask you at some future time, "What is this?" (13:14)

Rashi attributes this question to the tam, the simple son, of the Haggadah, Seder service. In Sefer Devarim the Torah repeats this question, attributing it to the ben chacham, wise son. Rashi notes that while both "sons" ask the same question, the wise son asks with chochmah, in a wise manner, while the tam speaks vaguely, unable to articulate his question in depth. In other words, when one asks, "What is this?", he can be motivated either by a profound, well thought out understanding of a subject or a nagging vagueness which reflects an inability to comprehend the subject. The chacham and tam seem to be saying the same thing, but, in reality, they are not. The tam asks, "What is this?" His blanket statement indicates a lack of perception. The chacham asks specifically, "What are the testimonies, statutes and judgements?" He asks with chochmah! It is not what one asks; it is how he presents the question.

Nachlas Tzvi cites a story as a basis for this idea. There was a caliph who had two sons, from two different wives: One son was the crown prince, his queen's child. The other son was born to him from one of his other wives. One day the caliph noticed that the queen was crying. When he asked her why she was crying, she responded, "I am bothered by the fact that you favor the maidservant's son over mine." The caliph said, "You are right; forgive me. Send for your son, and I will ask him to do something for me."

When her son appeared, the caliph said to him, "Go to the store and bring me some threads." The boy bowed to the caliph, immediately leaving to do his bidding. When the shopkeeper asked him regarding the texture of the threads, he did not know. He had forgotten to ask the caliph. Upon returning, the caliph instructed him regarding the threads' texture. The boy returned to the store only to be asked what colors the caliph wanted. Once again, the boy was dumbfounded and embarrassed for not asking the color before he left. The caliph instructed him to purchase white threads. He returned to the store only to be questioned regarding the amount of the threads the caliph required. Humiliated, the boy returned to the caliph at which point the caliph told him he no longer needed the threads.

Afterwards, the caliph instructed his aide to call the "other" wife's son. When the boy arrived, the caliph asked him to purchase threads for him. The boy immediately responded, "Father, what type of threads do you want: wool or linen, thick or thin, what color and how many? Perhaps if you tell me for what purpose these threads will be used, I can purchase the ones most appropriate."

The caliph now turned to the queen and said, "Do you now understand why I favor this son?" Knowing what to ask and how to question is a sign of wisdom. Patience and deliberation are virtues that not only complement wisdom, but they are also essential qualities which are the hallmark of a wise man.

There was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for a three-day period. (10:22)

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Rashi asks a question regarding makas choshech, the plague of darkness, which he does not ask concerning any of the other plagues: why did Hashem specifically bring about the plague of darkness? He answers that there were Jews in Egypt who refused to leave. They would rather choose to live with the slavery, suffering and persecution that Egypt had to offer than risk possible death in the wilderness. During these three days of darkness these Jews died and were buried by their brethren. Resigned to remaining in the position in which they were before the plague began because of the "weight" of the darkness, the Egyptians were not aware of this. Otherwise, they might have ignored the impact of the plague, noting that it was happening also to the Jews.

We derive from here the importance for every Jew to seek an environment containing nothing that is counter to his spiritual development. A Jew does not belong in Egypt. A Jew is not to be a slave to Egyptians. He serves only one Master, Hashem. We have to ask ourselves: Why? Why would such a large group of people - which, according to Rashi in Parashas Beshalach, amounted to four-fifths of Klal Yisrael - want to stay? Only twenty percent of the Jewish People desired to leave the miserable conditions and moral depravity of Egypt. Why?

Horav David Shneuer, Shlita, cites the Ibn Ezra in his commentary on the pasuk, "You shall not eat it partially roasted or cooked in water; only roasted over fire-its head, its legs, with its innards." (12:9), which sheds light on the psyche of the Jewish slaves. Ibn Ezra suggests that one might think that since the sheep is the Egyptian god, we should not make a public display of roasting it. Perhaps, just cook it partially, and "get it over with" as quickly as possible. The Torah empathetically replies, No! We must stop being afraid of the Egyptians. They are no longer our masters. We are the victors, and they are the vanquished.

We learn from here the level of depression to which the Jews had descended. Their fear of the Egyptians broke their will and destroyed their spirit. The slave mentality had completely enveloped them. They were like victims of abuse; they cowered, they were filled with anxiety; they were filled with nervous tension. They were willing to suffer, to be cruelly beaten and violated, to be persecuted and afflicted in the most heinous ways - and they would come back for more! To make trouble with the Egyptians, to defy their oppressors, was unthinkable. They would never think of leaving Egypt. They were here forever. They were slaves.

This is called "yiush," despair, hopelessness, terms antithetical to Jewish belief. The Jew always has hope. He is never to be "meyaesh," give up hope, because he trusts in Hashem. No one said that life was going to be easy. Without Hashem, however, it is impossible.

"It is a Pesach feast-offering to Hashem, Who skipped over the houses of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but He saved our households. (12:27)

Imagine, person A testifies that person B attempted to kill him. Person B is found guilty and placed in jail. Afterwards, person A makes a festive feast thanking the Almighty that he was not also incarcerated. Anyone privy to this case would certainly raise his eyebrows and wonder if person A is sane. Is that not, however, what the pasuk relates to us? The Egyptians sinned against the Jews. Hashem found them guilty and punished them severely. The Jews were offering their gratitude to Hashem for not also killing them! Why? It is the Egyptian who was the aggressor, and the Jew who was the victim. What could have justified punishing the hopeless victim?

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Siach Yitzchak suggests a pragmatic response to this question. There were individuals in Egypt who did not want to leave. The situation in Egypt notwithstanding, who knew what the wilderness might bring? Sometimes, status-quo, regardless of the pain and troubles which accompany it, is more desirable than an ambiguous and potentially risky change. Moreover, the Egyptian lifestyle was definitely not as spiritually demanding as life in the wilderness would be. Fearing that Hashem delay the liberation in response to these misguided individuals, Moshe Rabbeinu implored Hashem, asking, "Are all of us going to be held back because of these few who refuse to leave?" Immediately, Hashem caused a wind to blow the sweet smell of Korban Pesach into their nostrils. They were so captivated by the aroma that they acceded to leaving Egypt. This was then a great kindness from Hashem, for otherwise this minority would have impacted on Yetzias Mitzraim, the Egyptian exodus.

The power of an individual is incredible. We have only to look back over the last sixty to seventy years of Orthodoxy in America to note how much was accomplished by a few dedicated Jews. Whether it was lay people who understood the importance of Torah, or it was Roshei Yeshivah and rabbanim who would not permit the Nazis to destroy their will, these individuals, with Siyata diShimaya, Divine Assistance, overcame all odds to set in motion the great Torah renaissance which we enjoy today. We have also to remember that, regrettably, individuals can also destroy what has been built. We must never discount the single individual, because his potential is awesome.

Pharaoh rose up at midnight (12:30)

After Moshe notified Pharaoh of the impending death of the firstborn Egyptians, the Torah states that "Pharaoh rose up at midnight." From where did he rise? Rashi responds, "From his bed." Anyone who had been following the narrative knows that Pharaoh's time was up. Everything that Moshe had said would occur had been realized. Nine devastating plagues had come and gone. What more did Pharaoh need to make him face the reality that Egypt was doomed? He was being told about the tenth and most devastating plague-makas bechoros, death of the firstborn. What did he do the night before he was likely to die? He went to sleep as if nothing had happened or was going to happen! What possessed a human being to have such insolence. Pharaoh's incurable arrogance was absolutely mind-boggling!

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, explains that it is necessary to maintain a balance between the forces of good and evil. Otherwise, the concept of bechirah chafshis, free-will, has no meaning. Consider an individual of exceptional kedushah, holiness, whose unstinting devotion to Hashem is his benchmark. When told he is to sacrifice his beloved son, for whom he has waited nearly a life-time, he is prepared to do so without question. There must be an antithesis to him among the forces of tumah, impurity. If, on the night before he is to leave to slaughter his son, Avraham Avinu went to bed, then there must be a representative of the forces of evil, who, when told he and the other firstborn of his kingdom will die, would likewise go to sleep, ignoring Hashem's warning. If Avraham goes to sleep, then Pharaoh must also have been evil enough - or foolish enough - to go to bed.

Avraham Avinu's power of kedushah was so great that he transcended human nature and emotion in order to fulfill the word of the Almighty. As a counterpart to Avraham, there had to be a Pharaoh, whose evil and defiance of Hashem would likewise transcend human nature. Avraham went to sleep secure and trusting in Hashem's command. Pharaoh went to sleep demonstrating his obstinacy and hostility to Hashem's command.

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Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, supplements this thought with another case in which one's trust in Hashem overcame his natural tendency towards fear and anxiety. Yonah Ha'navi was on a ship, being thrown around the sea in the midst of a dangerous storm. The waves were shaking the ship and its passengers. Everybody was screaming, frightened for their lives. Yet, Yonah descended to the ship's hold and went to sleep. Is this a typical response to a life-threatening situation? Klal Yisrael was not created today or yesterday. We have been around for awhile and have endured the most formidable challenges to which human beings have been subjected. We are still here because Hashem protects us and wants us to be here. As He has protected us from our external enemies, He will also protect us from our enemies from within. Yonah goes to sleep trusting in Hashem, knowing that this storm is Hashem's work. Whatever will be - will be.

Horav Yitzchok Zilberstein, Shlita, attributes the rise in tension among Jews specifically to the above thesis. There has never been such a surge of Torah growth. Thousands upon thousands of young men and women are returning to Torah Judaism. The Yeshivos and Kollelim are filled with bnei Torah studying b'kedushah u'betaharah, with holiness and purity. Yet, in contrast, we find a world filled with moral decay unparalleled in history. There is a virulent animosity towards the observant Jew, regrettably, from some of our own brethren. That, however, is only a sign that the forces of kedushah are on the rise. To abate this elevation in holiness, there has to be a balanced rise in the forces of tumah, impurity. It is tragic that this has to be emanating from among our own People. We have to hope that one day they will come to their senses and realize that there is only one way for a Jew to live.

The situation seeks equilibrium. The Midrash relates that when the angel struck Sancheriv the king of Ashur's camp, during his battle against Chizkiyahu Ha'melech, all of his soldiers died. He was left alone with his two sons. When the wicked general saw this, he bowed down to his idol and said, "I am prepared to slaughter my remaining two sons to you, if you will help me." Before he had the opportunity to carry out his ill-fated plan, his two sons, who had overheard his prayer, killed him. The question glares at us. Sancheriv saw his own folly. He clearly saw that he was no match for Hashem. He had the strongest army, the most powerful weapons, and they were all transformed into nothing. Yet, he was prepared to slaughter his two children to an idol which has proven itself time and time again to be a worthless piece of stone. How irrational and senseless can one be? The answer is as mentioned. If Klal Yisrael possesses individuals whose level of kedushah, coupled with their overwhelming devotion to Hashem, is incredible-there has to be a balance. Sancheriv represented the balance.

In contrast, we offer the following story that demonstrates the kedushah of our People. In Russia, during the reign of the N.K.V.D., Russian secret police, who were notorious for their ruthlessness, it was forbidden to perform a bris milah, circumcise Jewish boys, or to shecht, ritually slaughter animals. Heaven-help he who was caught in such "defiance" of the state. Rav Aizik Roth, zl, was a mohel, ritual circumciser, who shared an apartment with another chasid who happened to be a shochet, ritual slaughterer. One night there was a loud knock on their apartment door. They knew that such a knock could only be a sign of trouble, since they were both "employed" in vocations that were strictly prohibited by the government. Rav Aizik told the shochet to gather his knives and leave through the back door. He would deal with the police. He opened the door to be greeted by a major in the Secret Police. "Where is the mohel?" he asked somewhat forcefully. Rav Galinsky, who happened to be in the apartment, looked at the officer and innocently asked, "Do you think, Major, that we would circumcise our children knowing that it goes against the government? No, we would never do this."

The Major was relentless; he would not budge: "Where is the mohel?" He walked through the apartment and saw that no one was there but himself and the two rabbanim. He turned to them and said

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in Yiddish, "I am also Jewish. My wife has given birth to a little boy, and I need a mohel to circumcise him." Imagine what was occurring. There is no doubt that if it had been discovered that this Major was circumcising his son, there would not be a gallows high enough for him. The Russian Secret Police would make him their paradigm of one who commits treason. His death would be slow and torturous. Yet, his overwhelming devotion to fulfill a mitzvah for which Jews died throughout the ages superceded all of his fears.

There must be a balance. In contrast to the malevolent evil of a Sancheriv there has to be an individual whose devotion to Judaism transcends even their basic desire to live. We should note that this major was not observant. He knew, however, that Bris Milah is a defining mitzvah in Judaism. He was prepared to die for this mitzvah. Regrettably, today some of our co-religionists who have alienated themselves from the faith, refuse to live with this mitzvah.

And it shall be when your son shall ask you at some future time, "What is this?" (13:14)

In the Haggadah, this question is attributed to the ben tam, simple son. How does the author of the Haggadah know this? Indeed, who says this question is the result of a curious, sincere and innocent mind; perhaps he is asking this mockingly, in an attempt to ridicule the mitzvos. Interestingly, regarding the simple son, the Torah says, "And it shall be when your son shall ask you at some future time," while regarding the ben rasha, wicked son, the Torah says, "And it shall be when your children say to you, What is this service to you?" (12:26). It seems as if they are both asking the same question; just the timing is different: The rasha does not wait; He asks immediately, while the tam asks at some future time. Is there a rationale for this?

In responding to these questions, the Kli Yakar first focuses on the simple son's question, "What is this?" What does he see that prompts this query? Indeed, this chapter does not even address the concepts of matzoh or marror. It is about Pidyon B'chor, redeeming the first-born. Evidently, the tam is not questioning the mitzvos of Pesach, but rather, the mitzvah of Pidyon B'chor. What is there about this mitzvah that provokes his curiosity?

Apparently, such is the nature of the simple son. When he is told to eat matzah and marror, he does not ask questions. He is told to perform a mitzvah; he listens and acts upon the request. After all, why not? It does not hurt to act properly. Questions? He will ask those later. The rasha, on the other hand, cannot tolerate even a "convenient" mitzvah. If an act even alludes to tradition or Torah in anyway, he must fight it. He is so pugnacious, he must immediately question the source, the rationale, the authority for this mitzvah. Heaven forbid that he be influenced into performing a "mitzvah"!

When the tam is asked to reach into his wallet to redeem the firstborn, then he has questions. One might err and compare the tam to the rasha, since they both question the mitzvah prior to accepting it. The Torah "explains" that there is a distinction between the two. The rasha asks immediately, he will do nothing if it in anyway alludes to Torah. The tam, in contrast, readily accepts the mitzvah that does not impose itself too heavily on his time, his person, his wallet. The difference is clear: The tam acts, then questions. The rasha seeks every reason not to act. The questions are just his way of justifying his arrogance and inaction.

"Moshe said, 'With our youngsters and with our elders we will go... because it is a festival of Hashem for us.'" (10:9)

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In the beginning of Sefer Devarim, when Moshe Rabbeinu rebukes Klal Yisrael regarding their behavior leading up to the cheit ha'meraglim, sin of the spies, he remarks, "All of you approached and said." He admonishes them for approaching him in a disorderly, disrespectful manner, with the young people pushing ahead of the elders, and the elders pushing aside the leaders. Rashi observes that this was in sharp contrast to the Giving of the Torah where everyone came up in an orderly fashion, according to age and station in life. We derive from this that proper *derech erez*, etiquette and manners, is for the young to follow their elders. Why then does Moshe say, "With our youngsters and with our elders we will go," placing the young before their elders? Should it not have been the other way around?

Horav Dov Eliezrov, z.l., explains this with a lesson in chinuch, Torah education. Pharaoh had demanded that only the grown men should leave to serve Hashem. Moshe told Pharaoh that this is not consistent with the Jewish system of education. Mitzvah observance accompanied by Torah study begins at a very young age. As soon as a Jewish child learns to speak, words of Torah become the first words in his lexicon. This is immediately followed by exposure to an environment replete with the spiritual amenities that will stimulate his growth in Torah and mitzvah observance. Maybe, in the pagan Egyptian religion, the young have little or no significance. In the Jewish religion, however, they are everything. They take precedence. It is for us a chag, festival, which we will celebrate with the Almighty. This heightened spiritual experience is a time when the young stand together with the old, absorbing the spiritual influence that permeates the air.

Jewish education has been the foundation of the Jewish People from their very genesis. Pharaoh knew that by keeping the youth in Egypt, he was causing a break in the chain of tradition in which a father teaches his son. It is important that the present generation imbue the future generation, based upon the inspiration of the past generation. This idea, says Nachlas Tzvi, was the underlying motif of Moshe's dialogue with Pharaoh. Moshe told Pharaoh that with our young, who represent our future, with our old, who signify our past; and with our sons and daughters, who comprise the present - we will go forward to worship Hashem. This is the only way that Klal Yisrael will survive, if we maintain our link with the past. The greatest, most significant and most meaningful source of educational inspiration occurs when children observe their parents' involvement in Torah and mitzvos. They emulate what we do. We must, therefore, make sure that they observe something that we want them to emulate.

Nachlas Tzvi cites an inspirational story about Horav Meir Shapiro, z.l., the Lubliner Rav and founder of the Daf HaYomi, system of studying one folio of Talmud every day. The Lubliner Rav was a brilliant scholar whose reputation was worldwide. He would constantly attribute his overwhelming success to his mother. His father, in speaking about her, would quote Shlomo HaMelech's pasuk in Eishas Chayil, "Many daughters have amassed achievement, but you surpassed them all." He would supplement this by saying, "Her love for Torah which burns within her produced an unparalleled fruit: She devoted her son to Torah from an early age." When Rav Meir grew into adulthood he would often relate the following incredible incident that occurred when he was seven years old.

One day shortly after Pesach in 1894, Rav Meir noticed his mother weeping bitterly. He immediately asked her what was wrong. She informed him that prior to Pesach she had invited a great Torah scholar from a nearby city to teach him. She had even agreed on the fee of three hundred rubles, which was a large sum at the time, and he had not arrived. It was already two days after Yom Tov and the melamed, teacher, was not yet here. She explained to him, "You should know, my son, that every day that goes by without Torah study is an irretrievable loss. Perhaps I did not offer him enough money.

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While the sum may constitute an incredible amount of money for us, it is but a small sacrifice for us to offer so that you will study Torah." Shortly thereafter, the teacher arrived. For the next six years, he devoted himself fully to teaching Torah to this budding Torah scholar, whose brilliant scholarship and unparalleled leadership ability would inspire the Torah world.

Regrettably, Rav Meir's mother did not live to see the light of her life shine brilliantly throughout the world. She passed away as a young woman during the first world war. Her son never forgot his mother's love and sacrifice. Indeed, once Rav Meir was speaking to a large assemblage of men and women. Suddenly, in middle of his address, he declared with great emotion, "Be happy and filled with joy, my dear mother, as you rest in Gan Eden. You have truly earned your reward. Look down at the eminence that your son has achieved. Take note of his distinction as a gadol b'Yisrael, Torah leader."

Understandably, the audience was shocked. While it was certainly true, what possessed Rav Meir to make this public declaration in the middle of his speech? Why would he laud himself publicly at this venue? After a moment Rav Meir turned to the balcony where the women were seated and proclaimed, "You women of Klal Yisrael, righteous, holy mothers of the Jewish People, if you, too, desire and aspire that you shall have sons that are Torah luminaries, scholars and rabbanim, then follow in the footsteps of my revered, beloved mother who sacrificed her life so that her son could distinguish himself in Torah."

Rav Meir sought to dramatize a point. He wanted to captivate the people and grab their attention so that they they would hear his message. He succeeded. Now, if we will also listen, it will prove worthwhile to us, as well.

*"And it shall be when your children say to you, 'What is this service to you?' ...
and the people bowed their heads and prostrated themselves." (12:12,27)*

Rashi explains that the Jews bowed their heads in gratitude for the news that they would be blessed with children. This is enigmatic. Veritably, the liberation from Egypt is something to be excited about. After what they had endured for all these years, it would make sense that they should be overjoyed and shout their joy from the rooftops. This is certainly something for which they should bow their heads. What is so unusual about being blessed with children? This is a nation that was giving birth to sextuplets. They experienced the first population explosion. Why are they so excited to hear that they would have children?

Horav Elazar Menachem Man Schach, z.l., offers a compelling explanation. When we look around with a penetrating eye, we realize that fathers are not begetting children. What is really happening is that fathers are begetting fathers! He is raising an individual who is completely independent, thinking and rendering decisions for himself. The father cares not what the son does, nor does the son care what the father is doing. They are independent of each other. The family unit has been shattered. Each one has his own interests and lifestyle. They get together at family social occasions to interact a bit, for "old times" sake. This is the story, regrettably, of the contemporary lifestyle throughout a greater part of the world. We think that if we bury our heads in the ground and ignore the social climate around us, it will not affect us. That is a grave mistake. A problem does not go away just because we close our eyes to it. This was the good news that Klal Yisrael was waiting to hear. This is why they bowed their heads in gratitude. They were told that they would have "banim," children, who

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would inquire into their customs and traditions, who would question the "avodah," work, that involved so much of their time. This is the first step towards a relationship: the child asks; he inquires; he wants to know, what and why, he wants to interact. This is wonderful news.

We may add that Klal Yisrael's reaction is a necessary prerequisite for the enduring success of the parent/child relationship. Klal Yisrael bowed their heads in gratitude. They were happy. They appreciated children that question, that inquired, that sought answers, that wanted to understand their parents tradition and lifestyle. A child should ask, but if the parent has no desire to respond the parent has severed his/her relationship with their child. This type of parent neither manifests interest in his/her child nor appreciates the value of the parent-child relationship. Such people have not earned a relationship. They are responsible for the consequences of their lack of engagement.

*"And it shall be a sign upon your hand, and for frontlets between your eyes;
for by strength of the hand, Hashem has brought us out of Egypt." (13:16)*

The Exodus should be memorialized in ways other than an annual celebration of miracles that were wrought for us some thousands of years ago. Its eternal message and lessons should be before the mind of a Jew, by means of a "sign" on the hand and frontlets between the eyes. These reminders, which are called Tefillin, include four sections of passages from the Torah which embrace: kabbolas malchus Shomayim, acceptance of the yoke of Heaven; achdus ha'Borai, unity of the Creator; and yetzias Mitzrayim, the exodus from Egypt. These fundamental doctrines, the foundation stone of our belief, must never leave our mind and heart, as we dedicate the intellect of the mind, as well as the emotion and passion represented by the heart, to the Almighty.

Throughout the millennia, the Jewish People have maintained their bond with the Almighty through their observance of the mitzvah of Tefillin. Numerous stories recount the devotion of our People to observing this mitzvah under the most difficult circumstances. Tefillin is a reminder of past miracles. Its observance strengthens our faith and commitment. Furthermore, Tefillin are a part of the Jew's uniform, which he dons daily as a proclamation of his deep rooted conviction. I recently came across an inspiring "Tefillin story," which conveys a universal message.

The hero of our story is a young yeshivah high-school student whom we will call David, who volunteered this past summer at the local home for the aged. One of the jobs of the volunteers was to ask the residents if they would like to go to the daily services. Most of the residents were receptive. Those who were not, were generally pleasant about it. There was one man, however, who was rather offensive in his attitude. He not only refused to attend, but he even once cursed the volunteer that had suggested he come daven, pray. Hearing this, David decided that he would go have a friendly chat with his resident.

David went over to the dining room, saw the man, and said, "The volunteers are only here to help you. There is no reason to curse them." The resident looked at David and responded "Wheel me back into my room, I want to tell you a story." David wheeled the man into his room. After he was comfortable, the resident began to relate the following story:

"I had grown up in a prominent, observant home. Everyone but my father and I had already been murdered by the Nazis. In the concentration camp in which we were interred someone had smuggled in a Tefillin-shel-rosh, which is worn on the head. Every morning the men would take turns

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putting on the Tefillin, even if just for a second."

"The day before my bar-mitzvah, my father became aware of a man who had a whole set of Tefillin. That evening, the man who had smuggled in the pair of Tefillin was killed by the Nazis. After hearing of the man's death, my father decided to go to his bunk and locate the Tefillin so that I could have a complete pair of Tefillin for my bar-mitzvah. On the way back, my father was seen by a Nazi, who shot and killed him before my very eyes. Somehow I managed to take the Tefillin and hide them."

The resident paused and then asked, "How could you expect me to pray to a G-d who would kill a boy's father right in front of him? He was getting Tefillin for me to be able to pray to Him! Is this the reward? My father was all I had left in the world. Why?"

Another minute went by, and the resident said, "Go to my dresser and open the top drawer." David did as he was told, opened the drawer and found an old black, worn-out bag. The man asked him to bring over the bag. The resident opened the bag to reveal its contents - a pair of Tefillin. "You see these boxes! I keep them to show people what my father died for: dirty black boxes and straps. They were the last thing my father gave me. This is my inheritance!"

One can only imagine the hurt and depression this young boy must have felt. He left the room speechless. He could neither eat nor sleep restfully. He empathized with the resident, but how could he explain to him that he was wrong? The next day, he avoided the man's floor until he was notified that they were one short of a minyan, quorum, and one of the residents needed to say Kaddish. He searched all over for a tenth man, to no avail. He had no choice but to go to the recalcitrant resident and ask him to join them.

David went to the room and asked the resident if he would attend the services so that another resident could say Kaddish. He was prepared for a negative response, so he was taken aback when the reply was, "If I come, will you then leave me alone?" David said, "Yes, if you come I will not bother you any more." David quickly added, "Would you like me to bring along the Tefillin?" To his shock, the resident said, "Yes, but after this, you must promise to leave me alone."

They went down to the synagogue. David wheeled the resident to the back. Just before he left, David showed the man how to put on the Tefillin. When the services were over, David returned to the room to help bring back the residents. He came into the synagogue to find one worshiper - his "charge," the resident whom he had brought to complete the minyan. He was sitting in the back of the shul, with his Tefillin still on. Tears were pouring down his cheeks.

"Should I get a nurse or a doctor? Does something hurt you?" David blurted out. Nothing - no response, just bitter weeping. He was mumbling something. David bent over to listen. He heard the resident saying over and over again, "Tatti, Tatti, it feels so right," as he kept staring at the Tefillin straps on his arm.

David waited until the man calmed down. He took him back to his room and helped him into his bed. The man turned to David and said, "During the hour that I wore the Tefillin, I felt as if my father were with me."

Every day after that, David would pick the man up and bring him to shul to daven with his "newly found" Tefillin. One day towards the end of the summer, David came to perform his daily ritual, but the man was not there. He was told to his great chagrin, that the resident was taken to the hospital during the night. They had just received word that he had died. David was broken-hearted. He had developed a close relationship with the elderly resident over the past few weeks. He would miss him.

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A few weeks later, a woman came to the home and asked to speak to David. She said to him, "You do not know me, but you were very special in my father's eyes. Actually, in a way, you saved my father's life." She then introduced herself as the resident's daughter. "Shortly before my father died," she continued, "he asked me to bring him his Tefillin. He knew he had very little time left, and he wanted to put on his Tefillin one last time and pray with them. You truly saved him and made his last days on this world comfortable. You helped him to reconcile himself with his past. My father died wearing his Tefillin. Thank you so much for caring about him." Years of bitterness were made sweet by an individual who cared about another person. This is a Tefillin story with a message about caring, because we do not always realize the difference that a little bit of caring can make.

One more plague shall I bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; after that, he shall send you forth from here. When he sends forth, it shall be complete; he shall drive you out of here. (11:1)

Simply, Hashem is conveying to Moshe Rabbeinu that Pharaoh and the Egyptians will have to undergo one more plague. Then the ten plagues will be complete, and Pharaoh will have received his due. Sforno, however, renders this pasuk differently. He explains that Pharaoh originally sent Moshe and Aharon away willingly; with his rod of anger, he drove them out from his presence. In a similar manner, he will now be compelled to send them and all of Klal Yisrael away in anguish. The previous time he had driven away only Moshe and Aharon - and it was only from his presence. Now, he will be forced to send Moshe, Aharon and all the Jewish People away - from his country.

Sforno explains that this is the measure of Hashem's justice. When a man obstinately refuses to comply with the wishes of his Maker, he will ultimately do what he has resisted doing; only now, it will be in distress and sorrow, against his will. This is similar to the pasuk in Devarim 28:47,48, "Because you did not serve Hashem...amid gladness and goodness of heart...So you will serve your enemy." This idea corresponds with Chazal's maxim, "He who abolishes/nullifies the Torah when he is wealthy, will eventually do so amid poverty." (Pirkei Avos 9:10)

Sforno draws an important moral lesson from this pasuk. What man fails to do of his own free will, he will eventually be compelled to do under circumstances that are more distasteful to him. We are taught that the world is not hefker, ownerless. Everyone must eventually give an accounting for his actions. There is no way to escape Hashem's will. We either do it willingly, at the appropriate time, under circumstances that are convenient and acceptable -- or we will do it under duress, under adverse conditions.

Sforno substantiates his thesis with the famous pasuk that admonishes us for not serving Hashem amid joy, with goodness of heart. Horav Gershon Liebman, zl, Rosh Hayeshivah of Yeshivas Ohr Yosef/Novardok in France, writes that he remembers being in the concentration camp digging ditches. Throughout this backbreaking labor he heard a certain Rosh Hayeshivah next to him repeating this pasuk constantly, serving as a reminder that this misery was a result of a lack of joy in serving the Creator.

Furthermore, when we sit back indifferent to the needs of our People; or when the crown of Torah is humiliated; when Torah Judaism is denigrated and no one takes a stand; we sit idly by watching with blank looks, folded hands, shaking our heads as Torah leaders are shamed, the Torah is defamed, and Orthodoxy is disparaged. How will we respond later, when Hashem asks us, "Why did you sit around doing nothing?"

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We have only to peruse history to find Sforno's words glaring at us. How many times have we been lax in our observance, performing mitzvot in an apathetic manner, only to be compelled to act in a similar manner during times of persecution and oppression? How often have we watched indifferently as those who would tear down the mantle of Torah did so- without our protest? Was this not followed shortly by decrees against our People where once again we were forced to acquiesce to the edicts of our enemies?

Sforno cites Chazal's maxim about nullifying Torah amid wealth. Rav Liebman remembers how the Jews of Morocco and Algiers were lax in their Torah study, focusing primarily on secular studies, especially mastering the French language. To convince parents to send their sons to a yeshivah was an onerous task. Now, the tables have been turned. French is of no value, unless it is being used to ask directions out of the country. The broken Jews who eschewed Torah study because it was not in vogue now do not have the time or "head" to study it, as they are so encumbered with attempting to leave the country for which they gave up so much. When will we learn that when we refuse to obey Hashem of our own free will, we ultimately will be compelled to do so under circumstances which are more unpleasant?

This month shall be for you the beginning of months. (12:2)

The first mitzvah Klal Yisrael received as a nation was the mitzvah of Kiddush haChodesh, sanctifying the new moon. Indeed, the moon is the constellation by which we reckon our Yamim Tovim, festivals; and Klal Yisrael is compared to the moon. Simply, this is due to the waxing and waning of the moon every month. As the moon goes through a process of monthly renewal, so, too, does Klal Yisrael have the opportunity and ability to rejuvenate themselves spiritually. Even if a person has feelings of rejection, when he senses within himself a sort of spiritual deterioration, he can reinvigorate himself and return to his original spiritual plateau.

Horav Mordechai Ilan, zl, supplements this idea with the consideration that the moon returns to its original state as it appeared during Creation. Similarly, this is Klal Yisrael's attribute. Upon rejuvenating themselves, they revert to the state in which they had been when they became a nation. While renewal is important, and rejuvenation is essential for growth, there has to be a base level position from which one proceeds and to which one returns. The starting point of one's renewal should be the point designated by Hashem, the position/plateau upon which he stood when he began his journey. Klal Yisrael reached their zenith when they accepted the Torah. This is their starting point to which they revert upon their renewal. If a person goes through a period of spiritual decline, he can pick himself up and return. He has to know, however, to where he returns and what position he must seek to rejuvenate himself.

Horav Avraham Pam, zl, cited in *The Pleasant Way*, derives another lesson from the moon. While the Torah refers to the sun and the moon as the meoros ha'gedolim, great luminaries, the moon hardly fits the description. The moon is actually tiny compared to the sun. Ibn Ezra and the Malbim explain that the appellation, meor ha'gadol, does not refer to the size of the luminary, but rather to what it accomplishes, to its function vis-?-vis the world. The sun gives light and heat to the earth - without which the world could not exist. The moon lights up the night, and, as such, it has a major role in illuminating the earth. While many of the stars are even larger than the sun, their power of illumination is relatively insignificant. What is especially significant is the fact that the moon is referred to as a great luminary, even though it does not even generate its own light. It only reflects the light it receives from

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the sun. We derive from here that the source of light is inconsequential; it is the actual manifest of light that counts. The moon illuminates the sky - that is important to us. The fact that this is reflected light has no bearing on the fact that the moon transmits this light to us.

Rav Pam explains that this may serve as an important lesson for bnei Torah, students of Torah, who feel shortchanged and unfulfilled because they are not mechadesh, do not produce novellae or original Torah thoughts. While it is true that in some yeshivah circles this is a barometer of success, it is regrettable that they overlook havanah, comprehension; hasmadah, diligence, and emes, sincerity in learning Torah lishmah, Torah for its own sake. The moon, which does not have any light of its own, is not mechadesh ohr. Yet, since it reflects the light of the sun, it is still considered a meor hagadol, great luminary.

So, too, should a ben Torah feel success when he reflects the Torah of his rebbeim, their middos tovos, character refinement, and chochmas ha'Torah, wisdom inspired by the Torah. The fact that he represents everything that is good in Torah is in itself a mark of success.

When one reflects the light of a mitzvah, if through him the mitzvah has greater proliferation, he is considered a success. In other words, facilitating the fulfillment of a mitzvah is tantamount to performing it. There are people who are blessed with great wealth which they use wisely and share with others. Does that mean that one who is not wealthy is deprived of the mitzvah of tzedakah? No! If one reflects the light of tzedakah by motivating others to give, by encouraging others to fulfill this mitzvah, he is also performing the mitzvah. Tzedakah means charity - reaching out to others and giving assistance. Some fulfill this mitzvah with money; others with time; yet others lend their expertise to help others. It is all the same mitzvah. While it may not earn him a plaque in this world, the recognition he will receive in the Eternal World is what really matters.

Remember this day on which you departed from Egypt...

Today you are leaving in the month of springtime. (13:3,4)

We are enjoined to remember the liberation from Egypt and to relate it constantly. Interestingly, the Torah seems to emphasize the fact that we were redeemed b'chodesh ho'aviv, in the spring. This is part and parcel of the geulah, liberation. It must be stressed again and again that we left during the spring. Rashi explains that we were redeemed in the spring, at a time when it is not cold or hot, or rainy. Indeed, at a time when the climate is perfect.

At first glance, the answer makes sense. When we think about it, however, the fact that we left Egypt in the spring is secondary to the actual liberation and its ensuing miracles. Furthermore, Chazal note, "See the chesed, kindness, that He granted you," in regard to the "perfect" time for taking us from Egypt. This kindness is certainly laudatory, but is it to be mentioned in the same breath with the miracles surrounding the Exodus? Apparently, there is a significant lesson to be derived from this unique "chesed."

Horav Chaim Goldvicht, zl, distinguishes between the concepts of gemilas chesed, acts of loving-kindness, and rachamanus, acts of compassion. In the Talmud Yevamos, 79A, Chazal state that there are three distinguishing characteristics by which we can identify a Jew: rachamanim, compassion; baishanim, a sense of shame, embarrassment, they can easily blush; gomlei chasadim, perform acts of loving-kindness.

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To the average person, rachamanim and gomlei chasadim are one and the same. The one who acts kindly is compassionate. He who has compassion acts lovingly towards his fellow man. Why are these two similar features considered separately? We derive from here that rachmanus and chesed are the same characteristic. The Zohar HaKadosh defines a chasid as one who is mischaseid im Kono, acts with kindness towards his Creator. Certainly the concept of rachamim, compassion, does not apply in our relationship vis-?-vis Hashem. Yet, a concept of chesed does apply.

The pasuk in Mishlei 11:17 reads, Gomel nafsho ish chesed. Chazal explain that the great Tanna, Hillel, viewed his body as a holy receptacle, catering to the needs of the neshamah, soul. We must, therefore, say that rachamim is an act of reciprocity whereby one manifests compassion for another human being. Chesed, on the other hand, is a sensitivity one demonstrates without provocation from another source. If one notices someone who is suffering, he has rachmanus on him and responds accordingly. When the reason for the rachmanus disappears, so does the compassion. Furthermore, even the most sensitive person, if confronted with pain and suffering on a constant basis, will, eventually lose some of his compassion. His sensitivity becomes numbed by too much exposure to pain.

The gomel chesed is different. He acts out of the kindness of his heart. Chesed is a characteristic within a person who seeks to perform kindness, to help others. He does not need external motivation to act. The baal chesed acts out of his own sense of duty. He wants to help others, even if they do not seek help or realize that they need his assistance. This may be noted from Avraham Avinu who helped the three Arabs/angels who he felt were in need of spiritual assistance, even though they did not apparently think so. Avraham was troubled when he lacked the opportunity or ability to be gomel chesed with others.

In explaining the pasuk in Mishlei, Chazal teach us that one can perform chesed even with oneself! The soul cannot be elevated as long as the body demands its physical gratification. Thus, when one addresses the needs of his body, he is essentially performing a kindness to his neshamah. Shlomo Hamelech tells us that one can be a gomel nefesh, act with chesed towards his soul by giving assistance to his body. Now that we see a clear line of demarcation between chesed and rachamim, we can begin to understand the relationship of chesed to yetzias Mitzrayim, the exodus from Egypt. Rav Goldvicht explains that if one were to examine the earlier pesukim in which Hashem states that He saw the Jews' affliction, listened to their cries and understood their pain, the implication clearly is that the Exodus had its genesis in Hashem's rachamim. This compassion evoked Hashem's response - yetzias Mitzrayim. An exodus based upon the middah, attribute, of rachamim is metzutzam, somewhat suppressed and constrained.

Hashem went a step further. He redeemed Klal Yisrael with the middah of chesed. While it is true that the original stimulation was Klal Yisrael's pain and suffering, it evoked an overwhelming response of chesed. True, a nation that has heretofore been subjected to harsh, spirit-breaking labor is only too happy to be redeemed. The fact that this redemption took place during a propitious time just adds to the event. The most significant aspect, however -- the aspect that concerns them most -- is the actual redemption. Everything else is "frosting on the cake."

We now have a more profound understanding of this aspect of the redemption. It is an indication of the sheleimus hageulah, completeness, perfection of the redemption. Hashem redeemed them with chesed, demonstrating His boundless love for Klal Yisrael. Yetzias Mitzrayim was an outpouring of unmitigated kindness to Hashem's Chosen People. His love for Klal Yisrael was manifest in the fact that He saw to it that every aspect of the geulah would be favorable.

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This should serve as a standard in our interpersonal relationships with people. Our friend should not have to fall into poverty, illness, or serious trouble before we reach out to help him. That is compassion; we respond when there is a need. Rather, we should act with chesed, in which we look for opportunities to reach out. Indeed, if that were to be the case, we might very well prevent the need for rachmanus.

Hashem said to Moshe, "Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn. (10:1)

The concept of hachbodas ha'lev, hardening of the heart, and basically removing one's bechirah chafshis, free will, is a difficult idea to accept. G-d has endowed man with the ability to choose between right and wrong, good and evil. This concept plays a critical role in providing the correct balance for reward and punishment. Why did Hashem take this opportunity from Pharaoh? In his Sefer Simchas HaTorah, Horav Simchah HaKohen Shepps, zl, applies the following analogy to explain and validate hardening Pharaoh's heart. A Jew once had a litigation with a gentile, which necessitated going to a secular court for adjudication. The Jew, realizing what he was up against, went to the gentile judge on the day of the trial and offered him a hefty bribe. The judge, understandably, was taken aback. "Is it not written in your Bible that one should not accept a bribe, because it blinds the eyes of even the most astute individual?" the judge asked indignantly. "How can you justify giving me a bribe?"

The Jew quickly responded, "Your honor, what I did was really not inappropriate. After all, you and my litigant are both non-Jews. It makes sense, therefore, that you are predisposed to hear his side of the case with greater sensitivity than you would my claim. Thus, by giving you a bribe, I am only balancing the scales of justice by attempting to override your predisposition."

The same idea applies to Pharaoh's hachbodas ha'lev. The plagues wreaked havoc on Egypt. They left an indelible impact on the Egyptian psyche. Hence, Pharaoh and his people were partial to the Jewish cause. He was inclined to let the Jews leave the country, but for the wrong reason. He had no remorse; he did not regret the evil decrees that he had directed against the Jewish People. His contrition was insincere. Hashem, therefore, hardened his heart, in order to counteract the effect of the plagues.

There was a darkness of gloom throughout the land of Egypt for a three-day period. No man could see his brother, nor could anyone rise from his place. (10:22,23)

Rashi explains the rationale behind the intense darkness that lasted three days. It seems that among the Jews of that generation were wicked individuals who had no desire to depart the Egyptian exile. They perished during the three days of gloom, in order that the Egyptians should not be witness to their downfall and say, "They, too, are being smitten as we are." The question that glares at us is basic: Is the fact that they did not want to leave Egypt sufficient reason to die? We see later, concerning the eved Ivri, Hebrew slave, who wants to extend his servitude beyond the required six years, that he goes to Bais Din, Jewish court, and has his ear drilled. That is it! One does not incur capitol punishment because he is foolish enough to remain a slave. What is Rashi teaching us?

Horav Shmuel David Walkin, zl, explains this pragmatically. How could there have been Jews who refused to leave Egypt? Who, in their right mind, would want to remain in Egypt only to be subjected to back-breaking labor and brutal suffering? Perhaps there were those Jews who were

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exempted from the slavery. They were not subject to the suffering that their brethren sustained. How could they remain indifferent to the suffering of their brothers? How could they go about Egypt and ignore the pain of their brethren? Apparently, they neither saw nor were sensitive to the pain of their fellow Jews. Such a person who does not empathize with the plight of his brethren does not deserve to be liberated with them.

This is the underlying meaning of the words, "No man could see his brother, nor could anyone rise from his place." Hashem punishes middah k'neged middah, measure for measure. If one wonders why they were punished in such a manner that they could not see one another, it is because they did not get up to help when they saw a Jew suffering.

In an alternative explanation, the wicked Jews were punished because they followed the pattern of centuries. Those who did not want to leave were not satisfied by simply staying back themselves; they had to make sure that others stayed with them. This attitude has plagued us for millennia. Jews that do not want to join in the quest for spiritual development want to arrange that those who are observant are similarly hampered. The adage of "live and let live" does not apply to them. That is why they were left with the Egyptians. Their attitude toward their brethren was inherently Egyptian in nature.

Against all Bnei Yisrael, no dog shall whet his tongue. (11:7)

Rashi cites the Mechilta that teaches us that the dogs became the beneficiaries of treifah meat, in the event an animal is deemed not kosher as the result of a wound. This is all due to their keeping still during the deaths of the Egyptian first-born. Another animal, the donkey, also received a reward for its role in the Egyptian exodus. The Torah instructs us (Shemos 13:13), "Every first-born donkey you shall redeem with a lamb." Rashi tells us that this law applies only to the first-born donkey, not to any other non-kosher animal. This is because the donkey carried the Egyptian spoils that the Jews took with them out of Egypt.

The question is evident. Two unclean animals both played a role in the Exodus. Both were rewarded; one with being fed unkosher, defiled meat; the other with the exalted status of kedushah, sanctity, which applies to bechorah, the first-born. Why did the donkey achieve kedushas bechor, while the dog became the repository for defiled meat?

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, gives a practical explanation that conveys to us a compelling lesson. The donkeys acted in a proactive manner. Their good deeds consisted of exertion in carrying the heavy burdens that were placed upon them. They provided necessary assistance to the Jews. For helping another fellow to carry his burden, one earns the merit of being rewarded with added sanctity. The dog also assisted, but, by contrast, it was in a passive manner. For refraining from barking it deserved a reward, but since no exertion was expended on its part, the reward is not very impressive. Perhaps we can say it is fit for a dog.

On the other hand, I question the above, since the dog went against its nature and refrained from barking, but the donkey did what it usually does: it carried a load. One would think that the dog should receive a greater reward than the donkey. Apparently, active performance of a chesed is of greater significance than unnatural, passive accomplishment.

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You shall guard the matzos, for on this very day I will have taken your legions out of the land of Egypt. (12:17)

Rashi cites the famous dictum of Rabbi Yoshiah, "Do not read the word only as 'matzos,' but rather, also, as 'mitzvos,' commandments. In this sense the pasuk is teaching us that just as people do not permit the matzos to become leavened, so should they not allow the mitzvos to become leavened, by leaving opportunities for their fulfillment unattended. Rather, "if the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah comes to your hand, do it immediately." A noteworthy statement, but how does it fit into the textual flow of the pasuk? What does meticulous observance of mitzvos have to do with the fact that on that very day the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt?

The Kesav Sofer explains that it is a well-known axiom that, prior to the geulah, Exodus, Klal Yisrael were at a precarious point. Had they remained any longer in Egypt, they would have descended to the nadir of depravity and reached the fiftieth level of spiritual impurity. Had this occurred, they could not have arisen from defeat and would have been relegated to a posterity of servitude in Egypt. The Exodus teaches us the overwhelming significance of seizing the moment. That fleeting moment made the difference in their redemption. Had they waited another minute we would still be there, enslaved to the Egyptian culture and mindset. Likewise, when the opportunity for performing a mitzvah materializes, one should not waste it and immediately react to perform the mitzvah.

Otzros HaTorah derives this same lesson from the blessings that Yitzchak Avinu gave to Yaakov Avinu. The Torah relates (Bereishis 27:30), "And it was, when Yitzchak had finished blessing Yaakov, and Yaakov had scarcely left from the presence of Yitzchak his father, that Eisav his brother came back from the hunt." Rashi adds, "This one left, and the other one arrived." The Midrash delves into how they missed each other, but after all is said and done, we are talking about mere moments, when Yaakov preceded Eisav in receiving the blessings, that made the difference in the lot of his descendants for all time. Another minute - had Eisav returned a moment earlier or had Yaakov tarried a moment longer - our history would have been forever altered!

When the wellsprings of spiritual bounty open in Heaven, we have to be prepared and waiting to receive our share - or lose it forever. The value of a moment is incredible. For some, it is the opportunity for tremendous spiritual or material benefit, while for others, it could mean the difference between success and failure. The Gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, knew how to value every minute of their lives. The following short vignettes, cited by Otzros HaTorah, lend us insight into their lives.

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, the legendary Rosh Hayeshivah of Baranowitz and one of the preeminent Torah leaders of pre World War II Europe, was known for his piety and intensity in Torah study. His diligence was so outstanding that, as a student in the Telshe Yeshivah in Lithuania, he would study for eighteen hours a day. Time was of the essence and it could not be wasted. As Rosh Hayeshivah, he refused to take a salary from the yeshivah, leaving him quite poor - but satisfied. It is related that his shoes were so worn-out that the students took up a collection in the yeshivah to purchase a new pair of shoes for their venerable rebbe. He accepted the gift, but after a while lamented

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the new shoes. It seems that it took him an extra two minutes every day to lace up his new shoes, while his old, torn shoes no longer had laces. The amount of time he wasted from Torah study disturbed him greatly!

On the last Yom Kippur of his life, the great tzaddik Horav Yehudah Leib Chasman, zl, Mashgiach of Yeshivas Chevron, davened Neilah at his home, surrounded by his closest students. In his weakened state after fasting the entire day, the Mashgiach sat down and waited for the zman, time, to begin Maariv. He looked at his students and said, "In the Haftarah of Minchah, we read that Yonah HaNavi tells the captain and crew of the boat that was rocking precariously in the turbulent sea, 'Lift me up and throw me into the water!' Why did he say 'Lift me up'? He should have simply said, 'Throw me into the water.' He said this because he wanted to gain another moment of life! We must do the same. We have a few minutes left. Let us not waste these precious moments."

At times, one can delay a positive undertaking, and it can make the difference between success and failure. Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, related the following story: A member of a distinguished Yerushalmi family once had occasion to spend Shabbos in a hotel. Shortly after the Shabbos meal, he noticed an Israeli soldier writing. When the soldier became aware of the man staring at him, he said, "You are surprised that I am writing on Shabbos? Well, let me tell you what led to this."

The soldier began, "I would like you to know that I believe in Hashem just as you do. Let me explain to you why I do not observe Shabbos. My parents were not observant. As a result, I grew up with no knowledge of Judaism. My sole exposure to Judaism was being called 'dirty Jew' by the Polish peasants. I was drafted into the army at the beginning of World War I and sent to the front. During an exceptionally heavy military attack, I noticed a group of Jewish soldiers taking out a Sefer Tehillim from their pockets and beginning to pray fervently to Hashem. I was heartbroken to see that I, also a Jew, had nothing. I was not accepted by the gentiles, but neither did I know how to act as a Jew.

"At that moment, I looked up at Heaven and said to Hashem, 'You know that I have no way of knowing of Your existence. I entreat You that You demonstrate Your existence to me by having a piece of shrapnel puncture my finger, so that I will no longer be able to shoot.' The moment I finished speaking, a piece of shrapnel hit my finger and wounded me to the point that till this very day I cannot bend that finger. I was released from the army and decided that I would enter the bais hamedrash on that very day and begin to study about my religion.

"Regrettably, I pushed off my visit to the bais hamedrash until after the war. Then, I was already enrolled in school with three months left to graduation. One thing led to another, and by the time I found my way to the bais hamedrash, my heart that had originally been so turned on, had turned into stone. Nothing could penetrate it. The motivation and enthusiasm that had reigned months earlier had cooled. I had waited too long. The mind understood, but the emotion was no longer there."

If the opportunity for mitzvah performance appears, do not waste it. Act immediately. A split second decision to act correctly, to follow up on a positive experience, can spell the difference between success or failure. In an incredible story cited by Rabbi Yechiel Spero in his book, "Touched by a Story," we see how the saintly Chafetz Chaim exemplified this idea. The cold, harsh winters in Radin, Poland, home of the Chafetz Chaim, were a challenge for the poor Jews due to inadequate heating. As bad as it was at home, it was much worse outdoors. Consequently, they would remain at home, unless they had to take an occasional trip to the market.

Warm clothes were a scarce commodity. Gloves, especially were a sought after item. Once a wealthy man came to visit the Chafetz Chaim and, after spending some time with the sage, left him a precious gift: an expensive pair of fur-lined gloves. The Chafetz Chaim was not one to accept gifts, nor

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was he inclined to wear such fancy gloves. After seeing how much it meant to the man, the Chafetz Chaim acquiesced and accepted the gift.

A few days later, the Chafetz Chaim, accompanied by a few of his closest students, traveled by train to a neighboring town to attend an important meeting. The compartment on the train in which they sat was small and compact. The trip was short, so the Chafetz Chaim sat in his coat with his new gloves stored in his pockets. After a short while, it became stuffy in the compartment, so one of the students opened the window to let in some fresh air. The Chafetz Chaim moved to another seat, and, in the process, his coat brushed against the open window, causing one of his gloves to fall out of his pocket and out the window. A student noticed this and, when he told his rebbe, the Chafetz Chaim, to the amazement of his students, took the second glove and immediately threw it out of the window as well.

Noticing the puzzled stare of his students, he explained, "Someone is going to be walking along the tracks one day and will find the beautiful glove, but since it is a single glove, it will have very little use for him. I asked myself, what benefit would I derive from a single glove. I might as well provide another person with a pair of gloves, so at least he will benefit from them.

The Chafetz Chaim was the paradigm of the ish hachessed, man of loving kindness. His thoughts before he acted were even more impressive. He saw an opportunity to perform chesed, and he acted immediately. Wasted opportunities are lost opportunities.

Please speak in the ears of the people: let each man request of his fellow and each woman of her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels... the people picked up its dough before it became leavened... and Bnei Yisrael carried out the word of Moshe... Hashem gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. (11:2) (12:34,35)

Rashi tells us that Hashem asked Moshe Rabbeinu to make a special effort to convince the Jews to request valuables from their Egyptian neighbors, so that the soul of Avraham Avinu would not have a grievance against Hashem for not providing them with wealth as great as He had promised him. We must endeavor to understand this statement. If Hashem made a promise to Avraham that, after Klal Yisrael's many years of captivity, they would not leave empty-handed, then Hashem will keep His word simply because He gave it - not because of what Avraham might say. Rashi seems to imply that the only motivating factor for requesting that the Jews ask for gold and silver was to allay Avraham's potential complaint.

In response to this question, Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita, cites the pesukim later on in the parsha that detail Klal Yisrael's exodus with their matzah on their shoulders, mentioning, as well, the fact that the Egyptians gladly parted with their gold and silver. The two pesukim seem to create a contradiction in the text. The pasuk begins by referring to the Jews who carried the unleavened dough as the "Am," people. The next pasuk begins by calling them Bnei Yisrael and closes by once again referring to them as "Am." The Torah commentators distinguish between Am, people, denoting the simple, common folk, and Bnei Yisrael, referring to the nobility, those who served Hashem on a deeper, more intellectually passionate level. Why does the Torah change its description of the Jews? Rav Schorr cites the Haflaah at the end of Meseches Kesubos, who renders a fascinating explanation for Hashem's use of the word, na, please, in requesting that the Jews appeal to the Egyptians for their gold and silver. Regarding Avraham's wealth, the Torah writes that Avraham was kaved me'od, very heavy, with cattle, silver and gold. The word kaved, heavy, implies that all this material wealth comprised a heavy load for Avraham. It is as if the Torah was telling us that Avraham was uncomfortable with the

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added wealth. Is this true? The Haflaah explains that, indeed, Avraham Avinu, as Patriarch, was transmitting an important lesson to his future descendents. They were to view material wealth as an added weight. Not only should they learn to be satisfied with what they have, but they should also eschew wealth. This would serve as a portent to his descendents, so that when they leave Egypt laden with gold and silver, they would view this material abundance as kaved, heavy, an added weight that they were obligated to take along with them. This would ensure that the wealth would be used properly, channeled to the appropriate outlets.

Hashem asked Moshe to "please" ask the emerging Jewish nation to request the Egyptian's valuables. He wanted the Jews to view this as a special favor, a unique request. If they would approach the gathering of Egyptian wealth in this manner, Avraham Avinu's soul would be at rest, because he was concerned about their attitude towards wealth.

Now, there were two types of Jews. The first, the Am, common people, did not want to partake of the Egyptian wealth for fear that they were not up to handling material abundance. They were not yet ready to deal with the opportunities and possible dangers that wealth would present for them. The Chasam Sofer adds that if they had at least one mitzvah that would provide them with a reminder of Hashem's Presence over them, they could risk the wealth. Without any protective mitzvah, however, they feared that the wealth would lead to arrogance and, ultimately, to forgetting about G-d.

Consequently, the Am, common people, decided on their own to take along a remembrance. The Matzah and Marror, symbolizing Hashem's Presence over them, were to serve as a constant testimonial of who they were and their purpose in life. "Bnei Yisrael," on the other hand, did not need this indicator of their relationship with Hashem. They were able to proceed - unhindered by feelings of inadequacy and fear - and request silver and gold from the Egyptians. Bnei Yisrael went on their own. They did not need Hashem's support. They asked the Egyptians outright for their wealth. In contrast, the Am, common people, needed Hashem to help them find favor in the eyes of the Egyptians.

Every Jew should view his G-d-given material abundance as Daber na, "please speak," as if Hashem is asking him to accept it for a purpose. This will engender restraint in regard to one's possessions. He will then remember that he is only a shomer, guardian, for a gift that Hashem has bequeathed to him for a specific purpose: to share it with others.

Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die...

to the firstborn of the maidservant who is behind the millstone. (11:5)

The firstborn children of the lowly Egyptian maidservants also died during the tenth plague, because they, too, enjoyed the suffering of the Jews. They suffered on their own account; yet, they took pleasure in the fact that there were those who suffered worse than they did. How often does it happen that one is involved in a business, and someone comes along and opens a similar business not far from him? He would love to do something to prevent his competitor's success, but he is afraid of getting into trouble with the authorities. Therefore, he waits and stewes, hoping that something will happen that will prevent the other business from succeeding.

One day, a fire breaks out and destroys his competitor's store. He is overjoyed. Of course, he would not dare publicize his joy over his competitor's downfall. Indeed, he might even do everything to help him, so that he appears to be a fine and wonderful human being. Deep down, however, in the inner

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recesses of his heart, he gloats.

Horav Yitzchak Aizik Sher, zl, posits that such a miscreant, who is happy at the expense of his competitor's anguish, is considered more than "a not nice" person; it is considered as if he had burned down the store! The lowly maidservants took pleasure in the Jewish pain. Hashem viewed them as oppressors because of their covert, subtle support for the Egyptian tyranny. Thus, they paid for their behavior in the same manner as the Egyptian taskmasters. Taking enjoyment from another's pain is tantamount to causing it!

*This month shall be for you the beginning of the months,
it shall be for you the first of the months of the year. (12:2)*

Rashi comments that we derive from this pasuk that the month of Nissan, the month during which the Exodus took place, is to be counted as the first month of the year, followed by Iyar as the second month, and so on. This is enigmatic. Why should Nissan take precedence over the other months? True, the Exodus was a seminal event for our People. What about Tishrei, the month in which the world was created, or Sivan, the month in which the Torah was given? Perhaps Tishrei should not be the first month, since the creation of the world is not a uniquely Jewish experience. Why, however, should Nissan precede Sivan? Indeed, are we not taught that the entire continuity of the world was dependent upon our acceptance of the Torah at Har Sinai? This event should certainly grant Sivan pre-eminence over Nissan.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains that we must not view the Giving of the Torah, which occurred in the month of Sivan, as an independent experience. Klal Yisrael could not possibly have reached the level of dedication necessary to be capable of receiving the Torah with a lasting commitment, until they had first undergone great preparation. Their faith and other character traits had to undergo a complete metamorphosis prior to the Revelation at Sinai. In addition to their personal refinement, they needed to divest themselves of the gentile influence which permeated their lifestyle. They were the products of two hundred and ten years of assimilation. This all had to change. It did. During the forty-nine day period between Pesach and Shavuot, between the Exodus and the Revelation, Klal Yisrael elevated themselves as they matured spiritually.

How was this possible? How could a nation that was subject to so much persecution and pain, a nation that had in a sense "bottomed out," that had descended to the nadir of depravity, turn around and accept the Torah. True, it took forty-nine days of intense and incessant preparation to achieve this goal, but what catalyzed this change?

The miracles of the Exodus, with the powerful lessons that they inspired, brought about this overwhelming change in Klal Yisrael's attitude. Thus, the Exodus symbolized more than Klal Yisrael's liberation from bondage. It was the genesis of the acceptance of the Torah. The Torah, therefore, deems it appropriate that the first month of the year be Nissan.

Rav Moshe adds that this idea applies equally to the proper method of raising children. The teaching of proper character traits and emunah, faith in the Almighty, cannot wait until a child is ready, willing and able to understand Torah. A child must be prepared for Torah study. Therefore, it is important that we strive to imbue our children with these all-important ideals from birth, so that when the time comes, they will be prepared for a life of Torah and mitzvos.

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This month shall be for you the beginning of the months. (12:2)

The Jewish year is based on the lunar calendar, while the secular year is based on the solar calendar. A number of reasons are cited by the commentators for this divergence. Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, suggests that by relying on the lunar calendar, Klal Yisrael emphasizes that whatever occurs in the world is not in accordance with the laws of nature, but are rather ordained by the Almighty. The Torah we study and the mitzvos we perform are the determining factors in the mehalech ha'chaim, course of life, that affects us. Just as the moon does not have its own source of illumination, everything is derived directly from the light of the sun, so, too, do we believe that the light that shines on this world has its source in the spiritual dimension. Everything that occurs in this world is a by-product of Torah and mitzvos.

This is contrary to contemporary society's perspective that views world happenings as part of the natural order. We know that this is not true. Indeed, the effect of the ben Torah sitting in his corner studying Torah is compelling and far-reaching.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, substantiates this idea with the miracle that occurred during the makas barad, plague of hail. The Torah tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu left Pharaoh's palace and stretched out his hands Heavenward. As a result, the powerful sounds that accompanied the hail stopped, and the hail no longer hit the ground. The Midrash adds that the hail was suspended in midair. It hung in the balance for a number of years until, when Yehoshua was battling the Emorites, stones descended from Heaven upon them. The remainder will descend during the final war of the nations, Gog and Magog, which will usher in Moshiach Tzidkeinu. Even the powerful sounds were literally put on "hold", to descend during the days of Elisha.

We wonder, asks Rav Shternbuch, why Hashem deemed it necessary to save the hailstones and the sounds in midair? Was there a shortage of stones that Hashem could not create other ones? He cites a commentator, who explains that the stones were created by the tears of Klal Yisrael, the men, women and children who suffered the Egyptian prosecution and cried out to Hashem. He saved these tears and placed them in a receptacle to be used at a later date. No tear will be wasted. There is a time when it will be put to good use.

The sounds of agony that accompanied the cries of pain were also stored away to be used later. Hashem directs His world in a way completely different from our level of understanding. A Jew cries out in pain. That cry and those tears will one day have an effect. On what? We do not know. When? We also do not know. What we do know - and believe - is that they will not be wasted.

About six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from the children. (12:37)

The word k'sheish, about (six hundred thousand), implies that there were not exactly six hundred thousand men. How many were there really? Rabbeinu Bachya says that only one was

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missing. When Klal Yisrael left Egypt, there were six hundred thousand men - minus one. What did Hashem do to ameliorate this problem? He included Himself with them as it says in the pasuk, "and I shall also surely bring you up." (Bereishis 46:4) What merit did they have that Hashem included Himself among their numbers? Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, suggests that it was their overwhelming cheishak, desire, to perform mitzvos. Chazal say HaKadosh Baruch Hu, v'Oraisa, v'Yisrael, chad hu, "Hashem and the Torah and Klal Yisrael are one entity." Understandably, this occurs only when Klal Yisrael exhibits an incredible eagerness to serve Hashem.

Mesiras nefesh, devotion to mitzvos to the point of self-sacrifice, has powerful properties. Indeed, it has the power to eradicate the most compelling decree. This is especially true if the decree is hampering the individual from fulfilling the specific mitzvah for which he is being moser nefesh. The story is told about one of the Gaon m'Vilna's disciples, who, despite suffering from blindness at an early age, continued to dedicate himself to Torah study on an almost super-human basis. The Gaon was determined to find a shidduch, compatible mate, for him. A special young lady in Vilna saw beyond his physical challenge and was prepared to become his wife. Her father was even willing to support the young couple, while the young man devoted his life to Torah study.

The Gaon's joy on the day of the wedding was unprecedented. He felt like the father of the chassan, groom, ushering his son into the milestone event of his life. The chassan was walked down to the chupah and the marriage ceremony was about to begin, when the Gaon turned to the chassan and said, "Chazal teach us that one may not marry a girl until he has seen her." As soon as the Gaon completed his sentence, the chassan opened his eyes and was miraculously once again able to see!

All those assembled took note of the Gaon's incredible powers. Moreover, they understood that one who clings to Torah with mesiras nefesh has the merit that the most serious decree will be abrogated if it stands in the way of his mitzvah performance.

And you shall relate to your son on that day, saying,

"For this sake did G-d act for me when I came forth from Egypt. (13:8)

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, makes a noteworthy observation here regarding the manner in which we, as parents, are to convey the foundations of our belief to our children. First, we note that immediately upon mentioning the Festival of Pesach, the Torah emphasizes the duties of education. Our children are not to be induced to be faithful and observant of the Torah by habit alone, nor should this communication consist merely of preaching to them. They have to be shown the way by our example, and, simultaneously, by conveying to them the meaning of our observances. This inspires their minds and hearts, so that they learn to perform mitzvos with understanding and enthusiasm. Thus, their zeal for Jewish observance appeals to their minds, as well as to their emotions.

Baa'vur zeh, "Because of these practices". For this sake, because of the various observances that you, my child, see me doing (eating matzoh, marror, etc), I was liberated." We explain to our children that when we were taken from slavery to freedom, the one and only thing that we were capable of doing towards achieving this freedom was committing that for all that time we would observe these commands. The only reason that we were liberated was that we accepted upon ourselves to observe Hashem's mitzvos - no other reason! From this statement, one can begin to measure the inestimable value of these practices. Our entire existence, based on Hashem and dependent on Him, rests on this commitment. From day one, a child must be taught, given to understand, and shown by example that

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what we are is because of what we do. A heartfelt commitment remains in the heart. One must demonstrate his conviction with the actions that we are prescribed by the Almighty.

*Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow...
silver vessels and gold vessels. (11:2)*

Chazal explain Hashem's "request" of Moshe Rabbeinu to make a special effort to prevail upon Klal Yisrael to "borrow" valuables from their Egyptian neighbors. If they would not do so, then the soul of Avraham Avinu would have a "grievance" against Hashem. He would say that with regard to the prophecy that his descendants would be oppressed for many years, Hashem carried it out in full measure. The other part of the prophecy, however, in which Klal Yisrael would leave their captivity with great wealth, Hashem did not fulfill. We wonder why the fear of critique is only from Avraham. What about the Jews themselves? After all these terrible years of suffering, did they not have a valid complaint? True, the promise was made to Avraham. But this was a promise that was probably transmitted throughout the generations: you will leave this misery with joy and complete wealth. The Jews would certainly be justified in having a problem with the prophecy not being carried out.

In his Divrei Yisrael, the Modzitzer Rebbe, zl, explains that every Jew individually is supposed to accept his lot in life - lovingly and with joy. No one ever promised us that it would always be "good." Thus, the Jew suffers, falls down, gets up, brushes himself off - and goes on. Kol man d'avid Rachamana l'tav avid. "Whatever Hashem does is for the good" is the catchphrase by which we live. If the Jews were to suffer in Egypt and circumstances demanded that they leave there penniless, they would accept their fate. That is the Jewish way. Avraham Avinu, however, is different. The righteous leader may not remain silent when Klal Yisrael suffers. As individuals, we do not complain or make demands for ourselves, but we cannot stand idly by while others suffer.

In the Talmud Berachos 54a, Chazal comment that one is obligated to bless Hashem for bad (misfortune) in the same manner that he blesses Him for good. This certainly does not mean that the blessings are the same. After all, for a misfortune one blesses, Dayan HaEmes, the "true Judge," indicating our acceptance and acquiescence to Hashem's decree. In the event of a joyful occasion, one blesses HaTov u'Meitiv, "Who is good and does good." What Chazal are telling us is that the blessing over bad should be recited with a similar level of joyful acceptance as if he were reciting the blessing over good. Horav Nachman zl, m'Breslov added that this idea applies only to one's own individual troubles, but, concerning another Jew's pain, he must cry out with pain and sensitivity. We must feel our brother's pain. We do not distinguish between good and bad when it concerns us personally. In contrast, when it involves our brother, we feel the hurt and cry out in their pain. Empathizing with our fellow's pain is an inherent Jewish character trait.

The great Admorim, chassidic leaders, were known for this empathy. Horav Moshe Mordechai, zl, m'Lelov once accepted a kvitel, a slip of paper containing requests submitted to a Rebbe as a petition, from a troubled chasid who cried his heart out over his many troubles. The Rebbe was visibly moved. Afterwards, he went into his dining room and noticed how members of his family were playing a game. He looked at them incredulously and asked, "How could you sit there, going on with business as usual, happy and carefree, knowing that a fellow Jew is in dire need? How can you be happy when you know that another Jew is in pain?"

I must add that we are not all capable of this lofty spiritual plateau. This was a spiritual giant whose essence encompassed the emotions of every Jew. He, and others like him, did not live for

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themselves. They lived for the klal, community at large. Each Jew's welfare was their concern - even at the expense of their own families. We should learn a lesson regarding our own behavior. Sensitivity towards another Jew is not merely another wonderful character trait, it is an obligation!

Horav Yitzchak, zl, m'Vorki cites an incident in the Talmud Megillah 28a, in which Rabbi Zeira's students asked him, "In what merit did you deserve longevity?" After mentioning a number of noble deeds he said, "I was never happy when my friend suffered a misfortune." The Rebbe asked, "Is this a reason to be granted longevity? What novelty is Rabbi Zeira teaching with this statement? How can anybody celebrate his friend's misfortune?" The Rebbe explained that Rabbi Zeira never celebrated his own personal joyous occasions at a time when he knew that another Jew was suffering. Certainly, he celebrated, but when he knew that another Jew was in pain, he was also in pain and could, therefore, not celebrate with the same joy.

Rav Moshe Mordechai Lelover interpreted this idea into the Shabbos zemiros (Baruch Hashem yom yom), Shivtei Hashem eidus l'Yisrael, b'tzarasam lo tzar. "That the tribes are G-d's He bore witness to Yisrael. Amid their distress is His distress." Shivtei Hashem eidus: What bears witness? What is the litmus test that one is a member of Klal Yisrael? B'tarasam lo tzar: if he is pained by the pain sustained by members of Klal Yisrael. A Jew who feels another Jew's pain - that is the defining factor of who is a Jew.

I think there is another factor that should be addressed, and, quite possibly, this may be another reason for empathizing with another Jew's plight: We should be cognizant of the fact that "what comes around goes around," and, therefore, we never know when we will be in need. Let me share with the reader the following analogy:

A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law and four year old grandson. The elderly man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered. Regrettably, this is not uncommon as people age. It was a loving family, and they made every effort to include grandpa in all of their family functions. First and foremost was dinner when they would all sit down together at the table.

Unfortunately, grandpa's shaky hands and failing eyesight made eating quite difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he would grasp a glass, the milk, or whatever liquid was therein, spilled onto the tablecloth. The son and daughter-in-law slowly became irritated with the mess. "We must do something about Father," the son said. We have been patient long enough. I have had enough of his spilled milk, noisy eating, and food on the floor." So grandpa was given his own small table in the corner of the room where he could eat and make noise, drop food on the floor and spill milk on the table. There he sat by himself, while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner.

Since grandpa had already broken a number of dishes, his food was served in a wooden bowl. Every once in a while when the family glanced in grandpa's direction, they would notice a tear in his eye as he sat alone. Nonetheless, the only words the self-righteous couple had for him were sharp admonitions whenever he dropped a utensil or spilled some food. During this whole scenario, the four-year-old just sat there absorbing everything in silence.

One evening, before dinner, the father noticed his young son playing on the floor with some scraps of wood. Curiously, he asked his young son sweetly, "What are you making?"

The child looked up at his father, and, in all innocence, said, "Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and Mama to eat your food in when I grow up." The young lad just smiled and returned to his masterpiece. The words struck a chord. In fact, it struck so hard that the parents stood there speechless.

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Suddenly, tears formed in their eyes, and they began to cry. They said nothing, because nothing needed to be said. They knew what had to be done.

That evening the son gently took his father's hand in his and led him back to his place at the family table. For the remainder of his days, grandpa ate his meals at the table with the family. Yes, he continued to drop his fork and spill his food. He even continued to make noise when he ate, but for some reason, neither the father nor the mother had any complaint. "What comes around goes around." At times, empathy is a subtle reminder that if not for the grace of G-d, we would be in a similarly unfortunate situation. Moreover, as evidenced in the above story, if we live long enough, the possibility of it occurring "at home" becomes exceedingly less remote.

*Please speak in the ears of the People: Let each man request
of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels. (11:2)*

Klal Yisrael are commanded to go to their Egyptian neighbors and ask them for their silver and gold vessels. This is to fulfill a promise Hashem made many years earlier to Avraham Avinu that his descendants would leave Egypt amid great wealth. The Torah's terminology is surprising. The people were instructed to "borrow" these vessels. Surely, the Jews had no intention of returning these vessels. After all, they were taking a one-way trip from Egypt. Why would they "borrow" the vessels? The Gerrer Rebbe, zl, derives a powerful lesson from here. They were not borrowing from the Egyptians; they were borrowing from Hashem. As far as the Jews were concerned, neither they nor the money was returning. They were owed this wealth, and they were taking what was coming to them. This was the first time that the Jewish people were confronted with the challenge of affluence. Hashem was intimating to them that what they were taking was not theirs. Nothing was theirs. It all belongs to Hashem, and it is on loan to us. Hashem wanted them to know how to view their newly found wealth. It belonged to Hashem. He allowed them to make use of it, but they should never forget its true owner.

This is a compelling statement, especially in light of the unprecedented wealth that exists in parts of the Jewish community in contrast with the tremendous needs that beg to be filled. How we should spend our money depends on how we view its possession. Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, cites an intriguing Talmud Yerushalmi in Meseches Shekalim that should evoke some serious thought concerning how we spend our money. One day, Rav Chama and Rav walked by an impressive looking synagogue in the city of Lod. Rav Chama commented, "How much wealth did our ancestors invest here?" Rav countered, "How many lives were sunk into the ground here?" Were there no talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars, whom they could have supported with all the money they wasted on such a magnificent building?"

These two Amoraim had divergent opinions concerning the manner in which those who preceded them used their material wealth. Rav Chama took note of their material sacrifice. He understood that these people were willing to part with their hard-earned money, so that they could build a beautiful edifice to honor Hashem. Rav, on the other hand, certainly did not ignore their sacrifice. He felt that even when funds are used for a noble cause, such as beautifying a shul, his perception is of a misappropriation of Hashem's gift. He went as far as to compare it to murder, since these funds could have been used to sustain a worthy Jew.

In other words, Rav posits that there are priorities in spending. While erecting magnificent buildings are a glory to Hashem's Name and bring honor and reverence to the cause which they

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represent, this does not take precedence over the basics, such as what occurs in the building: Torah study, Jewish education, supporting those who sacrifice themselves daily to disseminate Torah, and the list goes on.

The custom of the pious men of France, as described by Rabbeinu Bachya in Parashas Tetzave, was to have the coffin in which they were buried made from their dining room tables. They indicated thereby that nothing remains with a person when he leaves this world other than the mitzvos he has performed - especially those which he has shared with others. The dining room table was a primary focus of chesed, kindness to others. It was there where the guests that he invited to his home would find sustenance. It was there that the poor were fed. It was there where those who had no family or friends found solace and friendship.

I think that there is another noteworthy lesson to be derived from this custom. People shy away from thinking about the inevitable. Death is morbid, and an inescapable experience that we want to ignore. Chazal teach us otherwise. "Repent one day before you die," they say. "Does one know when he will die? No. Therefore, repent daily, so that all of your days will be filled with teshuvah, repentance." The spectre of ineluctable death must maintain a prime position in our focus on life. When the pious men of France sat down to eat at their table, they did not ignore the significance of this table and its function as a medium for chesed. When they sat at their table - they were eating off of their coffin! They recognized their obligations to others. They were acutely aware that the table upon which they ate would "accompany" them on their final journey. They taught us that a constant awareness of the inevitable lends greater meaning to life.

And you shall tell your son on that day saying,

"It is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Egypt." (13:8)

The Talmud in Pesachim 116b comments, "In every generation one is obligated to regard himself as if he personally had come out from Egypt." This pasuk is cited to support this statement. Chazal continue, "Therefore, it is our duty to thank, praise, pay tribute, glorify, exalt, honor, bless and acclaim to One Who performed all these miracles." In explaining Chazal's statement, the Brisker Rav, zl, cites the opinion of the Geonim, that there are actually two forms of Hallel, Praise, that are recited. There is a Hallel of Kriah, which we recite. This is done during the eighteen days of the year when Hallel is said during the morning prayers. There is another form of Hallel. This is a Hallel of Shirah, song, which we recite upon being saved from a tzarah, trouble, such as the Egyptian bondage.

Among the differences between these two forms of Hallel there stands out the fact that a Hallel of Shirah is said only upon one's personal rescue from a life-threatening situation. One however does not recite this form of Hallel, for his friend's rescue from a tzarah. That responsibility belongs to his friend.

The Hallel that we recite on Pesach night at the Seder, the Hallel in the Haggadah, is a Hallel of Shirah. This Hallel denotes our liberation, our rescue from the Egyptian enslavement. Therefore, it is essential that one feels that he was personally spared, that he was there and that he was rescued. Only then may he recite the Hallel of Shirah.

This is what the Baal Haggadah, author of the Haggadah, is telling us. Since one is duty-bound to view himself as having personally been there, he is now obligated to recite the unique Hallel of

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Shirah reserved specifically for those who have been spared from trouble.

It is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Egypt. (13:8)

The Torah instructs the Jewish People to relate to their children that Klal Yisrael was redeemed from Egypt for a specific reason: the commandments of Pesach, which means the Korban Pesach, which was brought as long as there was a Bais Hamikdash and in contemporary times, the mitzvos of Matzoh and Marror. It is only because of our kiyum ha'mitzvos, fulfillment of Hashem's commandments, that we were liberated.

The Meshech Chochmah gives the following analogy to further explain this concept. A man married off his daughter to a fine young man. The father, being a man of means, accepted upon himself to support the young couple. He provided them with a beautiful home and gave them the necessary credit cards, so that they could purchase what they needed. The bride's mother was overjoyed that her daughter had such a wonderful husband who provided for her every need. Her husband said, "True, things are presently wonderful. After all, I have given them a home and credit cards. The true test of our son-in-law's love for our daughter and his ability to provide for her will be when he leaves our home, when he will no longer have our credit cards, when he will have to fend for himself. Then we will know if he is a provider or a slouch who lives off of us.

This is the meaning of the enjoinder to observe the commandments later on, when they are not in the wilderness, being protected by the Pillars of Cloud and Fire, sustained by the Manna, being carried on the wings of eagles, and having plentiful water compliments of Miriam's well. They will have passed the test only when they maintain their commitment once they enter into Eretz Yisrael to plow and plant their own land. If they will then observe the mitzvos, then it will all have been worth it.

This is the underlying meaning of the Baal Haggadah's statement, "Baavur zeh, because of this - I say this only when Matzah and Marror are placed in front of you." When we will be in galus, exile, and the Korban Pesach will be history, and the only reminders of the Pesach observance that are placed before us are the Matzah and Marror - if we still observe it accordingly - then we have demonstrated our worthiness of redemption.

Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants. (10:1)

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart, preventing him from recanting and performing teshuvah, repentance, played a critical role in the punishment of the Ten Plagues that Hashem sent against Egypt. In truth, as Rabbeinu Bachya explains, Pharaoh initially took the first step by himself hardening his heart. It was after Pharaoh took the first steps and hardened his own heart that Hashem continued further to harden his heart, so that He could multiply His miracles and wonders in Egypt. Now that we know how the process began, we should ask ourselves a simple question: What is the meaning of hachbodas lev, "hardening of the heart?" Is it a dulling of the emotions, a lack of sensitivity, an obtuseness toward reality?

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Rabbeinu Bachya gives us the answer to this question. He quotes a pasuk in Mishlei 28:14, "Praised is the man who always fears; and one who hardens his heart falls in evil." To paraphrase Rabbeinu Bachya, one who feels fear in every action that he takes-- who studies his actions, considering their consequences, disadvantages and benefits before he goes forward-- should be lauded.

Such an individual is truly praiseworthy. He exemplifies fear of Heaven. He acts wisely, and he earns a living without infringing on others, making absolutely sure to only take what is coming to him. Such a person eats only healthy foods, so that his body is sustained, and surrounds himself with many mitzvos. He lives a purposeful and focused life. This, explains Rabbeinu Bachya, is the meaning of the first part of the pasuk, "one who always fears." In the second half of the pasuk, Shlomo HaMelech addresses the person who does the opposite: "He who does not contemplate the results of his actions is hardening his heart. This is the result of an evil and cruel heart."

Rabbeinu Bachya is teaching us the meaning of "hardening" one's heart: one who demonstrates a lack of concern and contemplation vis-?-vis the consequences of his actions. This is caused by an evil heart, a heart that is cruel - to itself. There is a powerful lesson to be derived herein. An individual who does not care about consequences is not necessarily a cruel person - even to himself. He might manifest a lack of conscientiousness or laziness - but cruelty? Is that not going a bit too far?

Horav Henoch Leibowitz, Shlita, derives a powerful lesson from Rabbeinu Bachya. We are being taught here that, in its normal state, the human psyche is completely aware and concerned with the ramifications of its actions. Man was created with an alert, perceptive mind, one that naturally feels an inner need to anticipate the after effect of his actions and remain vigilant concerning the future. Only a person who is plagued with an element of cruelty towards himself can repress this innate drive to be concerned about his actions.

The Rosh Yeshiva continues with an observation about life and people. The world is filled with people who seem to go about their business without a care in the world. They are not concerned with the results of their actions, doing what they want whenever they want, regardless of who may be affected thereby. The Mesillas Yesharim compares such a person to a blind man who walks on the banks of a river, heedless of the impending disaster that awaits him with one slip of the foot. There is a difference, however, between the two: the blind man is not blind by choice; it is G-d's decree. The other person is blind by choice. He closes his eyes, refusing to look at what awaits him. His choice is deliberate, uncaring--and cruel.

When we open our eyes and perceive the effects of our actions, we are actually showing compassion for our inner selves. We are not permitting the self-imposed blindness to distort reality and destroy our lives. How many of us are really able to do that? We often live a life without cheshbon, accountability, acting now and paying for it later. We say that we do not care, but is that really true? Moreover, even if we do not care about ourselves, even if we are so cruel to ourselves that we act without considering the ramifications, but what about those around us, such as our parents, spouses and children? What have they done to warrant the effects of the cruelty we inflict upon ourselves?

Hashem has endowed us with an instinctive desire to be concerned, to be sensitive--to ourselves and to others. We need only to defer to instinct and our own actions, so that our lives will play out in a manner that befits our status as the crowning point of Hashem's Creation.

On the tenth of this month they shall take for themselves a lamb or kid for each father's house...It shall be yours for examination until the fourteenth day of this month; the entire congregation of the assembly of Yisrael shall slaughter it. (12:3, 6)

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The Mechilta questions the need for acquiring and designating the lamb four days prior to its shechitah, ritual slaughtering. They explain that the appointed time for Klal Yisrael's redemption from the Egyptian exile had arrived. There was one problem, however: the Jews did not have a sufficient supply of mitzvos in which they were engaged to render them worthy of liberation. The Mechilta cites a pasuk in Yechezkel (16:7), "But you were naked and bare." This is a reference to Klal Yisrael's being "naked" of mitzvos. Thus, Hashem gave them the mitzvos of Bris Milah, circumcision, and Korban Pesach, which would occupy them until the geulah, redemption. In order to receive reward, one must act; he must carry out the mitzvah. This is why Hashem instructed Klal Yisrael to acquire the lamb four days prior to the appointed time for the redemption.

We must endeavor to understand Chazal's statement. It is not as if Klal Yisrael had already accepted the Torah, thereby obliging them in mitzvah observance. They had not. They were a community of Hebrew slaves living in Egypt. True, they were the descendants of Yaakov Avinu and the Twelve Tribes, but, without the Torah, they were not yet Klal Yisrael. How could they be held responsible for not performing mitzvos? This teaches us, says Horav Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, that the Jewish People are different. Even if they do not have mitzvos to perform; even when they are neither obligated to carry out any positive commandments nor held culpable for committing a sin by transgressing a prohibitive command, they are still considered "naked and bare." They are in a state of undress, of shame and humiliation. An adult who is not concerned with his indecent exposure lacks an element of maturity. He is still a child. Mitzvos are the Jew's covering without which he is bare, exposed to the elements and open to humiliation.

Rav Ezrachi explains that geulah, freedom, is not simply the antithesis of exile. Geulah is a state of being. One who does not have the Torah as his guiding principle can be theoretically free, released from bondage, but is nonetheless considered to be a slave to himself. He may have been freed from one master, but he is still obligated to another. Freedom is a state in which one is liberated physically, spiritually and emotionally. He is in control of his destiny. His decisions are made - not compelled.

When the Jewish People were liberated from Egypt, redemption developed progressively. As they moved forward, coming closer to Hashem, establishing a greater distance between themselves and the Egyptian lifestyle and culture, they were achieving redemption. This process evolved until the very last moment when the ultimate liberation was to take place, but Klal Yisrael was not ready. They were missing their covering. They were naked. One cannot leave Egypt in such a dismal state. Their freedom would be short-lived. Hashem granted them two mitzvos, which would provide them with temporary covering until they received the Torah and become truly free men.

A Jew who cannot perform mitzvos should feel inadequate. Something integral is missing from his life. He feels naked. It goes even further than that. A Torah Jew feels that he cannot survive without mitzvos. He feels a gravitational pull toward mitzvos and an overwhelming desire to fulfill them. There is no dearth of stories that emphasize this idea. I take the liberty of relating a famous incident that occurred concerning Horav Gershon Libman, Rosh Hayeshivah of Novordak in France, the man who was most responsible for the rejuvenation of Torah life in France following World War II.

At the time of the episode, Rav Gershon was interred in the notorious labor/death camp Bergen Belsen. Subsisting on almost no food and subjected to harsh, brutal labor, it was difficult to maintain the spiritual stamina for which he was well-known in the Novordoker Yeshivah. Yet, he did. He lived in Bergen Belsen, but his mind and soul were soaring in Novordak. Indeed, every challenge was a nisayon, a test, that brought him closer to Hashem, so that he triumphed over the adversity that had

confronted him.

One day while he was working in the field, he was grabbed by the SS and taken to the commandant's office. They did this whenever they sought to "break" a prisoner's will. Just being removed from the misery of the "outside" world and brought into the office with its fancy trappings could shock an inmate. The stark contrast between what the inmates had to endure and what this office represented was more than simply unnerving. What Rav Gershon was about to confront, however, was something for which he had never been prepared. He entered a room that was outfitted with plush carpeting, beautiful paintings and, in the middle of the room, a richly carved, ornate mahogany table. On the table were exquisite china, elegant silver flatware, and the main course: a large, roasted pig! While all of this repulsed him, the revulsion did not reach its climax until he noticed the tablecloth. There, spread across the table - beneath the repugnant roast pig- was a Tallis!

This Tallis, that was once probably used by a Jew davening to Hashem with sincerity and feeling, was now a tablecloth for a Jew to eat a pig! Thi revulsion was unfathomable; the shock too much to control. Rav Gershon forgot where he was and what the ramifications of his actions would be. In one swift move, he yanked the Tallis off the table. The china, crystal, silver and the pig went flying through the air, landing in a heap upon the commandant's lap. Rav Gershon grabbed the Tallis close to him, kissing it, caressing it and crying. "I am so sorry for the indignity that you had to suffer," he "told" the Tallis. "I am so sorry for your disgrace."

Rav Gershon was prepared. He waited for that bullet that would end his misery, but he would die holding the Tallis in his hands, giving it the respect it deserved. The commandant was furious. He had staged this entire scenario in order to push the Jew over the edge. Let him cringe with revulsion and shame, as his religious relic was defamed in his presence. The Jew, however, did not act according to the script. The Tallis meant more to him than his life. How could this be? For some reason, the Nazi did not kill Rav Gershon, settling instead on beating him mercilessly for his impudence. The blood flowed from his wounds, but Rav Gershon survived. He had preserved the dignity of the Tallis, the honor of Hashem. Mitzvos were his life, without which his life was not worth living.

And against all the gods of Egypt I shall mete out punishment. (12:12)

Of course, Hashem has the power to destroy Egypt's idols. Nothing has the power to stand up against Hashem - certainly not the Egyptian idols of wood and stone. What is the pasuk telling us? Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, interprets the "gods of Egypt" as referring to the various new idealisms that seem to sprout up in each generation. Every era has its plague of false and ill-conceived principles, doctrines that are touted by their innovators as the healing elixir for the world's ills. If we peruse back throughout history, we will note how Hashem in His infinite wisdom disposed of these ersatz misleading, ideals and philosophies. Socialism was going to save the world - until Hitler, the consummate socialist, demonstrated its hypocrisy and calamitous effects. Communism, at first, was heralded as the new messiah, grabbing the populace and transforming them into believers. This lasted until Mr. Communism, Joseph Stalin, proved to the world what kind of false idol communism really was.

People make idols for themselves, convincing themselves that they finally have the panacea to all of their problems. Hashem will show them, as He showed the Egyptians, that there is no room in this world for any false gods - regardless of the name under which it is packaged.

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You shall observe this day for your generations. (12:17)

We have to guard the matzoh dough, making sure that it does not become leaven. Likewise, explains Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl, we are enjoined to guard "the day" distill the experience, preserve the essence, perpetuate the lessons and emotions of the day that we left Egypt. How careful we must be not to allow the awareness of the revelations and miracles that we experienced become part of a "war of liberation," a freedom fight, that we waged against the Egyptians. We must be on guard that "the day" remains etched in our minds as a day of wondrous miracles wrought by Hashem for His People. It was not our triumph; it was not our strength and power; it was not our victory. It was Hashem's. Remember that He took us out. We did not leave by our own volition.

And it was on that day that all the legions of Hashem left the land of Egypt. (12:41)

The Jews had been in Egypt for generations. Finally, they were leaving. Why? What did they do that made them worthy of redemption? It is not as if they were committed to Hashem. In fact, at the Red Sea, it was hard to distinguish them from their pursuers. "They are both idol worshippers," the angels declared. "Why should the Jews live and the Egyptians die? The Midrash in Sefer Vayikra teaches us that Klal Yisrael was redeemed from Egypt because of four things to which they were committed: they did not change their Hebrew names; they continued to speak the Holy Tongue; they did not speak deleteriously against each other; they maintained their moral rectitude. There is no question that these four qualities protect the Jews from assimilating with the gentile world, and it is these characteristics that served as sentinels to safeguard the Jewish People, maintaining their commitment to the Almighty. Their transgressions were external, effects of mingling with-- and being exposed to-- Egyptian culture and society. Intrinsicly, however, they retained their Jewish values and commitment.

Retaining one's Jewish name has great significance, indicating a sense of pride in the individual's heritage. Jewish morals and respecting one another--demonstrated by not speaking slanderously--are certainly measures of one's values. How is an affinity to retaining one's language connected to redemption? Klal Yisrael continuing to speak Hebrew does not seem to warrant such considerable attention.

Horav Ben Tzion Yodler, zl, relates an incident that took place in Eretz Yisrael during the early part of the twentieth century. A group of rabbanim-- among them Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, Horav Avraham Yitzchak Kook, Horav Yonasan Binyamin Horowitz, Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, and Horav Ben Tzion Yodler-- traveled to the Galil to visit the new moshavim that were being established. Their goal was to impress upon the residents the importance of religious observance. The decision to send such a large contingent was based upon the enormity of the challenge. What they saw was disheartening. There was really no intention on the part of the pioneers to observe any aspect of the Torah. They were establishing physical homes for themselves and building the country for the future. Religion was simply not part of their architectural strategy. They had long ago left religion in Europe.

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The rabbanim were well aware of their challenges, and they set about preparing a religious offensive to save these Jews lost by total alienation. Rav Ben Tzion asked for an appointment to meet with the director of the primary organization in charge of developing the land and the settlements. The director agreed to meet under the condition that the conversation would take place in Ivrit, Hebrew. This was at a time when Hebrew was a religion and represented one's level of Jewishness.

Rav Ben Tzion began the meeting by telling one of his famous stories. "It happened in Russia a number of years ago. A young Jewish couple began their life together with the usual poverty, but with great aspirations for the future. Their mama lashon, mother tongue, was Yiddish - for the time being. As the young man succeeded in commerce, developing contacts and affiliations with others who had long ago rejected the mother tongue for the voguish Russian language, it became their new vernacular of communication. It reached a point where they hardly ever uttered a Yiddish word. It was always Russian.

The time came for their first child to be born, and the young man rushed to call the doctor. He came quickly, but did nothing. The young woman was in great pain, but the doctor said it was not yet time for him to get involved. She screamed, and the doctor remained adamant; it was not yet time. "Why are you making my wife go through this agony?" the man asked the doctor. "Do something to ease the pain," he demanded.

"It is not yet time," the doctor replied. "Do not worry. When it will be the 'real thing,' I will do what is necessary." This went on for another hour until the woman screamed in Yiddish, Momma, help mir! "Mother, help me!"

"Now," exclaimed the doctor, "she is ready. Once she began to shriek in her mother tongue, I knew it was sincere. She is crying out from the heart. The time has come."

Rav Ben Tzion concluded, "My dear director. You asked that we converse in Hebrew. I am sorry, but I must speak to you from the inner recesses of my heart. For that I must speak in momma lashon, the language that has been with our people for generations. It is the dialect that conveys my innermost feelings. It is the expression of sincerity. It is the symbol of my integrity and emotion."

Klal Yisrael's momma lashon in Egypt was Lashon HaKodesh. It was their natural language - unembellished, unpretentious, and straightforward. It represented what and who they were. When they spoke from the heart, they spoke as Jews. When they cared, they cared as Jews. They were essentially Jews who--under the duress of persecution and under the influence of an immoral environment--absconded to the prevailing culture. Their choice of momma lashon, however, demonstrated the focus of their true affiliation.

Stretch forth your hand towards the Heavens, and there shall be darkness upon the land of Egypt, and the darkness will be tangible. (10:21)

The ninth plague, darkness, was much more than simply an absence of light: it was thick and palpable; it was tangible. During the first three days of this plague, the Egyptians were still able to move around, but they could not see one another. The impenetrable darkness served as a thick barrier between Egyptian brothers. During the next three days, matters became increasingly worse. Now, they could not move from their places. Whoever was standing could not sit, and whoever was sitting could not stand up. They were frozen in position at the onset of this plague. This was truly a severe punishment, but can we say that it was worse than anything that had preceded it? How are we to

understand the severity of this plague?

Horav Shabsi Yudelevitz, zl, tells the story of a maggid, preacher, who traveled from town to town lecturing on ethical behavior and mitzvah observance. He once came to a small community, far-off the beaten path, and began to exhort the members of the community with a passionate, fiery speech. His words, which emanated from his heart, entered into the hearts of his listeners, especially when he described the punishment associated with Gehinnom, Purgatory, and the reward of Gan Eden, Paradise. Within a few days, a change was noticed in the community, as mitzvah observance increased and ethical behavior came into vogue. Certainly, everyone wanted to obtain his portion in the World to Come. Well, almost everybody. There was one man who approached the maggid and publicly declared, "Rebbe, I want to go to Gehinnom!" "Gehinnom?" asked the maggid. "Are you sane? Why would you want to go to Gehinnom?"

"Rebbe, listen to me. Let me explain the rationale for my statement," the villager replied. "Let us imagine that after I have lived my 'one hundred and twenty' years, I arrive at my rightful place in Gan Eden. What will I do there in the company of all the righteous, the rabbanim and the tzaddikim? My entire life I have lived among the common folk, the simple Jew. I am comfortable with them, because I can converse with them. What am I going to do in the company of the righteous? With whom will I speak? In Gehinnom, I will feel at home!"

The maggid looked at this simple Jew and said, "My friend, you are greatly mistaken. You think that in the World of Truth you will meet up with your friends? No. When the time comes for your soul to return to its source, you will discover that it is not the way you think. Gan Eden is filled with incredible light. Joy abounds everywhere. Tzaddikim are seated together, all basking in the shine of the Shechinah. They have the opportunity to meet those who have lived a life of righteousness, piety and ethics.

"Conversely, in Gehinnom, darkness prevails. One person neither sees another nor even lifts a hand to him. In Gehinnom, a person is all alone in the darkness. It is solitary confinement at its nadir."

We now return to our original question: What was so severe about the plague of darkness? Unquestionably, the fact that all of Egypt was suffering together made a difference and helped to ease the pain and misery that resulted from each plague. True, it was debilitating, but the individual was not suffering alone. There were others. We are all in this together. This continued for the first eight plagues. Each Egyptian suffered, but he suffered less because he knew that his fellow Egyptian was also suffering. When makas choshech appeared, however, things were no longer the same. Now, each individual was alone. No Egyptian could see, or speak to, or touch his friend. He could not move. He was alone. There was nowhere to go - and no one from whom - to seek comfort. When a person cannot share his plight with a friend, his misery becomes that much more severe. Makas choshech was the Egyptian's preview of Gehinnom.

There are different forms of loneliness. The cure for this unfortunate state of being is to belong. We are made to belong. We belong to Hashem; we belong to each other; we belong to the past, a heritage; and we belong to a future, to a legacy. When we destroy these bonds of "belonging," we impoverish our lives, exposing ourselves to the frustration and abuse that accompanies being alone.

The greatest tragedy of the modern-day assimilated Jew is probably that he has severed his relationship with his tradition, causing himself to hang in the air, like a lost kite, knocked around by the changing winds of doctrine. While loneliness is a terrible state of being and one that we should attempt to ameliorate, it is also, for some, a serious affliction. There are individuals who, although surrounded by people, feel terribly alone. How is this possible? When one is so wrapped up in himself that he

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perceives himself as "all alone," even though he is in the presence of people, he is truly disturbed. Such people will often think that they are better than anyone else, truly a breed unto themselves. This form of loneliness is, in a sense, self-imposed, the by-product of arrogance. This person is alone because he has written off people. Others can no longer help him until he is ready to help himself.

And touch the lintel and the two doorposts with some blood that is in the basin... and He will not permit the destroyer to enter your homes to smite... you shall observe this matter as a decree for yourself and for your children forever. (12:22,23,24)

What is the meaning of the Torah's enjoinder to "observe this matter as a decree for yourself and for your children forever"? The commandment to smear the blood on the doorposts was in effect only for Pesach Mitzrayim, the first Pesach, which Klal Yisrael observed in Egypt on the night of their liberation. Yechi Yehudah explains this from a mussar, ethical, approach. The battle that we constantly wage with the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, is a difficult one. As in all battles, one can only be successful if he has studied the tactics of his opponents and has found a way to triumph over them. The evil-inclination has a powerful tactic: subtlety. It does not approach a person and say, "Sin." No, the yetzer hora is very crafty. It first convinces the individual to deviate ever so slightly and then adds to that deviation until the person is so distant from his original way of life that idol-worship is no longer remote and inconceivable. Clearly, the more one becomes subjugated to the yetzer hora, the greater and more difficult it is to extricate himself from its hold.

Thus, the most important step one must take in warding off the yetzer hora is to not grant him access into his life. In other words, he should not allow him through the front door. Once the evil-inclination has gotten beyond the "threshold," he has entered, and it is that much more difficult to succeed in battling him. This is what the pasuk is teaching us. How do we win the war against the yetzer hora? How do we succeed over the mashchis, destroyer? We must not allow him past the mezuzah, blocking his entrance through the doorway of our lives. This is an exhortation forever, for every generation: Do not allow the yetzer hora to enter, for it will be that much harder to push him out.

Bnei Yisrael journeyed from Raamses to Succos, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. (12:37)

The Zohar HaKadosh interprets the kof of k'sheish, about six (hundred thousand), as being a kof ha'dimyon, kof that compares. The dimyon, parallel, in this case is the Heavenly Hosts. In other words, at that point, Klal Yisrael was so spiritually elevated that they were compared to the Angels on High. The Sefas Emes derives a powerful lesson from this pasuk. One day earlier, the Jews had been steeped in the tumah, spiritual contamination, of Egypt. They had sunken down to the forty-ninth level of spiritual impurity and were standing at the edge of the fiftieth level. With one more step, they would be lost to eternity. This situation compelled Hashem to liberate them before it would become too late. Yet, one day later, as soon as they were out of the filth of Egypt and its tentacles, they ascended to the level of the Heavenly Angels! This teaches us the greatness of the Jew. One day, he is under the hold of Egypt and sinking to the depths of depravity. The next moment, after he had divested himself of the defilement of the physical environment in which he had been living, he is able to elevate himself to a

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previously unrealistic and unattainable spiritual plateau. This is because the Jew is inherently holy and pure. When he falls under the influence of spiritual contamination, it is only an external lining which prevents him from reaching out and returning to his source. When he is removed from this challenging environment, however, he is able to return to his intrinsic spiritual self.

The Sefas Emes writes, "Veritably, just as it is necessary to believe in the Almighty, despite our inability to understand His hidden ways, so, too, must we believe in the Jewish People, even when they appear to be soiled and ugly." This is the underlying meaning of Shlomo Ha'Melech's statement in Shir HaShirim 1:5, "Though I am black (with sin); yet comely (with virtue)." Every Jew has an inner beauty, a concealed holiness that penetrates his essence. We must believe that this inner holiness can spark and flare up, instantly transforming the individual into a different person. At the end of the Kovetz Ha'aros the following question is presented. In Shemos 4:27, Hashem refers to Klal Yisrael as B'ni b'chori Yisrael, "My firstborn son is Yisrael." Yet, in Devarim 14:1, the Torah says, "You are children to Hashem." This implies that we are the only ones to be called children of Hashem. How then can we be referred to as His firstborn? The term firstborn indicates that there are other children, while the pasuk in Devarim clearly states that we are the only ones. How can we be the firstborn, if we are the only ones? Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, distinguishes between the period preceding Matan Torah, the Giving of the Torah, and the period afterwards, when accepting Hashem's Torah rendering Klal Yisrael His only children.

Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita, cites the Pri Tzaddik, who explains that the ministering angels are also called Bnei Elokim, sons of G-d. Thus, Klal Yisrael is referred to as the b'chor, firstborn, in comparison to the angels. This reflects our inherent kedushah, which can supersede even that of the Heavenly angels.

The Sefas Emes addresses the multitude of Jews who live in galus, exile, subject to the constant harassment of the gentile host country, with its ensuing persecutions and daily challenges to their spiritual belief. The yetzer hora has a running tirade in his effort to discourage the Jewish heart and mind from maintaining its belief inú and commitment toú the Almighty. Yes, it is true, that previous generations functioned on a more elevated spiritual plane, and they were still not redeemed from exile. So, to what do we (this was in the 19th century) have to look forward? What are our chances? Every Jew has in himself a powerful source of inner kedushah that can spring forth, radiate and illuminate his life. He should never despair, because as long as that kedushah exists within the Jew, there is always hope. It is the will of Hashem that we continue to remain in exile. The time will come, however, when it will be over. It is our obligation to guard and sustain that latent kedushah from within, so that we will be prepared to respond appropriately when the moment of redemption arrives.

We see the "before" and "after" pictures of many young men and women who have become baalei Teshuvah, returned to an observant lifestyle. One would think that they have been transformed. The Sefas Emes implies that there was nothing more than a superficial transformation, an unveiling of the individual's true essence. The kedushah had been concealed within, hidden beneath an exterior facade of materialism and the effects of contemporary culture and society, masquerading the real ben Torah or bas Yisrael. When the veil was lifted, the real person began to radiate forth.

And it happened when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to send us out, that Hashem killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt... Therefore, I offer to Hashem all male first issue of the womb, and I shall redeem all the firstborn of my sons. (13:15)

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We are taught that Hashem distinguished between the bechorei Yisrael, Jewish firstborn, and the bechorei Mitzrayim, Egyptian firstborn. Since the Jewish firstborn were spared from death while the Egyptian firstborn were killed, the level of kedushah, holiness, of the Jewish firstborn was elevated. They became holier because they were saved. This is enigmatic. While it is understandable that we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Hashem for sparing the Jewish firstborn, what is the connection between being spared from death and an increase in personal holiness?

Horav Chaim Goldvicht, zl, notes that we find throughout halachah that an act of kinyan, acquisition, imposes kedushah on the object which was acquired. For example, the wife of a Kohen - and even his gentile slave - is permitted to partake of Terumah, which is normally designated only for a Kohen. Yet, since they have a relationship with the Kohen by virtue of a kinyan, either of matrimony or of ownership, they have become elevated in holiness and can now share in his Terumah. Since "belonging" to him creates a shibud, reciprocal obligation, on their part to him, thus their spiritual status is elevated.

When we think about it, we may suggest that herein lies the secret of kedushas Yisrael, the holiness of a Jew. We are kanui, acquired by - and, thus, belong to - Hashem. This reality imbues us with kedushah. We belong to the Almighty!

This kinyan took place as we left Egypt. Avadai heim, "They are My servants - (because) I have taken them out of Egypt" (Vayikra 25:42). This act of liberation was Hashem's kinyan. He redeemed us and, therefore, we are now His. This is why the idea of the Exodus plays such a seminal role in the life of a Jew. We constantly reiterate it in our daily readings and traditions. We understand now that not only do we owe Hashem a debt of gratitude, but we also belong to Him. Our very existence as a free nation is due to Him.

Understandably, the level of kedushah directly correlates with the nature and force of the kinyan. Every added endeavor, every emphasis that is involved in making this act of acquisition more concrete, stronger and more impressive, adds to the level of kedushah created by this relationship. Thus, smiting the Egyptian firstborn, while simultaneously sparing the Jewish firstborn, was clearly a powerful and definitive act of acquisition, which catalyzed a greater level of kedushah. Hence, the Jewish firstborns became holy to Hashem. They received a stronger kinyan and, therefore, a greater level of kedushah than the average Jew. Sparing the Jewish firstborns from death increased their relationship with Hashem, thereby granting them greater kedushah.

Rav Goldvicht underscores this idea with regard to our daily lives. A person who has merited a special salvation from Hashem, who has been privileged to enjoy an unwarranted and unprecedented favor, not only has a profound debt of gratitude to pay, but he also has an enormous obligation. He becomes meshubad, obliged, to Hashem. This idea may be derived from the words of Avraham Avinu, "I am but dust and ashes" (Bereishis 18:27). Chazal explain: Avraham intimated, "Had I been killed by Amrafel, would I not have been dust? And if Nimrod would have succeeded in burning me alive, would I not have been ashes?" In other words, our Patriarch was acutely aware that these two instances of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, and Heavenly salvation established him as a new entity before the Creator. He was not afar v'eifar, dust and ashes. He became sanctified and consecrated to Hashem as a result of his salvation.

Every Jew that is alive today is a descendant of someone who had achieved this zenith. Those who have survived the persecutors that have tormented us throughout history have earned the title of afar v'eifar. We must uphold their legacy in our commitment to Hashem.

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