

Candle Lighting

5:32

S”Z Kriat Shema

9:50

Sunset

5:50

Motzei Shabbat

6:28



Parshat HaShavuah

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Bo

ו' שבט תשע"ו

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Ashreinu

חלקינו מה טוב

Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Special Alumni Edition

A LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS ZEVI LITWIN ('13)

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As the exile and slavery in Egypt are coming to a close, Hashem instructs Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael to request gold and silver from the Egyptians. In the following pasuk, the Torah tells us that “Hashem granted the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians” (Shmot 11:3). This fact seems to be informing us of the way in which the Jews were able to acquire the money from the Egyptians – Hashem made the Jews favorable in the eyes of the Egyptians, and in turn the Egyptians handed over their gold and silver.

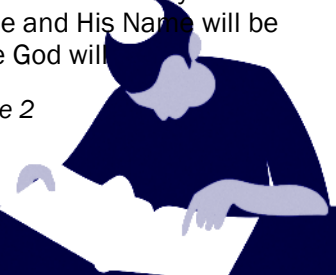
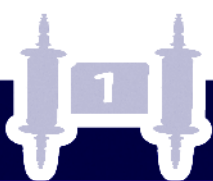
Why did it have to be this way? The Egyptians could easily have simply given over their possessions out of fear. After experiencing nine terrifying plagues and begging Pharaoh to let the Jews go, it would make sense that they would have done anything they could to get the Jews out of Egypt, even give away their money. Why did it have to be that they gave over their possessions out of “favor”?

The answer to this question reveals a profound insight into the nature and purpose of the Jewish nation. Throughout our history we have been hated and killed by the nations of the world for fulfilling the word of Hashem and performing His commandments. Since this is such a common theme in our history, there is a danger that we might come to accept this as the way things are supposed to be – that mockery and persecution are an indication of our correct service of Hashem.

In order to prevent us from accepting such a reality, the Torah tells us, “you shall guard and perform [the mitzvot], for it is your wisdom in the eyes of the peoples, who shall hear all these decrees and who shall say, ‘a wise people is this nation’” (Devarim 4:6). Not only are the nations of the world not supposed to hate and kill us, but the Torah tells us that when we perform the mitzvot correctly the nations will respect and honor us! The Torah clearly attaches importance to the respect given to us by the rest of the world.

In his commentary on the Torah, the Netziv writes that the goal of creation is that Hashem’s glory will fill the earth and all people will recognize His dominance over the world. Our mission in life is not to serve Hashem only within our nation, but to serve Him before the eyes of the other nations and make His message known throughout the world. We say in *Aleinu* three times every day, “When Hashem will be King over the whole world, on that day He will be One and His Name will be One” (Zechariah 14:9) – only when all the people of the world recognize Hashem as the true God will His name truly be One.

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Litwin continued

It is therefore our duty to make Hashem's existence known by following His commandments and living a life of Torah. We are meant to be an "*ohr la'goyim*", a light unto the nations, illuminating the proper way to live and act. The halachot that we follow encourage us to act in a way that will lead to a Kiddush Hashem and thereby bring us respect as a holy and upright people.

It is therefore imperative that we understand that the scorn of the nations of the world is not an indication that we are acting and performing the mitzvot properly, and if anything, it is the exact opposite! It is a sign that there is something lacking in our *avodat* Hashem and that there is something that we can improve on in our lives. Hopefully, through our careful and proper performance of the mitzvot we will earn the honor and respect of the nations of the world and bring about the worldwide recognition of "ה' אחד ושמו אחד".

CHOOSING GOD

MICHALI MAZOR ('15)

The Exodus from Egypt is often considered the defining moment in the history of the Jewish nation. It was the rebirth of a people who were raised from the ashes of the "Iron Furnace" and reformed into the chosen people of God. This miraculous occasion shaped and molded our nation.

Our daily lives are filled with reminders of this event: when we daven every day and put on tefillin, when we celebrate Shabbat and say kiddush, when we sit around the Seder table discussing the entire story with our children. We are even told that the reason for keeping the holiday of Pesach is "למען תזכר את יום צאתך מארץ מצרים כל ימי חיך" – "so that you should remember the day when we went out of the land of Egypt all the days of your lives" (Devarim 16:3).

Yetziat Mitzrayim may have been a momentous occasion. It may have been the focal point in our nation's history. But, why is the chronicle of Yetziat Mitzrayim so essential to our daily lives? Why the emphasis on this one event, on this particular set of miracles that happened thousands of years ago? As historically significant as this event was, one may argue that it does not hold any practical relevance.

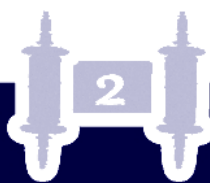
The Ramban, commenting on this week's parsha, gives a profound answer to this question. He says that since the time of אנוש, three types of heretics have existed: those who do not believe in God, those who do not believe in God's active role as the sustainer of the universe, and those who do not believe in the concept of Divine retribution.

Through recounting the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim and reminding others that Hashem altered natural laws when He performed these miracles and when He served retributive justice to the Egyptians, we effectively invalidate each of the three heretical assertions. The miracles of the ten plagues and *kriat yam suf* prove to all those who doubt, that God is the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Administer of justice in this world.

We live in a historical period when Hashem's presence is camouflaged. We have no concrete proof of His existence and do not experience or witness open miracles. We live in a time when social norms glorify the deniers of Hashem and lionize those who decry the faithful. We hear world leaders, military commanders, economic trailblazers, and cultural trendsetters declare "כוהי ועוצם ידי". We live in a time when anything Godly is disdained and dismissed and where lack of faith is parallel to the days of אנוש.

God created a system for the world known as nature, a system of scientific laws and calculated measures. His omnipotence and omnipresence are concealed within the confines of the natural order, which facilitates our בחירה חופשית, our free choice. As it says in Berachot 33b, "הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים" – "everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of

Continued page 3





Mazor continued

Heaven.” Despite His control over the trajectory of our history, God gives us a choice. We are free to choose to believe that He is the Ultimate. It is in our power to bring God into our lives and interject His presence in our thoughts and deeds. Yet God, in His kindness, acknowledges that we need assistance. This is precisely the reason for the many commandments. The mitzvot are our blueprint, our guide, that help us make the right choices.

As human beings, we often strive for a singular fleeting moment, a moment of absolute recognition of God – inspiration. In that moment, we do all we can to hold on to that sense of clarity. We say that we will take something small upon ourselves, so that we will remember this very singular moment.

The experience of Yetziat Mitzrayim was no different. God gave us many commandments, not simply to remember the miracles of the Exodus, but to concretize that amazing earth-shattering extraordinarily inspiring moment forever. In the generation of Yetziat Mitzrayim, they did not have a real choice; God’s presence was unquestionable. However, we have that choice. We have the ability to wake up each and every day and recognize the presence of Hashem by remembering Yetziat Mitzrayim as the ultimate representation of our faith in God.

STRENGTHENING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

DORON DAVID ('09)

Towards the end of this week's parsha we find two interesting mitzvot that Hashem commands Bnei Yisrael when leaving Egypt. While at the surface the two seem quite similar, they are in fact very different.

The first mitzvah is that of matzah. The Torah tells us (Shmot: 13: 5-10): “And it shall be when Hashem brings you to the land of the Canaani, and the Chitti, and the Emori, etc. which He promised to your fathers to give to you, a land flowing...and you should do this worship in this month. Seven days shall you eat matzot...And you should tell your child, ‘this is because of what God did for me when I went out of Mitzrayim....’ And it shall be as a sign on your hand and a remembrance [*zikaron*] between your eyes, so that the Torah of Hashem will be upon your mouth, for with a hand that is mighty (*yad chazakah*) did God take you out of Egypt. And you should keep this statue (*chukah*) at its proper time, forever.”

The second mitzvah is that of *kiddush bechorot*. As it says: “And it shall be when Hashem brings you to the land of the Canaani, which He promised to you, and to your fathers and has given to you. And you should render every first born to Hashem...And it will be when your son asks tomorrow, ‘what is this?’ And you shall say to him, ‘with might of hand (*chozek yad*) did Hashem take us out of Egypt from bondage....’ And God smote every firstborn...thus I slaughter every firstborn [of the animals] and every firstborn of my children I redeem. And it shall be as a sign upon your hand and an ornament (*totafot*) between your eyes, for with might of hand (*chozek yad*) did God take us out of Mitzrayim.” (13: 11-16)

When it comes to the mitzvah of matzah, we understand that Hashem brought about the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt due to the promise that He made to the Avot, whereas the mitzvah of *kiddush bechorot* illustrates Hashem's deep connection with Bnei Yisrael directly. Hashem masterfully crafted the grandiose events leading up to this point so that Bnei Yisrael would recognize Hashem's mutual commitment to them as a nation and what they would become in the future.

The lesson we can learn from this is that our relationship with God strengthens as we recognize His everlasting commitment to us. Had He brought us out of Egypt simply through the merit of the Avot, it would have been understandable for us to feel disconnected and let go because we hadn't earned The Exodus ourselves. It is often easy for our relationship with God to feel stuck in the status quo, however it is our obligation to remember that the Brit Yisrael is an eternal bond which should continue to grow deeper over time.



The climax of the ten plagues is at hand. Pharaoh, apparently not knowing the definition of insanity, hardens his heart to the idea of Jewish freedom nine times – each time with results more disastrous than the last. Finally, as Moshe lets Pharaoh know, Hashem will strike down every Egyptian firstborn in an extravagant show of power that will bring the Jews their freedom. When Moshe relays this information, he says that it will happen “כחצות הלילה”- “around midnight.” Rashi explains that this is because if Hashem said that it would happen at EXACTLY midnight, the Egyptian sorcerers might accidentally miscalculate the time and, seeing that it wasn't midnight according to them, try to discredit Moshe.

This strange comment of Rashi begs an important question. Hashem is all-powerful; if He so desired, he could cause the sorcerers to calculate the correct time of midnight and spare Moshe the potential shame. Why would He instead have Moshe say “around midnight?” Surely, the first option would have been much better at having the sorcerers believe in the power of Hashem!

“Anything you say can and will be used against you.” Lately, the previous sentence has become a cliché of police procedurals and courtroom dramas, but this phrase is the lesson that the Torah and Rashi try to impart to us. There are many things that we can ascribe to error and take back; our words are not one of them. Many relationships have been ruined because one party spoke without thinking. In fact, this lesson is not just evident in the final plague, but if one parses the beginning of Sefer Shmot carefully, it is evident that every word that Moshe says to Pharaoh is careful and thought out, so that neither Pharaoh nor his sorcerers can deny that the plagues are anything but acts of Hashem. I hope that we can all learn to use our words to better this world and bring about the Final Redemption.

HACHODESH HAZEH LACHEM

YOCHAVED (TIRSCHWELL) ABRAMS ('08)

In this week's parsha, the Jewish people receive their first mitzvah as a nation: *kiddush hachodesh*, sanctifying the new month. Throughout the Torah, we see that there are no specific names for the months—they are referred to by their places in the calendar, beginning with the month that we left Egypt. There are four months referenced in Tanach by name, but these four months were often called by their places in the calendar despite these additional names. The Talmud Yerushalmi notes that originally there were no names for the months, but when the Jews were living in Bavel, they adopted the Babylonian names for the months that we still use today. Why did we abandon the language of the Torah and switch to idolatrous names?

Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky suggests that this decision was one of many that illustrate the progression of history from the first Beit Hamikdash to the ultimate one, the third, which has yet to be rebuilt. When the first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, many of the Jews made their way to Bavel. In Bavel, the Jews knew that if they built a second Beit Hamikdash, it wouldn't last forever. They also knew that if they returned to Israel, it wouldn't be the final redemption. Their thought was that a Beit Hamikdash would only serve to prepare the nation for the long exile ahead. The Jews therefore stayed in Bavel for many years and only returned to Israel when it was clear that they would lose their identity and would be fully assimilated into the Babylonian society if they didn't separate themselves.

They returned to Israel to regain and preserve their identity and emunah in God, but they weren't fully redeemed. This semi-redemption was just a means to get to the longer exile, which will end with final redemption and the building of the third Beit Hamikdash. To illustrate that they were somewhat still in exile, the *Aron*, which was the source of holiness, was hidden and missing from the second Beit Hamikdash, the people spoke Aramaic instead of returning to Hebrew, and they adopted the Babylonian names for months. The second Beit Hamikdash was a means to keep the Jewish nation alive throughout the long exile before the third Beit Hamikdash is rebuilt. Life has many stages; we may think that one thing that we do is not important in the grand scheme of things, but the message of the second Beit Hamikdash is that even if something is a means to an end, it is an essential part of life and is important in assisting us to achieve our ultimate goals.

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7902 Montoya Circle
Boca Raton, FL 33433
Phone: 561-417-7422
Fax: 561-417-7028
www.yeshivaahs.org

