

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Bo

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ALWAYS BY OUR SIDE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Come to Pharaoh...'" (10:1)

The Kotzker Rebbe (Emes V'Emunah) seems to wonder why Hashem instructed Moshe to *"bo"* - "come" to Pharaoh instead of commanding Moshe to *"lech"* - "go" to Pharaoh.

The Kotzker Rebbe explains that Hashem was communicating to Moshe that even when Moshe would go to the palace of Pharaoh, he would not be leaving the presence of Hashem, as He fills the world. Instead, Hashem would come together with Moshe to confront Pharaoh. It is for this reason that Hashem used the word *bo* - "come," as opposed to the word *lech* - "go."

In life, when confronting challenges, we often feel as though we are alone and isolated from Hashem. We try to navigate and face difficulties without asking for His help. The Kotzker Rebbe is reminding us that we are never left to fend for ourselves. Hashem stands by us through thick and thin. The only condition is that we need to make room for Hashem in our lives. Once we do so, Hashem is guaranteed to be with us throughout it all.

COMING HOME

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Come to Pharaoh...'" (10:1)

We would expect G-d to tell Moshe to "go to Pharaoh" rather than to "come to Pharaoh." By saying "come to Pharaoh," G-d is teaching us how we should understand the Exodus from a broader perspective, including our personal process of redemption from our own states of "bondage" and "exile."

Redemption can only happen if we are "coming" rather than "going." Going somewhere implies that our home base is where we already are; we are simply visiting the place we are headed toward. Coming somewhere, in contrast, implies that we are moving our home - that we are going where we are headed with our whole being.

Thus, when we free ourselves of the bondage of materiality by communing with G-d in Torah study or prayer, we should be sure to "come home," immersing ourselves in the words and ideas completely, rather than just "going" there for a visit.

In this way, our study and prayer can affect us and change us; it can take us out of our personal Egypt.

Moreover, going out of our personal Egypt hastens the advent of the collective redemption of the Jewish people and all humanity, as well. (Sichot Kodesh 5740, vol. 1, pp. 843-845) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

NEVER ASSUME

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

"And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Come to Pharaoh...'" (10:1)

Rashi comments: "and warn him." He understood that Hashem's instructions to warn Pharaoh were given indirectly; even though the Torah does not relate that Hashem gave Moshe specific directions before his encounter with Pharaoh, it is apparent in retrospect from the fact that Moshe actually did warn Pharaoh that he must have been ordered to do so by Hashem.

If this is so, however, a question arises: At the end of this verse Hashem gave Moshe a reason for His command, "for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn." How is that a reason to warn him?

We can say that Hashem told Moshe, "Even though it will do no good to warn Pharaoh since I have so hardened his heart in order to place these signs in his midst for you to relate to your descendants, still you must give him a warning in My Name."

This may have been intended to teach a lesson to judges and courts of all generations: Even if you are convinced that someone is so obstinate in his wicked ways that all the warnings in the world will make no impression on him, it is not for you to look into people's hearts, and you must still warn him and apprise him of the repercussions of his actions before you can impose punishment on him.

LOUD AND CLEAR

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I have mocked Egypt.” (10:2)

Why does the verse include the seemingly superfluous words “relate in the ears of your son” why not simply say “relate to your son”?

Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman explains that when it comes to teaching our children, sometimes we are able to speak to them and convey a message clearly. However, there are times and environments where there is background noise and so we must shout a little bit. Occasionally, that approach is still not sufficient and the only way to get over our message is to say it directly into our children’s ears.

In our verse, the message that Hashem specifically wanted to convey in such a way, explains the Ohr HaChaim, was His complete control over nature, leaving no doubt Who created the world and Who is in complete control of it.

Furthermore, says the Ohr HaChaim, the purpose of the plagues was not to bring revenge upon the Egyptians - which could have been done in any natural way in This World or the Next - rather it was solely for our sake, to inculcate within the Jewish People throughout the generations this message, one which was crucial for the Jewish People in Egypt as they faced immense physical and spiritual challenges just as it is for us today as we too are distracted by the significant “background noise” of today’s society which all too often blocks out our recognition of Hashem’s role in the world.

One person who is remarkably successful at speaking in the ears of the Jewish People and awaking their inner desire to come closer to Hashem is Rav Yitzchak Dovid Grossman, lovingly known as the “Disco Rabbi” after he first arrived in Migdal HaEmek (then a city notoriously rife with poverty and crime) and asked where he could find the youth so that he could speak to them about Hashem. He was pointed to the local disco, something which he had never heard of from his upbringing in Meah Shearim. Yet, this did not perturb him as he entered the dark room and approached a group of young men.

Speechless at the sight of a *Chassid* in his full garb, Rav Grossman took the opportunity to start speaking about Hashem’s role in the world.

The group were spell-bound and thus began Rav Grossman’s career literally and figuratively speaking in the ears of the youth.

Within a year he was appointed the city’s Chief Rabbi with a lifetime tenure; and sixty years later, Rav Grossman is internationally acclaimed for the work he has done for orphans, the impoverished, and prisoners, winning several prestigious awards, as well as running the world’s largest orphanage!

INFLUENCED BY INFLUENCING

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I have mocked Egypt... that you may know that I am Hashem.” (10:2)

Hashem said to the Jews: “If you will diligently impress the greatness of G-d upon your children and grandchildren, you yourselves will grow in strength of faith and in knowledge of G-d, and you will know that I am G-d.”

LENGTHENING OUR DAYS

Pardes Yosef

“And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I have mocked Egypt... that you may know that I am Hashem.” (10:2)

The word “*U’lemaan*” (and so that you should) appears in the Torah in only one other place: *U’lemaan ta’arichu yamim* - “And so you may lengthen your days” (Devarim 11:9).

The connection is based on the words that the Rambam wrote to his son, that each person has an allotted number of years to live and accomplish his goals. However, even if one has lived a long and fulfilling life, if he teaches his children Torah, then Hashem may extend his life. One can lengthen his days if he relates the Torah to his sons and his sons’ sons.

DISPLAY OF LOVE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“...that you may know that I am Hashem...” (10:2)

Our *parashah*, Bo, starts with G-d instructing Moshe to warn Pharaoh that the last of the plagues will be proof of G-d’s dominance (10:1). The next *pasuk* starts with a unique word, “*U’lemaan* - And in order” that you tell your children about the signs and miracles that G-d performed on our behalf (10:2). The only other time the word *u’lemaan* is used is in reference to honoring your parents, proclaiming that the reward of honoring one’s parents is long life, “and in order” that things go well with us (Devarim 5:16). Don’t the first seven plagues already convey G-d’s supremacy and greatness? What makes the last few plagues different? Also, what is the connection to honoring one’s parents?

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig offers a fascinating insight. He explains that the purpose of the final plagues wasn’t to demonstrate G-d’s dominance to the Egyptians, because that was already obvious. It was to show the Jewish people how much they meant to G-d and what He was willing to do for them. Similarly, the requirement to honor our parents is intended to benefit both them and ourselves. Only by expressing affection to our loved ones can we perpetuate that love and hope to merit its growth.

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I have mocked Egypt... that you may know that I am Hashem.” (10:2)

In the beginning of Parshas Bo, G-d explains to Moshe the reason why He hardened Pharaoh’s heart, resulting in his continued refusal to allow *Bnei Yisrael* to leave, thus necessitating additional *makkos* (plagues):

למען תספר באזני בן ובן-בן את אשר התעללתי במצרים ואת אותותי אשר שמתי בם, וידעתם כי אני ה'

“So that you tell your children and grandchildren about how I made a mockery of Egypt, and the wonders I performed there, so that you know that I am Hashem.” (10:2)

The Torah here makes it clear that the goal of the miracles of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* was not merely to force Pharaoh to release *Bnei Yisrael*, but also - וידעתם כי אני ה' - to strengthen our *emuna*, so that we, *Am Yisrael*, will always remember and draw inspiration from these miracles. The *makkos* were, primarily, for us.

These miracles remind us that no matter what we’re going through, when we endure periods of war or other crises, Hashem can intervene and instantly save us.

The reason why we so frequently mention *Yetzias Mitzrayim* in our *tefillos*, each day, is because we need this constant reminder that Hashem can solve any problem and extricate us from any crisis.

The word מצרים is related to the word מיצר - “confinement.” Just as Hashem brought our ancestors out of מצרים, so can He bring us out of any מיצר we find ourselves in. We are never trapped. The situation is never hopeless, because G-d can release us from our “confinement,” from our predicament, whatever it is, just as He miraculously delivered our ancestors from bondage.

The Gemara teaches in Maseches Berachos (4b): איזהו בן - one who recites the section of גאולה just before the *shemona esrei* is guaranteed a share in the next world. Before we begin the *shemona esrei* during *shacharis* and *ma’ariv*, we speak about the miracles of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, of how G-d redeemed our ancestors from their troubles.

Halacha requires that we proceed immediately from גאולה, that we make no interruption whatsoever between the section of גאולה and the *shemona esrei* prayer. And the Gemara promises that one who fulfills this requirement, beginning the *shemona esrei* immediately after concluding the section of גאולה, without any interruption, is assured a share in the next world.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe and others explain that סמיכת גאולה is necessary so that we enter the *shemona esrei* prayer with the proper mindset.

As we begin praying, we might wonder, “Does G-d really have the ability to fulfill my needs, and if He does, is He really interested in doing so? I am about to ask for wisdom, for forgiveness, for health, for a livelihood, and for many other things - how do I know that He truly can and is actually ready to grant my requests? How do I know I’m not just wasting my time?”

To avoid these hesitations, we are to begin reciting the *shemona esrei* immediately after reciting the גאולה section, after recalling the great miracles of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. The memory of these miracles, which has been preserved throughout the generations, reassures us of Hashem’s unlimited control over the world, and that He is ready and prepared to accept our *tefillos* and lend us the assistance we need.

The *makkos* remind us that even in a מיצר, when we feel our world closing in on us, when there seems to be no way out, Hashem is capable of intervening and rescuing us, and so we must turn to Him for help.

HEARTFELT FAITH

Belzer Rebbe

“And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I have mocked Egypt... that you may know that I am Hashem.” (10:2)

This means that one must have complete faith.

“That you may relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son” means that your teaching must be words that come from the depths of your heart so that you will be able to persuade another.

ROOTED IN CONCEIT

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And Moshe and Aharon came to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘So said Hashem, G-d of the Hebrews: How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?’” (10:3)

The verse relates Hashem’s primary criticism against Pharaoh - that he was arrogant and refused to humble himself. Rav Shteinman asks, is this really Pharaoh’s biggest fault?! What about the fact that he systematically murdered and enslaved an entire nation? Would that not have made a stronger and more worthy accusation?

Rav Shteinman answers that of course Pharaoh was responsible for the most heinous of crimes, but Hashem was revealing the source of Pharaoh’s evil acts - his unwillingness to humble himself.

Such is the great danger of being arrogant that there are no boundaries in the quest to fulfill one’s desires!

Indeed, arrogance distances a person from Hashem so much that, frightfully, Hashem declares about such a person, “I am not able to dwell with him in This World” (Sotah 5a).

In stark contrast to Pharaoh, Rav Shteinman - the world's leading Torah figure of his time - was famous for his humility. Despite being worthy of every honor he received, he viewed the esteem awarded to him as something which could potentially distance him from Hashem, and sought every opportunity to rid himself of any vestige of arrogance that may have potentially come from it...

While honor may not reach us to the same degree, we must still be very careful to avoid all forms of self-righteousness and conceit. For, even if we do have attributes, skills, or possessions that others look up to or desire, if we just take a moment to remember Who gave us these gifts, we will immediately realize to Whom the honor we receive should really be directed. And rather than distancing us from Hashem, it will only bring us closer.

NEVER TOO LATE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Moshe said to Pharaoh,] 'For if you refuse to send forth My people, I will bring locusts.'" (10:4)

The fact that G-d warned Pharaoh that he would be punished for not obeying Moshe's demand means that the door to repentance was still open. True, G-d had made Pharaoh stubborn, but that just meant that it was difficult for him to repent. Had Pharaoh summoned the inner strength to listen to his conscience, he still could have let the Jews go and spared himself and his country the impending ruin.

The lessons for us are as follows: First, no matter how estranged we may feel from G-d, even if it seems as though G-d has shut the door on us, nothing can resist our sincere efforts to return to Him. The apparent estrangement exists only in order to inspire us to summon a deeper, more powerful resolve.

Second, no matter how far another person may seem to have strayed from G-d, we must never despair of him. With true love and friendship, we can encourage him to mend his ways, and with G-d's help he will come back to his true, inner self. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 6, pp. 64-68) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

PEOPLE OF PROMINENCE

Sefas Emes

"Pharaoh's servants said to him, 'Until when will this continue ensnaring us? Send out the men that they may serve Hashem, their G-d! Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?'" (10:7)

Pharaoh's men meant to send out only the most prominent among the Israelites. Pharaoh's response was "Which ones shall I send?" for they are all prominent.

IMPACTFUL SURROUNDINGS

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"Pharaoh's servants said to him, 'Until when will this continue ensnaring us? Send out the men that they may serve Hashem, their G-d! Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?'" (10:7)

After Moshe and Aharon warned Pharaoh of the impending plague of *arbeh* (locusts), Pharaoh's advisors turned to him and implored him to yield:

ויאמרו עבדי פרעה אליו: עד מתי יהיה זה לנו למוקש? שלח את האנשים ויעבדו את ה' אלוהיהם. הטרם תדע כי אבדה מצרים

"Pharaoh's servants said to him, 'Until when will this continue ensnaring us? Let the people go serve Hashem their G-d. Do you still not know that Egypt is being destroyed?!'" (10:7)

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in his *Lahavos Eish*, poses the simple question of how the servants had the gall to speak to Pharaoh this way. In ancient times, despotic monarchs were feared by their subjects. Challenging the king generally meant an automatic death sentence. How could Pharaoh's servants speak so disrespectfully, for him criticizing, הטרם תדע כי אבדה מצרים, asking rhetorically his indifference toward the plight of the Egyptians and the future of the country?

Rav Druck answered that, very simply, the servants felt emboldened and confident enough to speak to Pharaoh this way because of Moshe and Aharon. They watched and listened as Moshe and Aharon repeatedly walked into the palace and confronted Pharaoh, demanding that he obey their G-d, and threatening him of the consequences. The servants had indeed lived in fear of Pharaoh, and "walked on eggshells" every time they spoke to him, but Moshe and Aharon's confrontational demeanor when speaking to Pharaoh had the effect of diminishing from this fear and dread.

Rav Druck draws our attention to the story of Haman, who enjoyed great wealth and prestige, but felt וכל זה איננו לי שווה, that none of this was worth anything (5:13), because of a single person - Mordechai - who refused to bow to him. All the fame and fortune of being vizier of the world's largest empire meant nothing to Haman because there was one Jewish man who would not accord him respect. Rav Druck explained that Haman understood the power and influence that a person has on his surroundings. It wasn't just that Mordechai refused to bow. The problem, in Haman's eyes, was that Mordechai's disrespect for him would affect the people around him. Once they saw Mordechai refusing to bow, their esteem for, and fear of, Haman would be compromised. Just as Moshe and Aharon's confrontations with Pharaoh lowered his esteem in the eyes of his servants, Haman similarly feared that Mordechai's defiance would lower his esteem in the eyes of the rest of the people.

Haman learned this concept, Rav Druck proceeds to explain, from his ancestors, the nation of Amalek, who attacked *Bnei Yisrael* just several weeks after *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and the splitting of the sea. Moshe describes Amalek's attack with the phrase אשר קרך בדרך (Devarim 25:18), and Rashi explains the word קרך to mean קר, "cold," that Amalek "cooled" *Bnei Yisrael*. Rashi writes:

"For all the nations were afraid to wage war against you, until this [nation, Amalek,] came along and initiated [hostilities], showing the others that it was possible. This is comparable to a tub of scalding water, which nobody could go into. One evil person came along and jumped into it. Although he was burned, he cooled it for the others."

After the extraordinary events of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and the splitting of the *Yam Suf*, *Bnei Yisrael* were untouchable. They were feared. Nobody dared challenge them. But then Amalek came along and attacked them, shattering this aura of invincibility. Amalek was "burned," defeated by *Bnei Yisrael*, but its attack showed that *Bnei Yisrael* were indeed vulnerable, paving the way for future assaults.

This shows us just how profoundly we are influenced by the people around us, and by what we see and hear. We are not even aware of the extent of the impact that our surroundings have upon our minds. When we hear people ridiculing and challenging that which we hold sacred, it affects our attitude; it diminishes, if even slightly, from our respect and reverence. We must therefore carefully choose what we expose ourselves to, and ensure to always place ourselves in the company of those under whose influence we want to be.

DEDICATION TO EDUCATION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go... for it is a festival to Hashem for us." (10:9)

Moshe mentioned "our young people" before "our elders" in order to emphasize the primary importance of teaching the youth to develop their relationship with G-d. Pharaoh ridiculed this concern, insisting that only adults need to be involved in spiritual practice and observance.

Moshe was vindicated when later, the Jewish children were the first to recognize G-d when the sea was split. Their heightened spiritual sensitivity bore witness to the care that their parents had invested in their education.

Just as the Jewish people's attention to the spiritual growth and development of their children preceded the Exodus from Egypt, so it will be in our times: our dedication to the spiritual growth and development of our children will hasten the final, Messianic Redemption. (Hitva'aduyot 5744, vol. 4, pp. 2396-2397; Igrot Kodesh, vol. 30, pp. 146-148. See also Likutei Diburim 5b:20-21) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

COMPLETE PARTICIPATION REQUIRED

Satmar Rebbe

"With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go... for it is a festival to Hashem for us." (10:9)

Moshe was also concerned about future redemptions. He said that we need the elders to teach Torah, and the young and innocent to perform the mitzvos. The youth will go with the older generation who are not ashamed of their deeds. Together they will bring the redemption.

EVERY YID IS A TZADDIK

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go... for it is a festival to Hashem for us." (10:9)

Before the eighth plague, the plague of *arbeh* (locusts), Pharaoh summoned Moshe and Aharon, and informed them that he was allowing them to go serve G-d in the wilderness. He asked, מי ומי ההולכים - "Who are the ones going?" (10:8). Moshe replied that everyone - young and old, men and women - needed to go:

בנערינו ובזקנינו נלך, בבנינו ובבנותינו, בצאננו ובבקרנו נלך, כי חג לה' לנו.

"We shall go with our young and with our elderly; we shall go with our sons and with our daughters, with our sheep and with our cattle, for we have a celebration to G-d." (10:9)

Pharaoh flatly rejected this demand.

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe, in Amaros Tehoros, explains what this argument was all about. The question מי ומי ההולכים, the Rebbe writes, expressed the notion that only the great *tzaddikim*, the spiritual elite, needed to go. As this was a religious service, Pharaoh figured, it should be reserved for the religious giants. He was telling Moshe, "I know these people. I know who they are. I know that they have fallen to the מ'ט שיערי טומאה, the 'forty-ninth gate of impurity.' They aren't very holy. They don't deserve to serve G-d. Only a small handful of righteous people need to go."

In contemporary terms, this would translate into: "I know your browsing history. I know what you've watched on Netflix. I know how often and how badly you've messed up. Davening isn't for you. Learning Torah isn't for you. You're not worthy of עבודת ה'. You're not a *tzaddik*."

Moshe, however, sternly and resoundingly rejected this approach. He loudly declared, בנערינו ובזקנינו נלך. The Rachmastrivka Rebbe explains בנערינו as referring to those who have always served Hashem devotedly, since their youth, whereas בזקנינו refers to those who have only recently, in their older years, committed themselves to mitzvos. All *Am Yisrael* are welcome and expected to serve Hashem. Rabbis and Torah scholars are bound by the same Shulchan Aruch, and recite the same *tefillas*, as everyone else.

Torah and mitzvos are not reserved for the great *tzaddikim*. We all have access to Hashem, and we are all required to serve Him.

ועמר כולם צדיקים (Yeshayahu 60:21). Every Yid is a *tzaddik*! Any person, young or old, regardless of his past, who makes the decision to serve Hashem, is urged to do. Judaism is not a religion for only the spiritual elite. It is for each and every one of us. We all equally share the privilege, and obligation, of עבודת ה', of serving Hashem to the best of our ability.

REASON TO CELEBRATE

Yismach Moshe

"With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go... for it is a festival to Hashem for us." (10:9)

When our youth and elders go together, then it is a "*chag Hashem lanu*" - a festival of Hashem for us.

FUTURE REDEMPTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d said to Moshe, 'Stretch out your hand towards the heavens, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt. The darkness will be palpable.'" (10:21)

G-d did not force those Jews who did not want to leave Egypt to do so. By choosing to remain in Egypt, their lives lost all meaning and had spiritually ended. In contrast, in the future Redemption, even those Jews who do not consciously want to be redeemed will be taken out of exile. This is because when G-d gave us the Torah, He connected our essence with His essence, making it impossible for us to really oppose our connection with Him.

Of course, we can go through the motions of opposing our connection to G-d, but this is only superficial. Sooner or later, our deep, inner essence will surface, and this will make us all indeed worthy of being redeemed. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 11, pp. 1-7) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

IMPENETRABLE DARKNESS

Sforno

"G-d said to Moshe, 'Stretch out your hand towards the heavens, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt. The darkness will be palpable.'" (10:21)

Ordinary "darkness" is no phenomenon in itself, it merely signifies the absence of light. When there is no light, it is dark. Darkness of this sort has no existence in its own right and can be readily dispelled by the kindling of a light. But the darkness that came over the land of Egypt was a phenomenon in its own right, so real (Hebrew: *mamash*) that it could be felt (*va'yameish*) and could not be dispelled by light.

CONNECTING TO THE SPIRITUAL

Rebbe Nachman

"Stretch out your hand towards the heavens, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt. The darkness will be palpable." (10:21)

The darkness became matter, a tangible thing. (Rashi)

Va'yameish (וימש, will be palpable) is similar to *yamush* (ימוש, will be removed). G-d commanded Yehoshua: "This Torah scroll will not be removed from your mouth" (Yehoshua 1:8). We can also read this verse as "This Torah scroll will not be made corporeal in your mouth" - i.e., Yehoshua should not treat it as a secular wisdom devoid of spirituality.

One who appreciates the spiritual nature of the Torah can retain it in his mind and heart. If he treats it as something corporeal, he cannot truly retain it, for now - like any other material object - it takes up space. Since it takes up space in his mind, which can only hold a finite amount of materiality, some of it must inevitably be lost. (See Likutey Moharan I, 110)

When a person respects the Torah as an instrument of spirituality, its words illumine his mouth with G-dliness.

Should he think of the Torah as a corporeal body of knowledge, however, it becomes dark and obscure for him, and it will not direct him towards G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 11:2)

LIGHT OF SPIRITUALITY

Reb Noson of Breslov

"G-d said to Moshe, 'Stretch out your hand towards the heavens, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt. The darkness will be palpable.'" (10:21)

The darkness became matter, a tangible thing. (Rashi)

Why was there a Plague of Darkness? There were wicked Jews who refused to leave Egypt. They died during the Plague of Darkness and were buried at that time [so the Egyptians would not see the Jews suffering]. (Rashi on Shemos 10:22)

There is a body, there is a soul. There is matter, there is form. There is darkness, there is light. There is death, there is life. The first of each pair are all one concept, as are the second (Likutey Moharan I, 37:2).

Those who pursue the material - the body - are actually pursuing matter and darkness. Those who pursue spirituality merit to form and light.

Therefore, the Egyptians, who were steeped in bodily lusts, literally felt the darkness envelop them. And the wicked Jews who did not want to leave the materialistic lifestyle of Egypt died, since matter, body, darkness and death are the same concept.

But those Jews who sought spirituality and anticipated the salvation had light in their homes, for spirituality and light are synonymous.

In fact, they merited the light of the Future, which is similar to the light of Creation that enveloped the entire world (see Rashi on Bereishis 1:3). (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 149a)

NEVER GIVE UP

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"G-d said to Moshe, 'Stretch out your hand towards the heavens, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt. The darkness will be palpable.'" (10:21)

The Rosh in his commentary on our *parsha* asks: Why didn't Dathan and Aviram die during the plague of darkness like the other wicked people (as described in Chazal)?

He explains that they were spared because they never gave up the hope of being redeemed.

This means that even someone as wicked as Dathan and Aviram can experience Hashem's salvation if he does not lose hope of Hashem redeeming him from his "personal Egypt."

MAINTAINING MORALITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Moshe raised his hand toward the sky. There was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days." (10:22)

The Midrash tells us that the plague of darkness enabled the Jews - who were not affected by it - to enter the Egyptians' homes unnoticed and see their valuable possessions.

Later, when the Jews were freed, they asked the Egyptians for their valuables, both as restitution for generations of servitude and in order to fulfill G-d's promise to Avraham that his progeny would leave their exile with great wealth.

If an Egyptian denied having a particular valuable, the Jew could say that he saw it in his home and even tell him where it was located.

Although the Jews could have simply taken the Egyptians' valuables during the plague of darkness (and therefore avoided testing the Egyptians' honesty later), they knew that one must not take something belonging to someone else without permission, even if he owes it to him.

From this we learn that although it is imperative that we elevate the spiritual potentials inherent within materiality, we must do so pleasantly and peacefully, faithfully adhering to the moral code of the Torah. (Hitva'aduyot 5746, vol. 1, pp. 90-91) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

THE SOURCE OF IT ALL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"But for all of Bnei Yisrael there was light in their dwellings." (10:23)

The Egyptians, like many ancient peoples, assumed that the opposing forces of day and night - light and darkness - were the manifestations of two opposing deities. G-d therefore caused darkness and light to occur simultaneously, so the Egyptians could see that nature is ruled by one supreme power.

We, too, should realize that both the "darkness" and the "light" in our lives originate in the one and only G-d. We can then realize that the darkness is really an opportunity for us to bring more Divine light into our lives. This hastens the advent of both our own personal redemption and the Redemption of the world at large. (Ohr HaTorah, Bo, p. 250; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5663, pp. 83-84) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

THE WORST DARKNESS

Chiddushei HaRim

"They [the Egyptians] did not see one another, nor did any of them rise from his place." (10:23)

The worst darkness is the blindness in which one person will not "see another," refusing to notice another person's misery and help.

One who will not "see another" will become incapable of "rising from his place"; that is, incapable of growth and development.

BLINDING PURSUITS

Avnei Ezel

"They [the Egyptians] did not see one another, nor did any of them rise from his place." (10:23)

This may also have been the thought of the Sages of the Midrash when they stated that the darkness that enveloped the land of Egypt was as thick as a golden dinar. The pursuit of the golden dinar causes people to be selfish so that they become unwilling and unable to "see" others and their needs.

UNIQUE DIAMONDS

Reb Baruch of Mezhibuz

"But for all of Bnei Yisrael there was light in their dwellings." (10:23)

Every Jew has a Divine spark within him. This spark shines like a diamond. However, it depends on where one finds the diamond. In some, the diamond is found in Torah and prayer; in some, it may be found in food and drink; in some, it may be in the pocket; and in others, it may be found in the heart.

LEARNING FROM ALL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Moshe said, 'You will also provide us with feast-offerings and ascent-offerings so that we may offer them up to Hashem, our G-d.'" (10:25)

Allegorically, Moshe was saying that the Jewish people's own spiritual resources are not sufficient; in order to serve G-d fully, we must sometimes also make use of resources provided by the world at large.

This includes not only physical resources but the lessons of history. It is for this reason that the Torah, before listing the commandments that G-d requires us to obey, describes the creation of the world and the events that led to the Giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. This is because there are lessons in proper conduct and in our relationship with G-d that we need to learn from observing nature and human history.

As the Ba'al Shem Tov put it, a lesson in how to fulfill our Divine mission can be learned from everything that Divine providence arranges for us to see. (Hitva'aduyot 5746, vol. 2, pp. 427-433) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

WILLING TO SACRIFICE

Malbim

"And our livestock, as well, will go with us - not a hoof will be left - for from it we shall take to serve Hashem, our G-d; and we will not know how we shall serve Hashem until we arrive there." (10:26)

Moshe said to Pharaoh: "Our cattle will go with us of their own free will, for they are willing and ready to die in order to be offered up as sacrifices to G-d."

The Sages related that the bullock that Eliyahu HaNavi wished to offer as a sacrifice to G-d on Har Carmel (Melachim I 18:19-39) ran to the altar of his own accord, while the bullock that the false prophets planned to slaughter on the altar of Baal refused to go.

This teaches us the proper spirit in which to worship G-d. If even a mindless beast offers itself to G-d of its own accord, then we humans, who are endowed with intelligence, should certainly do so of our own free will.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE WORTH

Chidushei HaRim

"...and we will not know how we shall serve Hashem until we arrive there." (10:26)

We are unaware of the true worth of our service to Hashem and our observance of the mitzvos. We will not fully comprehend until we are judged at the appropriate time.

That is why the *pasuk* says, "And we will not know how we shall serve Hashem until we arrive there."

SLAYING THE INTELLECT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d said to Moshe, 'I will send one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt.'" (11:1)

Allegorically, the term "firstborn" refers to the intellect, the first faculty of the soul that emerges in our conscious minds. The intellect is followed by the emotions and the faculties of expression.

It is self-evident that natural human intellect cannot grasp G-d's essence. None of us has the capability to fully understand the true nature or essence of G-d on our own. Nonetheless, we can still "grasp" G-d's essence non-intellectually, through the inner yearning of the heart (see Zohar 3:289b). In order to reveal this yearning, however, we have to temporarily suspend our intellect in order that it not obstruct our experience of our heart's inner dimension.

"Egypt" in Hebrew (Mitzrayim) means "limitations." In order to completely liberate ourselves from "Egypt" - that is, from all the limitations in our lives that keep us from relating directly to G-d - the first stage is to "slay the Egyptian firstborn," which allegorically means to temporarily "neutralize" our limited, human intellect. This way, our hearts' inner yearning for G-d can assert itself and energize our lives. (Ma'amarei Admor HaZakein HaKetzarim, pp. 33-34) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

CUTTING ALL TIES

Sefas Emes

"When [Pharaoh] shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out from here altogether." (11:1)

G-d wanted no trace of Egypt's impurity to remain with the Jews. He therefore brought it about that they would be "thrust out" from there. By literally expelling the Jews from Egypt, Pharaoh broke off all their ties with Egypt so that they no longer had any contact with the corruption in the land of their exile and could easily and speedily rise to the superior moral level at which they would be worthy of the appellation "host of G-d."

Had Pharaoh allowed them to depart in a spirit of peace and goodwill, a "clean break" in this sense would have been impossible.

FAVORABLE KINDNESS

Ostrovitzer Rebbe

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

When Jews perform deeds of kindness and help each other, especially in times of need, then even their enemies will notice the favor that Hashem has granted them.

KINDNESS BREEDS KINDNESS

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

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

Moshe Rabbeinu instructed the Jewish People to collect valuables from their Egyptian neighbors before they left Egypt. “Let them borrow, each man from his friend (רעהו) and each woman from her friend (רעותה), silver vessels and golden vessels” (11:2). Why does the Torah use the word רעהו - friend, to describe the Egyptians?

The Vilna Gaon zt'l (Kol Eliyahu) explains that actually, Hashem requested that the Jewish nation should first borrow clothing and valuable utensils from one another. That created an atmosphere of *chessed* in the world. Only then, when they asked the Egyptians to lend them gold and silver utensils and expensive clothing did they agree. This is because *chessed* generates more *chessed*. The *chessed* the Yidden did with one another swayed the Egyptians hearts to do kindness with the Jewish nation.

PROMISED WEALTH

Sichos Tzaddikim

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

The Hebrew word “*na*,” which G-d employed in commanding Moshe to speak to the people (“Speak now”), is an expression that always denotes entreaty. Here it means: “I entreat you to do that which will follow, so that Avraham, that righteous man, may not say: ‘The prophecy that the Jews should serve the Egyptians and that the Egyptians should afflict them, He permitted to be fulfilled, but the promise that, afterwards, they should leave Egypt with immense wealth, He did not fulfill for them.’” (Rashi)

G-d’s promise that “afterwards, they shall leave Egypt with immense wealth” could be construed to refer to a higher, spiritual wealth, meaning that the Jews were to take with them from Egypt not mere silver and gold but whatever sparks of goodness and holiness they could find among the Egyptians. But then Avraham might have protested, saying. “The prophecy that the Jews should serve the Egyptians and that the Egyptians should afflict them G-d fulfilled in an extremely obvious manner so that every Jew - even the simplest among them - could sense it. Therefore, it is only right that the promise that ‘afterwards, they shall leave Egypt with immense ‘wealth’ should also come true, not symbolically but literally, so that every Jew may be able to see the ‘wealth’ with his or her own eyes.”

It was out of these considerations that G-d commanded the Jews to ask their Egyptian neighbors for vessels of silver and gold to take with them when they left the land.

FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

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

G-d informs Moshe of the final plague and tells Moshe to “please ask them [the Jewish people] to borrow... silver vessels and golden vessels” (11:2). Rashi explains that leaving Egypt with wealth would satisfy a promise G-d had made to Avraham. However, G-d could have easily made gold and silver available through other means, and G-d’s use of the word “please” in this instance is so noteworthy that it warrants analysis.

Rabbi Henschel Leibowitz suggests that the people’s request for gold and silver was meant to instill a sense of self-worth within them, compensate them for their hundreds of years of slave labor, and teach them to speak up for themselves. Respecting themselves enough to stand up for their rights isn’t something that can simply be taught; it needs to be practiced. G-d’s request was the beginning of the Jews’ transformation into a nation that fights for what is right and fitting, and that can be a lesson for us as well. G-d’s instruction not only teaches us that it’s right to stand up for ourselves, but that we should regularly engage in advocating for what others rightfully deserve.

RESPECTED BY ALL

HaDerash VeHalyun

“Moreover, the man Moshe was very great in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of Pharaoh’s servants and in the eyes of the people.” (11:3)

It is rare that someone is accepted and respected in equal measure by both the aristocracy and the masses. In most cases, someone popular with the masses will be despised by higher society, and someone who enjoys the upper classes’ respect will be disliked by common people, for each class of society has its own standards and requirements.

What was so unusual about Moshe’s personality was that he was respected not only by “Pharaoh’s servants” - Egypt’s nobility - but also by the Egyptian masses.

AMIDST THE DARKNESS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“So said G-d, ‘At around midnight, I will go out into the midst of Egypt.’” (11:4)

All seems blackest at midnight, yet it is precisely then that redemption and salvation began. “Around midnight” indicates that it is very difficult to know exactly when salvation will come, but we must know that it lies waiting to spring at the darkest moment.

This teaching also applies to the New Moon. It is difficult to know exactly when the New Moon appears; Moshe himself did not understand what a New Moon looked like until G-d showed it to him (Rashi on Shemos 12:2). (Likutey Halakhos I, p. 117a)

By calling the Jewish nation “My firstborn son” (Shemos 4:22), G-d saw the good in the Jews in Egypt, even at their lowest point and darkest moment. Our Sages speak highly of the practice of rising at *chatzos*, in the middle of the night, to beseech G-d to end the exile and bring about the Final Redemption. There is so much to accomplish at this hour because *chatzos* represents the ability to find the light and good within the evil and the darkness. (Likutey Halakhos, I, p. 5b)

A MIDNIGHT MOMENT

Baal Shem Tov

“So said G-d, ‘At around midnight, I will go out into the midst of Egypt.’” (11:4)

The verse states, “The spirit of G-d was hovering over the face of the water. And G-d said: ‘Let there be light’” (Bereishis 1:2-3).

What is the spirit of G-d? It is the soul within you. It hovers over the surface of your water, meaning the Torah that you study, because the Torah is compared to water. You hover with all your soul over a single topic, unable to continue your journey through the ocean of Torah wisdom, because you cannot reach a true conclusion in a topic with which you are experiencing difficulty. You hover because you care too deeply to move on.

G-d then announces, “Let there be light!” He commands that your eyes be illuminated by the light of Torah, so that you can resolve the matter with sudden clarity.

“At around midnight, I will go out into the midst of Egypt.” The word *ka’chatzos*, at around midnight, indicates a doubt whether that precise moment belongs to the first or second half of the night. *Ka’chatzos* alludes to a Torah concept that lacks clarity.

Due to your diligence in toiling over the issue, G-d announces, “I will go out into the midst of Egypt.” G-d intervenes to rescue you from your intellectual constraint - *Mitzrayim* (Egypt) is related to *meitzarim* (constraint). He will illuminate your eyes with the Torah’s truth.

SIMPLE SINCERITY

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

“But against all the Children of Israel, a dog will not sharpen its tongue...” (11:7)

The Chasam Sofer quotes the Gemara (Sanhedrin 60a) that says that when Eliyahu HaNavi is in town dogs play, and when the *malach ha’maves* - the Angel of death, is in town, the dogs bark.

If so, we would have expected the dogs to be barking in full force during *makkas bechoros*, and yet the *pasuk* tells us that ולכל בני ישראל לא יחרץ כלב לשונו. How did this happen?

The Chasam Sofer explains that the dogs did not bark at *makkas bechoros* because there was no *malach ha’maves* at *makkas bechoros*. Hashem Himself performed the plague. Therefore, the dogs did not start barking.

We can infer this from the words of our *pasuk*: ולכל בני ישראל לא יחרץ כלב לשונו - and why not? Because, as the *pasuk* continues, למען תדעון אשר יפלה ה' בין מצרים ובין ישראל - “In order [that] you should know that I, Myself, differentiated between Egypt and Israel.”

If you want a proof that it was Hashem Himself who brought *makkas bechoros*, it is found in the fact that the dogs did not bark.

Another lesson that emerges from this *pasuk* is a warning to *Bnei Yisrael* not to think one thing in one’s heart but say another with one’s mouth. When davening, concentrate on the words, their translation, and their meaning, and keep in mind to Whom we are praying so that our heart and our words are in sync.

Likewise, in business, don’t say one thing but mean another. Be honest, speak clearly, and say what you mean.

In every relationship, be authentic and genuine.

- ולכל ישראל - all Jews
- לא יחרץ - don’t be too clever
- כלב לשונו - K’lev, what they say should be what they mean (in their heart). (Idis She’B’idis, p. 157)

CONFUSED CANINE

Rav Aharon Yaakov Greenberg

“But against all the Children of Israel, a dog will not sharpen its tongue...” (11:7)

Chazal tell us that dogs bark when the Angel of Death is in town and become playful when Eliyahu HaNavi is in town (Bava Kamma 60a). That night in Egypt, when the *geulah* was happening at the same time that the Egyptian firstborn were dying, the dogs were confused. As a result, lo *yecheratz kelev lishono* - the dogs in Egypt just kept quiet.

COMPASSION TOWARDS ALL

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“And he [Moshe] went forth from Pharaoh’s presence in burning anger.” (11:8)

As Moshe forewarns Pharaoh of the impending tenth and final plague, the *pasuk* reads that Moshe exits from Pharaoh with “burning anger” (11:8). Why would Moshe be so angry with Pharaoh, and why only now, with the very last plague?

Rav Shimon Schwab suggests that Moshe's anger resulted from Pharaoh's reckless indifference toward human life and G-d's creations that are about to perish in the final plague. The destruction from this plague is so powerful that the Torah reveals that a plague such as this "has never been and shall never be again" (11:6). Despite the awful treatment from our oppressors in Egypt and Pharaoh's subsequent disregard for lives lost, it behooves us to rise above, like Moshe, and instead challenge apathy and have compassion for all victims.

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"And he [Moshe] went forth from Pharaoh's presence in burning anger." (11:8)

After Moshe relayed to Pharaoh Hashem's warning about the final of the ten plagues, מכת בכורות (the death of the firstborn), the Torah says, ויצא מעם פרעה בחרי אף - "He left Pharaoh's presence angry."

What is the meaning of Moshe's חרי אף - anger? Why was he "angrier" now than after all the previous times when he warned Pharaoh about the consequences of his ongoing defiance?

Rav Zaydel Epstein explained this *pasuk* to mean that Moshe was disappointed with Pharaoh. As evil as Pharaoh was, Moshe never lost his sense of הכרת הטוב (gratitude) for having been brought as an infant into Pharaoh's palace, where he was cared for and raised. Moshe maintained a delicate balance between firmly confronting and challenging Pharaoh, and feeling profound gratitude for all that Pharaoh had done for him.

Moshe did not want Pharaoh to be punished. Throughout this process, Rav Zaydel writes, Moshe hoped that Pharaoh would change, that his heart would be softened, that he would finally recognize the truth and obey G-d.

This is what Moshe wanted. He felt indebted to Pharaoh, and in this indebtedness, he genuinely hoped that Pharaoh would yield to G-d and avoid punishment.

And so now, after delivering the final warning, seeing that nothing had worked, and Pharaoh remained defiant, ויצא - מעם פרעה בחרי אף - Moshe left upset, disappointed, and exasperated.

There is a remarkable command in Sefer Devarim (23:8): לא תתעב מצרי כי גר היית בארצו - "Do not despise an Egyptian, because you were a foreigner in his land."

The Egyptians treated our ancestors with unspeakable cruelty, enslaving them, using their infants as bricks and throwing them into the river. And for this reason, we are not to allow an Egyptian to marry into the Jewish People for ten generations.

But at the same time, we must never forget that when Yaakov's family faced grave danger, when they had no food, they were cared for in Egypt.

The Egyptians later enslaved them and killed their babies - but this does not entitle us to forget their earlier kindness. This is how far the Torah value of הכרת הטוב extends.

Our sense of indebtedness to someone does not end when that person treats us improperly.

Both as individuals and as a nation, we recognize the goodness that others have shown us even if we also have legitimate grievances against them.

THE TZADDIK'S COUNSEL

Rebbe Nachman

"Then all these servants of yours will come and bow down to me, saying: 'You and all the people who are at your feet - leave!' After that, I will go forth." (11:8)

The *tzaddikim* are called "feet" because of the advice that they give, which is compared to the feet upon which a person stands and walks.

The *tzaddikim* are also called "feet" because they go to the people in order to teach them G-d's word. (See Likutey Moharan I, 22:1)

The people who follow the *tzaddik* and accept his advice are considered to be his "feet." It is extremely beneficial for people to be attached to the *tzaddik*, for the "feet" sense what the mind sees.

Thus, our Sages (Mekhilta, Beshalach 3) teach that at the Splitting of the Sea, due to the presence of Moshe, a Jewish maidservant witnessed a revelation of G-d even greater than that experienced by the Prophet Yechezkel, who saw the Chariot of G-d.

"The people who are at your feet" - those who follow your advice and ways (Rashi).

"Feet" correspond to advice. The Jewish people are compared to the feet of the *tzaddik* in that his intellect far transcends their level.

The *tzaddik* must draw his intellect down to them by revealing some of his attainments, while at the same time keeping its full brightness concealed from them.

Thus, the word "feet" indicates drawing down spiritual insights from the *tzaddik*.

People who are spiritually sensitive realize that G-d consulted with their souls when He created the world. Though a person might feel lowly (i.e., the "feet"), the source of his soul is incredibly lofty.

If he sensitizes himself, he will be able to reconnect to that awesome moment, and thereby repent and draw close to G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 17:8)

MONTHS OF RENEWAL

Reb Noson of Breslov

"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)

The New Moon represents the smallest phase of the moon's cycle. Specifically at that time, the moon starts its new cycle. So too, even if a person is at his lowest level (or specifically because he is at his lowest level), he can still attain an incredible revelation of G-dliness to renew himself. This message is so important that it is the first *mitzvah* given to the Jews as a nation. (Likutey Halakhos III, p. 85a)

The commandment to sanctify the New Moon was the first *mitzvah* given to the Jews because it mirrors the realities of each person's life. Just as the moon waxes and wanes, every person experiences ups and downs throughout his lifetime. Just as the moon receives an illumination - a rectification - each month, each *mitzvah* a person performs rectifies his soul a little bit more. And just as the time will come when the moon will attain a full rectification of its blemish and "shine like the sun" (Yeshayahu 30:26), each person will ultimately attain his own rectification. (Likutey Halakhos III, p. 114a)

The word *Chodesh* (חודש, month) is related to the word *hischadshus* (התחדשות, renewal). Just as the moon waxes and waxes anew, the Jewish people - who possess the power of self-renewal - count their months according to the lunar cycle. (Likutey Halakhos I, p. 136)

Chodesh (חודש, month) implies *hischadshus* (התחדשות, renewal), the power to renew oneself continually, never backsliding into an "old" mentality. In contrast, the evil inclination is called an "old king" (Koheles 4:13). One who wishes to avoid the snares of the evil inclination should seek opportunities for renewal. (Likutey Halakhos III, p. 119a)

BRIGHTNESS DESPITE DARKNESS

Sefas Emes

"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)

The nations of the world build their calendar around the sun, while the Jewish people base theirs on the moon. This symbolizes the difference between the heathens and the Jews. The heathens can survive only as long as the light shines upon them. As soon as darkness descends upon them, they perish and disappear from the scene of history. But like the moon, which can shine even through the darkest night, the Jewish people can survive and spread light even in darkness.

CONSTANT OVERSIGHT

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

"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 this verse teaches that Nissan is to be the first in the order in which months are counted, while all the others are to be counted after it: Iyar is the second month, Sivan the third, and so on. The reason for this requirement is simple. For Jews, it is not enough to believe merely that Hashem created the world, for which Shabbos is our sign and our everlasting covenant; we must also believe that Hashem still continues to be the Creator and the Ruler of everything that happens to any human or animal. This is the lesson of the plagues and the Exodus, as narrated in the Torah.

This is why Nissan, the month in which the Exodus occurred, was chosen to be the first of the months, as a sign of Hashem's ongoing rulership over all people and events.

CONSTANT RENEWAL

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"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)

When Hashem presented to Moshe the instructions for the night of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, He introduced these instructions with the command *ראש חדשים* - the *mitzvah* of *קידוש החודש*, the system of declaring the new months based on the sighting of the new moon. (Nowadays, we use a fixed lunar calendar, but in ancient times, witnesses who saw the new moon would testify before the Sanhedrin, who would then declare the new month based on their testimony.) Rashi, in his famous opening comments to his Torah commentary, observes that this is *מצוה ראשונה שנצטוו בה ישראל* - the first *mitzvah* given to *Am Yisrael* as a nation.

What is the particular significance of this *mitzvah*, on account of which it was chosen to be the first *mitzvah* given to *Am Yisrael*?

One answer relates to the theme of *חידוש*, renewal. The month is called *חודש* precisely because it begins when the moon starts to renew itself, when it has reached its smallest point and now starts growing larger. The very first *mitzvah* given to *Am Yisrael* is the *mitzvah* that expresses the idea of renewal, that we are always capable of renewing ourselves just as the moon is renewed each month.

Each morning, we say about Hashem, *המחדש בטובו כל יום* - "Who renews each day, in His goodness, the act of creation." Rav Chaim of Volozhin, in *Nefesh HaChaim* (1:2), explains this to mean that the world exists only because G-d renews the act of creation at every moment.

The world was not just created and then put into motion; all of creation comes into existence anew at every fraction of a second.

This perspective on the world is especially empowering. It means that at every moment, we can recreate ourselves. If all of existence is created anew each fraction, then necessarily, we, too, are being created anew. Therefore, we are never “stuck” in the same place.

The way we were last year, last month, yesterday, or even the last moment, does not dictate who we are right now. At every moment, we have the capacity to change. Our past selves do not define who we are now and who we can be going forward.

This is why **החודש הזה לכם ראש חדשים** is such a crucial *mitzvah*. It tells us that we are endowed with the power of **חידוש**, of renewal, given the ability to recreate ourselves at any time.

Tu B'Shvat is observed in the dead of winter, when the trees are bare, when nature seems lifeless. But even then, beneath the surface, in the soil, processes are taking place preparing for the beautiful spring blossom.

This shows us that even when we seem spiritually “lifeless,” nevertheless, deep within our souls we have the capabilities that we need to blossom and to shine brightly. It is never too late to change and improve, regardless of our current condition.

החודש הזה לכם. At every moment, we have new opportunities, a chance to rewrite our story and recreate ourselves.

GLOWING IN THE DARK

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“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)

The Sefas Emes points out that unlike the rest of the world, which follows the solar calendar, *Klal Yisrael* follows the lunar calendar.

The reason for this is that while the rest of the world can only thrive when they have clarity, as the sun shines in the sky, the Jewish people have the unique ability to persevere and succeed even in the face of darkness.

Klal Yisrael can see the hand of Hashem and illuminate the world even when the world seems to be consumed by gloom and dread.

The Sefas Emes is teaching us what it means to be a Jew. As Jews, we must always look for the hand of Hashem. The secret to our success is realizing that Hashem is always present and with us.

Let us continue to see Hashem in our everyday, which will provide us with the light to not only survive but thrive.

WAYS TO CONNECT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“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)

The commandment to declare a new month whenever the moon begins anew its cycle of growth and decline is the first law that G-d gave to the Jewish people as a collective entity.

Moshe personifies the “downward” revelation of the Torah from on high, which we re-experience whenever we study the Torah. In contrast, Aharon personifies the “upward” striving of the soul toward Divinity, which we experience primarily in prayer.

It was therefore appropriate that G-d addressed the very first, all-encompassing commandment to us through both Moshe and Aharon, for the essence of the commandments is the connection between G-d and the people, the twin sides of which we experience through the study of the Torah and prayer. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5626, p. 41; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5632) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

DESIRING KINDNESS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev

“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)

In taking us out of Egypt, G-d exhibited His attribute of judgment against the Egyptians and His attribute of kindness toward the Jewish nation (Zohar 2:36a), as we say in our prayers, “All their firstborn you killed, but the firstborn of the Jewish people You redeemed.” This was a demonstration of the aspect of judgment that is contained within the attribute of loving-kindness.

On account of the kindness that G-d showed the Jewish people, He exhibited His trait of severity against their enemies. Accordingly, G-d displayed both attributes when He took us out of Egypt.

Which attribute does G-d prefer?

Certainly, the attribute of loving-kindness, as the verse says, “He does not maintain His anger forever, because He desires kindness” (Michah 7:18). It is only on account of His kindness toward the Jewish people that severe judgments are executed against their enemies.

This is what is meant by the verse “This month shall be for you... It shall be for you the first.” The renewal of G-d's two attributes is “for you,” meaning “for that which is relevant to you.” Namely, His loving-kindness was for the sake of the Jewish people, and His judgments were necessitated by that kindness.

That is why it says, “I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out” (Shemos 20:2), meaning, “Even though you witnessed both loving-kindness and severity when leaving Egypt, G-d’s will was principally directed and focused on that which was important to you: showing kindness by taking the Jewish people out of Egypt.”

The use of the Name *Havayah* in this verse indicates the attribute of loving kindness. This is what the Torah means when it says, “I am G-d... Who has taken you out” - that this was His true desire.

TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“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)

The Gemara (Gittin 60b), based on the pesukim in Parshas Ki Sisa, teaches us that Hashem structured the Torah to be in two parts: *Torah She’Bichsav* - the written Torah, and *Torah She’Baal Peh* - the oral Torah.

The Beis HaLevi in his *shailos u’teshuvos* asks why Hashem designed the Torah in this way. Why didn’t Hashem have the entire Torah written down to begin with? Wouldn’t that have been a much clearer and easier way to understand it?

The Beis HaLevi explains that Hashem wants *Klal Yisrael* to play an active role in the ongoing existence and development of Torah. He doesn’t want us to just be robotic and simply follow a manual. He wants the Jewish people to be invested in the transmitting of our mesorah. The Beis HaLevi illustrates with a metaphor: We, *Bnei Yisrael*, are the *klaf* that the Torah She Baal Peh is written on.

It is possible to suggest that this may be why Rosh Chodesh, which is the first *mitzvah* that Hashem commanded *Klal Yisrael* as a nation (recorded in this week’s *parshah*), is given even before Hashem gives us the Torah. On the surface, one could certainly wonder why Hashem would choose this *mitzvah* more than Shabbos, *emunah* or any other *mitzvah* for that matter. What about Rosh Chodesh is so fundamental to our relationship with Hashem? Yet, when you think about it, it makes a lot of sense. With the *mitzvah* of Rosh Chodesh, Hashem was communicating that He wanted to relinquish partial control over time in order to partner with *Klal Yisrael*. Similar to the Beis HaLevi’s explanation that we mentioned, Hashem wants us to play an active role in our relationship with Him. Hashem chose this *mitzvah* specifically to highlight that Judaism is not a spectator sport. Rather, Hashem wants us to get on the field and play our part.

Let us identify new ways to connect with Hashem, not by standing on the sidelines, but by getting in the game! Let’s look for new opportunities to strengthen our relationship with Hashem by actively pursuing new initiatives in our spiritual growth.

FREE WILL

Rabbi Ari Ciment

“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)

Everything is expected and yet permission is granted. (Avos 3:15)

How is this concept evident in our *parashah*?

Shemos 11:10 states: “Hashem hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he did not let the Children of Israel go out of his land.”

The very next chapter begins: “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.” (Ibid. 12:2)

Is there any connection between Pharaoh’s stubborn reluctance to let the Jews go and the first *mitzvah* given to the Jewish nation, namely *kiddush ha’chodesh*, sanctifying the new moon?

My father, Dr. Larry Ciment, stated that the common denominator here is in “free will.”

Many argue that Pharaoh lacked free will because G-d hardened his heart, and so how could he be held accountable?

An interesting approach, at least partially attributed to the Seforno (7:3), is that G-d restored his free will by hardening his heart! The *makkos* delivered to the Egyptians were removing his inherent desire to enslave them, and thus He hardened the heart of Pharaoh to once again restore his “free choice.”

Similarly, by the sanctifying of the new month, we learn about destiny versus will. The members of the Sanhedrin were experts in astronomy and knew exactly when the new moon would have appeared and where it would have been visible. Nevertheless, the sanctification depended on the testimony of two witnesses who saw the crescent of the new moon (Rosh Hashanah 22). G-d left the declaration of our months up to the “free will” of the beis din in this way!

In both cases, then, G-d is showing us that He doesn’t want us to view Him as a rigid controller; a completely fatalistic approach is, in fact, not Jewish.

And this is what Rabbi Akiva means in Avos when he says, “הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה” - Everything is expected, and yet permission is given!”

Takeaway Messages: Although the all-knowing G-d may know our destiny, free will is given to each one of us to shape and flavor that destiny.

Hence, the connection between Pharaoh’s stubborn reluctance to let the Jews go and the first *mitzvah* given to the Jewish nation, namely *kiddush ha’chodesh* (sanctifying the new moon): They are both examples of G-d giving heed to “human choice.”

Pharaoh’s hardened heart and the new moon are thus examples of free will.

LESSON IN HUMILITY

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"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)

The Chida explains why it is that the Jewish calendar is lunar and not solar-based.

The *pasuk* says (Devarim 7:7): לא מרבכם מכל העמים חשק - "Not because you are more numerous than all the peoples did Hashem desire you and choose you, for you are the fewest of all the peoples."

The Gemara (Chullin 89a) explains the *pasuk* to mean that what endears us to Hashem is the fact that even when He charges us with greatness, we do not make ourselves big or large but rather we act with humility.

Although He gave greatness to Avraham Avinu and told him that he was to be אב המון גוים - "a father of many nations," Avraham Avinu nevertheless was able to say, ואנכי עפר ואפר - "I am but dust and ash!" Although He gave greatness to Moshe and Aharon, they were able to say, ואנחנו מה - "And what are we?" Dovid HaMelech said of himself, ואנכי תולעת ולא איש - "I am worm and not man."

Therefore, Rashi explains the words לא מרבכם to mean: "you do not make yourselves large but little, and therefore Hashem desires you as His nation."

This lesson is also learnt from *kiddush ha'chodesh* - sanctifying the new month, which takes place when the moon is at its smallest. The Gemara (Chullin 60b) cites the famous complaint of the moon as to why Hashem created them equal in size. The moon turned to Hashem and complained, אי אפשר לשני מלכים שישתמשו בכתר אחד - "Two kings cannot wear the same crown," and as a result Hashem shrunk the moon, making it smaller than the sun.

Each month, when we proclaim the new month by seeing the moon in its smallest state, we are reminded of the consequences of *gaavah* - arrogance and pride, and are moved to live a life of humility.

Thus, when the *pasuk* says, החדש הזה לכם, it means that the fact that we count the months according to the moon should be a lesson for you (לכם) about humility.

FIERY DEVOTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Do not eat any of it half-cooked or cooked in water, but only roasted over the fire, together with its head, its legs, and its internal organs." (12:9)

Allegorically, the "head," "legs," and "internal organs" of the Pesach offering signify the three dimensions of spiritual life. The "head" is the study of the Torah; the "legs" - the limbs of action - are the active performance of the commandments; and the "internal organs" refer to prayer, the inner life of the soul.

All three must be totally permeated by the "fire" of holiness, i.e., warmth and enthusiasm for G-d. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5747-5751, pp. 364-369) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

FLEEING EGYPT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You must eat [the lamb or kid goat] in haste. It is the Pesach sacrifice to G-d." (12:11)

Although the Jews had renounced their involvement in Egyptian culture, the glamour of Egyptian materialism still maintained an inner grip on them.

G-d therefore had to hurry them out of Egypt while they were still sufficiently impressed by the ten plagues that they were willing to leave the only home they knew and venture into the double unknown of the inhospitable desert and a lifestyle of holiness.

The same is true whenever we go out of a personal "Egypt," i.e., whenever we leave behind the familiarity of a previous way of living and rise to a new level of Divine consciousness and its accompanying way of life.

In order to stay on our new path, it is crucial to sustain our momentum and take all necessary measures in order not to slide back into previous habits.

In the Messianic Redemption, however, this caution will be unnecessary. Since this redemption will be absolute and encompass all reality, there will be no possibility of backsliding into the mentality of materialism. (Tanya, chapter 31; Ohr HaTorah, Bo, pp. 291-2; Toras Shmuel, VeKachah (5637), chapters 1-4; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5737, pp. 191-199) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

UNITED SACRIFICE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"You must eat [the lamb or kid goat] in haste. It is the Pesach sacrifice to G-d." (12:11)

The Jews offered the Paschal lamb in the heart of Egypt, a land filled with idolatry. Because of their courage and self-sacrifice, this offering ascended to G-d and caused His revelation to occur.

The *maror* (bitter herbs) which were eaten together with the Paschal lamb (Shemos 12:8) bring home the message that one can earn a revelation of G-dliness if he is willing to sacrifice for it. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 17a-34)

The law of the Pesach sacrifice stipulates that it must be eaten in one house, even if many families participate in the meal. It is impossible to receive the light of the Torah except in unison with others.

For this reason, the four passages of the hand-*tefillin* are written on one parchment and housed in one box.

AVOIDING VIOLENCE

Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik

"I will go through the land of Egypt on this night and strike down every [male] firstborn in the land of Egypt." (12:12)

On the night of the Plague of the Firstborn, the Jews were explicitly warned not to walk outside. Of course, Hashem could have allowed them to go out and ensured that no harm would befall them. But there was another purpose there.

When a nation that had been ruled and often oppressed by others gains their independence, they tend to exact revenge upon their former occupiers, killing, looting and destroying any semblance of what was. The Jews were forbidden to go out on this night of death, lest they feel the psychological impulse of a former slave to violently seek vengeance against the Egyptians, their former masters!

SPIRITUAL LIBERATION

Meshech Chochmah

"You shall celebrate it as a festival to Hashem; throughout your generations you shall keep it a festival by a decree forever." (12:14)

If one considers the festival commemorating the Exodus from Egypt as nothing more than the anniversary of liberation from physical oppression and slavery, it would be justifiable to argue that there was no sense in celebrating it as long as the Jews continue to be exiled and enslaved among the nations of the world.

But if the Exodus is understood in its proper meaning as the spiritual liberation of our people in which G-d Himself led us from the corruption of Egypt to take us to Himself as His people and to have His Presence rest upon us so that we became a holy nation, then it can be readily seen why the festival of Pesach must be observed - even while we remain in physical exile and suffer from persecution and oppression.

The Torah states: "You shall celebrate it as a festival to Hashem." If you will celebrate this festival as "a festival to Hashem," as a Divinely-commanded festival marking the anniversary of the Jews' spiritual liberation, then "you shall keep it a festival by a decree forever"; i.e., you will be able to observe it always, even through the worst periods of your exile.

ATTAINING SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

Rebbe Nachman

"You should eat matzos for seven days." (12:15)

Matzos (מצות) is an acronym for the phrase *Tzedakah Tatzil Mi'maves* (צדקה תציל ממות, charity saves from death) (Mishlei 10:2). (Just as matzah is a symbol of physical freedom, giving charity is a sign of spiritual freedom.) (See (Likutey Moharan I, 201)

SUSTENANCE FROM ABOVE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"You should eat matzos for seven days." (12:15)

The Jews tasted manna in the cakes they took with them from Egypt (Kiddushin 38a).

The holiday of Pesach reinforces our faith in G-d and His Providence. Matzah, the central food of Pesach, represents the ability to rely totally upon G-d to sustain us as He pleases, whether in wealth or otherwise. After gaining the benefits of this spiritual food during Pesach, we can then partake of *chametz* (leaven) after the holiday, for we will not waver in our belief that G-d provides for us. The Zohar (II, 183b) calls matzah the "bread of healing," since it first heals our souls and then allows us to partake safely of material nourishment. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 226)

GRABBING INTELLECT

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Guard the matzos..." (12:17)

Do not read *Matzos* (מצות), but *Mitzvos* (מצוות, commandments). Just as you would not let matzah ferment, don't let a *mitzvah* ferment. If one comes your way, do it immediately. (Rashi)

Matzah represents faith, an acknowledgement that we cannot understand everything in life.

Chametz (leaven) represents an inflated perspective, the belief that we can understand things that are beyond us.

When a person begins to draw close to G-d, he must strengthen his resolve to serve G-d with absolute faith, even though he doesn't understand everything.

Each *mitzvah* is a channel for G-dly intellect. When we perform a *mitzvah*, we draw intellect with which to come closer to G-d and understand His ways. Therefore, we should never delay the performance of a *mitzvah*, but grab hold of it as soon as it comes our way.

REVELATIONS OF COMPASSION

Reb Noson of Breslov

"For seven days, leavening should not be found in your homes." (12:19)

According to the *halakhah*, the search for *chametz* (leaven) is conducted on the night of the fourteenth of Nisan, the eve of Pesach. We begin our search only on the fourteenth of the month because the first thirteen days of Nisan correspond to the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion.

One who works to attain these Thirteen Attributes (by emulating the Attributes) is then able to search for and reveal that which is hidden, doing away with the forbidden and taking in the permitted. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 180)

UNITED REDEMPTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Moshe summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, ‘Draw for and take for your families one of the flock and slaughter the Pesach offering.’” (12:21)

Goats are usually black, while sheep are typically white. The dark goat therefore evokes the imagery of a life devoid of Divine light, i.e., the former life of a penitent sinner. In contrast, the white, unassertive sheep evokes the imagery of a pure life unsullied by sin and undefiled by a skewed ego, i.e., the life of a righteous person.

The fact that both sheep or goats may be used for the Pesach offering reflects the fact that this offering was required of every Jew, regardless of his or her spiritual status. Whether we are righteous or on the way to becoming righteous, we all have to internalize the message of the Exodus from Egypt and be redeemed from the limitations that prevent us from progressing in our relationship with G-d. (Sefer HaMa’amarim 5629, pp. 105 ff, 120-121; Sefer HaMa’amarim 5729, pp. 153-158) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

UNITED HUMILITY

Reb Yechezkel of Kuzmir

“And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. (12:22)

This is to teach you that even if you are as lowly as the hyssop, which grows low on the ground, as long as you are bound together into one united group, ready to “dip it in blood” - give of your lifeblood for Judaism, you will be able to “strike (lit., reach) the lintel”; you will be able to attain high places.

READYING FOR REDEMPTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. (12:22)

The right doorpost signified good deeds, the left doorpost signified prayer, and the lintel above them signified the study of the Torah. Together, these three constitute a complete, balanced life that enables us to fulfill our Divine mission of making the world into G-d’s home.

The door itself signified our readiness to obey G-d’s will, since this commitment is the entrance into our active partnership with G-d to rectify the world. The lowly hyssop used to apply the blood to the door frame signified the self-abnegation we must cultivate in order to be receptive to G-d’s presence in our lives. The blood itself signified the vitality of our animating soul, with which we must perform good deeds, pray, and study the Torah.

Every personal exodus from an “Egypt” requires that we humbly apply our vitality to action, prayer, and study of the Torah, all performed with renewed commitment to our Divine mission in life. (Sefer HaMa’amarim 5632, vol. 1, pp. 129, 284-285; Sefer HaMa’amarim 5678, pp. 239, 244-245; Sefer HaMa’amarim 5706, pp. 69-70, 76) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

FRESH START

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“G-d will pass over the entrance [to your homes] and not allow the destructive plague to enter your houses.” (12:23)

The purpose of the first nine plagues was to bring the Egyptians to the knowledge of G-d (Shemos 7:3-5). The Jewish people already believed in G-d, so there was no concern that these plagues would strike them.

The tenth plague, however, was meant to slay the firstborn of the idolatrous Egyptians, not to educate them. Since many Jews had lapsed in their loyalty to G-d during their Egyptian slavery - some even serving idols - there was an acute need to counteract their liability to the death penalty.

This was accomplished by the Pesach sacrifice. The lamb was one of the deities of Egypt, so by slaughtering a lamb, the Jews were risking offending the Egyptians, thereby putting their lives in jeopardy. The Jewish people’s willingness to suffer martyrdom in order to fulfill G-d’s instructions expressed their essential bond with Him.

The merit of this act neutralized their culpability for whatever sins they had committed during their slavery in Egypt.

Similarly, whenever we summon up our unconditional and genuine devotion to G-d, it wipes our past, blemished record clean, affording us a fresh start in our relationship with Him. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 864-866) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

SKIPPING THE ENTRANCE

Reb Baruch of Mezhibuz

“G-d will pass over the entrance...” (12:23)

Our Sages teach: “Open the door as little as the sharp end of a needle and I will open the door as wide as the door of a hall” (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:3). Heaven will help those who will make a beginning to repent. The repentant must first open the door and Heaven will open it wider.

However, in Egypt, the Jews had been influenced and immersed in the impurities of the land. Therefore, it was impossible for them to show any signs of repentance. The Almighty had pity and opened the door for redemption, for as the Torah tells us, “Hashem will skip over the entrance.”

HOLY HOMES

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“G-d will pass over the entrance [to your homes] and not allow the destructive plague to enter your houses.” (12:23)

A large section of Parshas Bo is dedicated to the *korban pesach*, the sacrifice which *Bnei Yisrael* offered on the night of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, and which is to be brought each year in commemoration of this miracle, on the 14th of Nissan.

Significantly, the word בית - “home” - appears fourteen times throughout this section. Indeed, the home and the family play a crucial role in this *korban*. *Bnei Yisrael* were commanded to take a *sheep* לביית אבות שה לביית - a sheep for each household (12:3). Moreover, they were commanded to remain home throughout the night (12:2) - לא תצאו איש - מפתח ביתו עד בוקר.

When we consider the way the *korban pesach* was performed on the night of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, we will discover that the home was treated like the *Beis HaMikdash*. The blood was placed on the doorposts (12:22), paralleling the זריקת הדם, the sprinkling of the blood of the *korban* on the altar. And, whereas normally *korbanos* must be eaten in the *Beis HaMikdash*, or within the walls of Yerushalayim, the meat of the *korban pesach* was to be eaten inside home. The home became the *Beis HaMikdash*, the place where the blood was sprinkled and where the meat was consumed.

Significantly, this *mitzva* - to turn the home into a *Beis HaMikdash* - was given to *Bnei Yisrael* right at the beginning, as they were about to become a free nation, teaching us that from the Torah’s perspective, the center of religious life is the home. The heart of Jewish practice is found not in the *shul*, not in the yeshiva, not even in the *Beis HaMikdash* - but the Jewish home.

Rav Aharon Lewin, the Reisha Rav, noted that when a gentile enters a Jewish home, what does he notice? Bookcases full of sefarim, a *shtender*, pictures of rabbanim on the walls, and kiddush cups and other religious articles displayed in the breakfront. To him, the Jewish home resembles a synagogue - which it indeed should.

The Reisha Rav explained on this basis the famous *pasuk* in Sefer Yeshayahu (56:7) - כי ביתי בית תפילה יקרא לכל - העמים - “for My home shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.” This may be understood to mean that כל העמים, the Jewish home, will be looked upon by כל העמים, other nations, as a בית תפילה, a *shul*. In other faiths, the center of religious life is the house of worship. But for us, it is the home. The most important place where we put our values and ideals into practice is within the family unit. For good reason, then, the *korban pesach*, the *mitzva* given to our ancestors as they prepared to become a free, independent nation, revolved around the home and the family, because the home marks the focal point of religious life.

A similar notion is expressed earlier in the *parsha*, where we read that before the plague of locusts, Pharaoh was prepared to allow *Bnei Yisrael* to go and serve Hashem, and he asked, מי נמי ההולכים - “Who are the ones who are going?” (10:8). Pharaoh had assumed that since Moshe demanded that the people be allowed to leave to serve G-d, only members of the clergy needed to go. For a religious service, he figured, only the religious figures were included. Moshe replied, בנערינו ובזקננו נלך, בבננו - “We shall go with our young and with our elderly, with our sons and with our daughters... for we have a festival to G-d.”

Avodas Hashem is a חג, a joyous experience, and so it includes everybody. If serving Hashem was only a burden of responsibility, an arduous task, then indeed, it would be reserved for the spiritual elite. But *avodas Hashem* is about living with joy, with meaning and purpose, and so it is something in which everybody, not just the clergy, is included.

Torah life is for everybody, and thus the primary setting in which the Torah is to be practiced is the home, where we live and interact with one another. We are bidden to transform our homes into a *Beis HaMikdash*, and to live our lives as a חג לה', as joyous servants of the Almighty, together with our sons and our daughters, as a strong family unit devoted to *avodas Hashem*.

JEWISH IDENTITY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“G-d will pass over the entrance [to your homes] and not allow the destructive plague to enter your houses.” (12:23)

In preparation for the last plague, Moshe instructs the Jews to place blood from the lamb on their doorposts so that G-d will “*pasach*” their entrance. Rashi interprets *pasach* to mean that G-d will either “have pity” or “skip over” the Jewish homes (12:23) and smite only the Egyptian homes. While skipping over Jewish homes makes sense, why would Rashi translate G-d’s actions as having pity?

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig proposes that many Jews considered themselves Jewish Egyptians, after being enslaved and enduring the previous plagues. For the Jews that self-identified as Egyptian Jews, G-d happily skipped over and saved them. Those who identified themselves as Egyptians but still put the blood on their doorposts were saved as well, but out of pity rather than merit.

Identifying with our past is not only important and admirable; it is foundational to our identity, and it is that which enables us to actively identify as a Jew in the present.

As grateful as we must be for the freedoms and liberties of the country in which we live, we are forever indebted to our ancestors for getting us to this place so that we may thrive as a Jewish people.

OBSERVING OUR WORDS

Koznitzer Rebbe

"You shall observe this matter as a decree for yourself and for your children forever." (12:24)

The word used for "matter" in this verse is "*davar*," which can also mean "word."

This teaches us that one should heed his word and guard his tongue. This should be "a decree for yourself and for your children forever."

ADVANCING LEVELS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"You will say, 'It is a Pesach sacrifice to G-d...'" (12:27)

The verse implies that when you speak the words of the Torah and prayer, it is a "Pesach" - that is, the word "Pesach" (פסח) can be broken into the two words for "a mouth that speaks" (פה סח). Contemplate and analyze this well.

The verse thus tells us, "If you do this, then you will experience the transformation of it, i.e., the hidden third person, alluding to G-d's hiddenness, into 'to G-d,' i.e., the state in which G-d's light is revealed to you."

(In the merit of their Torah and prayers, the Jewish people advance from one spiritual level to the next, experiencing greater revelations of G-d's light.)

When we wish to bring an offering today, in our bitter exile, when we no longer can bring offerings, the Torah tells us, "you shall say it is a Pesach offering to G-d."

That is, "say words of Torah and prayer with a focused mind, so that they are exclusively to G-d." In this way, the words of Torah and prayer are substitutes for the offerings.

MOUTH THAT SPEAKS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"You will say, 'It is a Pesach sacrifice to G-d, Who passed over the homes of the Jewish people in Egypt...'" (12:27)

Pesach (פסח, Passover) is like *Peh Sach* (פה סח, a mouth that speaks). *Mitzayyim* (מצרים, Egypt) is like *Meitzar ha'garon* (מיצר הגרון, the narrowness of the neck) - i.e., the narrow area that houses the vocal chords, which produce speech.

In order to leave the exile, we must engage in holy speech and recount the miracles of G-d.

The central idea of *Pesach* (פסח, Passover) is *Peh Sach* (פה סח, a mouth that speaks). When a person articulates his good desires and longings for G-d, he merits to a *Pesach*, an exodus from his spiritual exile.

REWARDED FOR SHOWING UP

Rabbi Ari Ciment

"And the Children of Israel went and did so; as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did." (12:28)

There are four types among those who attend the study hall. One who goes but does nothing has gained the rewards of going. One who does [study] but does not go to the study hall-has gained the rewards of doing. One who goes and does, is a *chassid*. One who neither goes nor does is wicked. (Avos 5:14)

According to this ethic, if you go to do a good deed like learning or visiting the sick, and you either don't learn anything that day or the sick person you went to visit was not there, you still get reward for going. But where is the source for such reward? And why should you get reward?

Moshe teaches the whole Pesach service to be observed for all time. At the end of the fifth *aliyah*, the Torah (Shemos 12:28) says: "And the Children of Israel went and did so; as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did."

But if the elders are being instructed on the first of Nissan to do something on the fourteenth of Nissan, why does it say that *Bnei Yisrael* "went and did so"? There could not have been any "did so" because "did so" didn't occur until the fourteenth!

Quoting a midrash, Rashi beautifully answers the enigma: "So the Children of Israel went and did": Now did they already do [it]? Wasn't this said to them on Rosh Chodesh? But since they accepted upon themselves [to do it], Scripture credits them for it as if they had [already] done [it]... [They] went and did: Scripture counts also the going, to give reward for the going and reward for the deed. (Mechilta)

The Tanna in Avos likewise says that הולק ואינו עושה שכר - there is an aspect of going that, irrespective of the deed accomplished, is rewardable in and of itself!

But the next step is understanding why. Why should going count as a *mitzvah*, and which *mitzvah* would it count as? The answer can be derived from the other quintessential example of the power of going to do a *mitzvah*, irrespective of whether you can perform an actual deed:

"Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and the stranger that is within your gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear Hashem your G-d, and observe to do all the words of this law."

Why should little ones go and hear the reading of the Torah by the king? Surely it is no *mitzvah* for them, as they can't comprehend what they are listening to? Rashi says the children come למביאיהם - לתת שכר - "so that reward would be given to those who bring them along" (Chagigah 3a). But if you read the alternate reading in the Hebrew, brought down by the Maseches Sofrim: "לקבל שכר" - "מביאתם" - just the fact that the children were there gave them (the children themselves!) a reward beyond any requirement of comprehension but just for being there!

And so the two reasons that going itself (even without performing a deed) is a *mitzvah* itself is because:

1. There is the training aspect and the preparation itself, which is a *mitzvah* (this fits with the version that the no are brought to give reward to those bringing them - מצות (חינוך).

2. Going is an actual *mitzvah* itself! The *טף* themselves, although not bar *mitzvah*, can actually fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* by being in the right place at the right time.

Takeaway Messages: We learn the profound concept that merely intending or going to do a *mitzvah* is itself a rewardable act disparate from completing the actual deed from the *pasuk* in our *parashah*: "ילכו ויעשו בני ישראל." Even before saying נעשה ונשמע, the Jewish People demonstrated this incredible ability to commit to mitzvos, projects, and good deeds when they were commanded on Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

They are rewarded for their commitment even before "fulfilling the pledge," which reminds us all of how powerful our commitments are even before they are actually fulfilled!

Why are we rewarded for merely committing ourselves?

This is learned from *Hakhel*:

(1) it is an aspect of training ourselves to be better, or

(2) it is an actual *mitzvah* itself - a mystical element of going to do the right thing. Is reward reserved for only completing a *mitzvah*? No, the going itself is reward-worthy!

ILLUMINATION OF FAITH

Reb Noson of Breslov

"They were driven out of Egypt and were not able to delay." (12:29)

The Jews' willingness to leave Egypt quickly, without proper preparation for their journey through the desert, displayed great faith.

From whence did they derive that faith? Moreover, the Jews were steeped in the lowest levels of idolatry, without any means of understanding the truth about G-d. Had they been in possession of the Torah, they would have had the means to learn about G-d and to have faith in Him. Without Torah, what motivated them to follow G-d?

This is the miracle of the Exodus - that G-d, knowing the Jews were not quite ready, nevertheless gave them an illumination of faith and truth by which they could accept Him and follow Him into the desert. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 149a)

The same holds true for anyone who seeks G-d today. When a person displays a willingness to accept G-d, G-d will send him an illumination of faith and truth to help him begin his spiritual journey. (ibid., I, p. 151a)

YEARNING FOR REDEMPTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The Egyptians urged the people to hurry to send them out of the land, for they said, 'All of us are dead!'" (12:33)

Despite the horrors of slavery, some Jews had second thoughts about leaving Egypt. G-d had to force these reluctant Jews out of Egypt by having the Egyptians urge them to depart.

Nowadays, as well, some might prefer to remain in exile rather than face what they incorrectly imagine to be the "oppression" of living constantly in G-d's presence - as we all will after the Messianic Redemption. Nonetheless, G-d will redeem these people, too - even against their will. Since G-d's mercy extends to all His creatures, He always does what is best for us on all levels, even if we do not presently realize or appreciate it.

On the other hand, if we study the Torah's teachings about the Redemption, we will truly yearn for it. Our increased, collective yearning for the Redemption will, in turn, hasten its arrival. (MiMa'ainei HaChassidus, vol. 2, p. 61) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

HUMBLE TRUST

Reb Noson of Breslov

"The people picked up their dough before it could rise." (12:34)

Chametz (leaven) corresponds to the natural order; matzah corresponds to Divine Providence and miracles. *Chametz*, which "rises," symbolically proclaims: "My efforts caused this to happen." The flatness of matzah, in contrast, connotes a humble spirit that has faith and trust in G-d. Matzah proclaims: "It is G-d Who provides, not my efforts." (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 236-119a)

Matzah is like the manna, as it requires almost no preparation. This reminds us that G-d is the One Who provides everything we need. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 132a)

FAITH IN REDEMPTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And they requested silver and gold utensils and clothing from the Egyptians." (12:35)

By also bringing along timbrels, the women demonstrated more faith and trust in G-d than did the men. The women of our generation, too, can lead the way by demonstrating their faith that the final Redemption is imminent.

To be sure, until the moment of redemption arrives, we should all feel the bitterness of the exile and pray fervently that G-d bring it to an end. But at the same time, our unshakable confidence that G-d will fulfill His promise of redemption should fill us with overflowing joy.

Women, on the strength of their innately more deep-seated faith, can already begin celebrating the Redemption - even with music and dance - and this will inspire the men to follow suit. (Sefer HaSichot 5752, vol. 1, pp. 303-307) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

MORALITY AND THE IDF

Rabbi Ari Ciment

“And G-d gave the grace of the nation in the eyes of the Egyptians, and they borrowed and plundered the Egyptians.” (12:36)

Ben Azzai says: Run to do a small *mitzvah* like a hard one and run from a sin. One *mitzvah* leads to another and one sin leads to another sin. The reward for one *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah* and the reward for a sin is a sin. (Avos 4:2)

What is meant by “the reward for a sin is a sin”?

The verse states, “And G-d gave the grace of the nation in the eyes of the Egyptians and they borrowed and plundered the Egyptians.” (12:36)

Doesn't it seem strange that the Jews would find the Egyptian nation gracious to them when, after all, we just terrorized them with ten harsh plagues? Also, to fulfill G-d's promise of exiting “with great wealth, why did *Bnei Yisrael* borrow the items rather than outright taking them, since we deserved the spoils anyway?

One answer is simply that this was yet another miracle. Of course, the Jews shouldn't have found favor in their eyes, and yet G-d miraculously made that happen.

Yet another answer may be derived from analyzing a midrash on the *parashah* that highlights that the Jews could have plundered the Egyptians during the three days of intense darkness but didn't (the midrash sought to explain that the Egyptians “lent” them their gold and silver accoutrements, since they were essentially impressed with their honesty). The Jewish “honest” approach of plundering Egypt was respectable and the Egyptians acknowledged it by graciously acquiescing to their planned plunder. Important for the development of our Jewish character, we couldn't look like thieves stealing these items in the middle of the night, but rather more gracefully and acceptingly “borrowing” items albeit with a plan of never returning them! Some may call this “semantics” and others may describe this as an example of the Torah talking in *lashon sagi nahor* (speaking in opposites as a type of euphemism, i.e., they really stole but doesn't want to talk in “negative language”), but it can equally just be *Bnei Yisrael* merely trying to fulfill G-d's pledge of “You will exit in great wealth” in the cleanest way possible without “getting their hands too dirty!”

We must not view ourselves as thieves even when plundering an oppressive nation that deserved to be plundered!

Rabbi Bixon asks why it was that by the plague of hail we see an apologetic Pharaoh, for the first time admitting that “G-d is righteous, and my nation and I are evil”?

He beautifully answers that *Bnei Yisrael* function as an *ohr l'goyim*, a light unto the nations, which is supposed to carry the moral compass directed by G-d. Practically, this was accomplished by warning our Egyptian enemies about the hail so that those who obeyed the warning could have protected their animals. So much so, he points out, that the Mechilta says that the very horses that eventually pursued the fleeing Jews by the sea were only alive because of this Jewish warning! Almost to a fault, the Jewish People continuously make every effort to be a moral compass despite what fake news media may report, i.e., the Israeli army graciously and morally warns even the darkest terrorists about their planned attacks so that lives and infrastructure can be spared.

The lesson of hail is the lesson of the Egyptian spoils “borrowed” and not stolen during the plague of darkness. We go out of our way not to connive and steal surreptitiously as we bear the mantle of carrying the moral compass, despite being unfairly castigated by the media, etc.

Regarding the ethic brought above, the Bartenura on Avos explains, “The reward for a sin is a sin.” The “benefit” or “high” that one feels from doing a sinful act is considered a sin in itself. The reason the Jews went out of their way not to do a sinful act (even though they were entitled to the spoils) is because the act itself would have brought an illicit “benefit” or “high,” which is sinful in some way. The point is that there are clear-cut sins, but there are also some not-so-clear sins accompanied with sinful acts. We should avoid both!

Takeaway Messages: How did the Jews find grace within the Egyptians' eyes? Why did they borrow and not steal or plunder the spoils outright? The answer is the same reason why only by the hail did Pharaoh acknowledge his moral inferiority. *Bnei Yisrael* exhibited great morality and compassion when warning the Egyptians to save their lives and livestock by hail, even though this ultimately even put them at a disadvantage! The Jews could have easily “stolen” the gold and silver from the Egyptians during the darkness but opted for the more morally acceptable “borrowing” during the day. Despite being the object of continuous criticisms and despite the reality that they are placed in compromising situations because of their graciousness, we must recognize that our IDF is just emulating its forefathers in Egypt! Egyptian plunder, hail, and the IDF - examples of unbelievable Jewish morality to be proud of!

CRUNCH TIME

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, they had also not prepared provisions for themselves.” (12:39)

Mashal: The old Russian culture center was where the local villagers gathered to watch reels of film, which were activated manually by a man who sat in a box slowly turning the handle.

One day, as they were watching the film, the picture suddenly froze on the screen. It turned out that the one manually turning the reel had fallen asleep upstairs.

The people began protesting and shouting - but to no avail. The man was closed off in his box, sleeping soundly.

For the first fifteen minutes they watched the show as usual, and for an hour and a half they stared numbly at the frozen picture.

Finally, the man in charge woke up with a start. Frantically, he looked at his watch and realized that according to the schedule, the show was to end in a few short minutes. He quickly began turning the handle as fast as he could.

After an hour and a half of staring at a frozen screen, the picture began moving at dizzying speed, and the audience left dumbfounded.

Nimshal: For generations, *Bnei Yisrael* lived in Egypt in a tortured pattern of *galus*. Then, suddenly, hysteria overcame their entire existence - plagues, redemption, *Krias Yam Suf*, Amalek, and *Matan Torah*, one event quickly rushing after another. In our lives, as well, the picture had been “frozen”; the world was quiet for a long time. But as our redemption draws near, world events are occurring quickly and frantically. There is no time; Mashiach is rushing to arrive! (Aram Tzovah)

SAFEGUARDING KINDESS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“It is a night of guarding for G-d.” (12:42)

As a rule, G-d continuously bestows kindness on the Jewish people. To prevent the external forces, i.e., the forces of evil, from also benefiting from the kindness that G-d bestows on the worlds, G-d forbid, the Jewish people perform mitzvos. By performing the positive commandments, they ensure that G-d continuously bestows His kindness on the Jewish people, and by observing the negative commandments (i.e., the prohibitions), they preclude the external forces from receiving any of this bounty.

When they were still in Egypt and had not yet received the Torah, the Jewish people had no positive or negative commandments to observe. Nonetheless, G-d acted generously toward the Jewish people, keeping His bounty and kindness from being received by the external forces. This is what the verse alludes to when it says, “It is a night of guarding.” G-d safeguarded His bounty, preventing the external impure forces from receiving any of it even though the Jewish people had not yet observed any mitzvos.

The Midrash alludes to this with the statement “I (G-d) observed the *mitzvah* of respecting the elderly first” (see Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah 1:3). Avraham Avinu prevented the external forces from receiving G-d’s bounty. Avraham was the first person to be referred to as “elderly” in the Torah (Bereishis 24:1).

But before Avraham came along, and similarly, until the Giving of the Torah, G-d, out of His love for the soul of the Jewish people, safeguarded His kindness so that only they would receive it.

ACTION LEADS TO EMOTION

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And you shall not break a bone of the Pesach offering.” (12:46)

The Sefer HaChinuch asks why the Torah prohibits breaking any of the bones. Once we are permitted to eat the *korban pesach*, why does the Torah preclude us from eating the *korban* in any way that we choose?

The Sefer HaChinuch explains that at the Pesach Seder we are to conduct ourselves as kings. Royalty would never attempt to eat a piece of meat until the point where the bones would break. Since we are to eat the *korban pesach* as if we were kings, there is a prohibition to break any of the bones.

The Sefer HaChinuch then continues by addressing his son: “My son, you may ask - ‘Why do we need to involve ourselves in so many details? Wouldn’t it be sufficient to do a few of these ‘king-like’ activities?’”

The Sefer HaChinuch responds to his son by introducing the very famous words, *Ki acharei hapeulos nimshachim ha’levavos* - “After one’s actions the heart is drawn.” In order for one to fully be in the moment and appreciate the circumstances, one needs to do as many actions as possible to reach that feeling and connection.

The Torah is teaching us that our actions determine how we feel.

We are expected to do the mitzvos and develop a relationship with Hashem even when we aren’t feeling it at that particular moment. Our actions will cause us to feel the emotion, as opposed to the other way around.

As in any meaningful relationship, we must constantly pour ourselves into the relationship with actions, despite the common roller coaster and sometimes lack of emotion in our lives. At times, we need to “fake it ‘til we make it” so that we can ensure a stable and positive connection with Hashem. With this message in mind, we are more likely to have a stronger relationship with Hashem.

EAGER TO PLEASE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“All the Children of Israel did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did.” (12:50)

After the Torah outlines the detailed and distinctive instructions for the Pesach offering, it concludes with, “All the Children of Israel did as G-d commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did” (12:50). Why do we need to be told that they followed the instructions they were given?

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch points out that every Jew followed all of the instructions precisely as they were given, not an easy task for three million people to get exactly right. This *mitzvah* is a turning point for the people: After years of having a G-d but no rules to follow, we are finally told what pleases G-d. The perfect execution attests to people's eagerness to finally be able to follow G-d's wishes. This sharing of G-d's likes and dislikes in the form of commandments is a big step in the context of our relationship with G-d, one we should be excited to engage and grow in.

FOR ALL TO KNOW

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You must tell your child on that day." (13:8)

Interestingly, the commandment to retell the story of the Exodus - which is the source for the annual Pesach Seder - is given in the context of describing "the child who does not know how to ask," the most immature of all the four types of children to whom we must tailor our description of the Exodus. This teaches us that our duty to retell the Exodus applies mainly to this uninitiated child. We must find the words to inspire even this type of child with gratitude to G-d for liberating us from Egypt and from all past, present, future, personal, and collective Egypts.

This is so because the Exodus from Egypt was absolute: not one Jew remained in Egypt. Since the Exodus was so all-encompassing, the transmission of its message must also encompass each and every individual that can possibly understand it, even if this takes extraordinary effort.

By ensuring that even "the child who does not know how to ask" understands the meaning of the Exodus, we ensure that the other children will understand it, too, much as lifting up the bottom of any structure automatically raises the rest of the structure, as well. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5734-5735, pp. 347-353) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

DRAWING FESTIVE RADIANCE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"You shall observe this decree at the designated time from year to year." (13:10)

The three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot serve as the medium through which G-d's light illuminates the entire year in the three dimensions of space, time, and soul (Sefer Yetzirah 3:5). Pesach accomplishes this in the dimension of time, since the distinction between leaven and matzah depends on the brief time it takes to walk the unit of distance known as a mil [18 minutes]. Shavuot accomplishes this in the dimension of soul, since Shavuot commemorates our receiving of the Torah. Sukkot accomplishes this transmission in the dimension of space through the *mitzvah* of dwelling in the sukkah. In turn, these festivals influence the entire year.

This is what is meant by the verse's phrasing "from year to year" (literally, "from days to days") - it connotes the influence from the days of the festivals themselves on the days of the rest of the year.

It is possible to draw the Divine radiance that shines during these festivals into the ordinary weekdays of the year. How? By strengthening our belief in miracles, we extend the influence of Pesach; by accepting the Torah, we draw the luminosity of Shavuot; and when we repent and our sins are pardoned, we spread the light of Sukkot (which is the culmination of the Days of Awe, when we receive atonement for our sins).

HASHEM IS IN CONTROL

Rav Yissachar Dov Loriner

"It was with a mighty hand that Hashem brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage." (13:14)

The Ramban at the end of Parshas Bo declares that a major purpose of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* is to teach *Bnei Yisrael* that Hashem created the world and that He has complete knowledge and control over all its affairs.

When Hashem completely turns around the workings of nature, He demonstrates that He is the sole Creator and Controller of the entire world. This great phenomenon occurred during the events leading up to and including *Yetzias Mitzrayim*.

If we learn this lesson, we will come to the realization that there is no nature at all, only Hashem controlling all the actions and forces in the world. It is to Him that we must constantly turn for all our needs.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"It was with a mighty hand that Hashem brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage." (13:14)

Why did Hashem impose ten plagues on the Egyptians? Couldn't He have extended one plague over a longer period and accomplished the same goal?

Imagine if the plague of blood had extended for six months. The Egyptians would not have survived without any drinkable water for that length of time.

If locusts hovered over Egypt for six months, it would have been unbearable. Yet, Hashem chose to afflict the Egyptians with a variety of plagues rather than to just focus on one specific plague. Why?

To answer this question, Rabbi Shalom Rosner quotes the Dubno Maggid, who offers a parable:

"There is a difference in the way one prepares food for himself versus how he prepares it for others. If I am cooking for myself, I cook the one dish that I want at the time. However, if I am cooking for a large group of people, I have to offer a variety of dishes. A restaurant cannot

offer just one main dish on its menu. Different people's palates are touched in different ways. There must be a choice so that one can select the item that is most attractive to him."

Based on this parable, Rabbi Rosner quotes the *sefer V'Karasa La'Shabbos Oneg*, which explains the purpose of the plagues.

The plagues were not just a tool to convince Pharaoh to free the Jews. Instead, they were an educational tool for the Egyptians and the Jews.

Different events inspire different people. Hashem implemented a spectrum of plagues because people related to each plague differently.

Some felt that darkness was the worst, others were affected most when Hashem struck them personally with lice, etc.

The purpose was to be able to connect with each and every individual Egyptian and Jew.

This applies concerning *mitzvah* observance as well. The last Mishnah in Masechta Makkos states: רצה הקב"ה לזכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצות [Hashem] wanted to give merit to Yisrael, therefore He increased for them Torah and mitzvos." Why are they considered a merit?

Everyone is obligated to fulfill each *mitzvah*, but there are certain mitzvos that speak to us more than others.

There are *bikur cholim* Jews, Talmud Torah Jews - all types. For people, it is easier to connect to a particular *mitzvah* and to excel in it.

The same is true of the *chagim*. Some connect to one more easily than another. Some are Purim Jews, while others identify most with Pesach, and yet others with Shavuot. We each must fulfill all of them, but we may connect to some more deeply than to others.

That is why it is a merit that Hashem blessed us with so many mitzvos, because it ensures that there is a favorite *mitzvah* for everyone.

Hashem inflicted a variety of plagues on the Egyptians to touch the hearts of each and every Egyptian and Jew.

No two people experience or view things the same way. Ask those gathered around your Shabbos or Seder table to state which plague they believe was the worst, and there surely will be a variety of answers.

Thus, the Torah is providing us with a methodology:

When we teach our children, we need to keep in mind the principle of חנוך לנער על פי דרכו. Education is not a one-size-fits-all exercise; as each pupil experiences things differently, and different subjects will appeal to different students.

When transmitting Torah, we must find the proper approach so that we can motivate and excite each of our children to appreciate and internalize Torah in their own unique fashion. (Torah Tidbits, vol. 1358, p. 28)

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And it shall be when your son will ask you tomorrow, 'What is this?' you shall say to him, 'It was with a mighty hand that Hashem brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage.'" (13:14)

If we are immersed in the Torah's lifestyle, it is easy for us to relate to those of our children who share our values and have chosen to perpetuate our lifestyle. But if we have children who have chosen a different path, not connected to the Torah and its values, we may feel disconnected from them and despair of being able to relate to them.

The Torah's message here to us is that as parents, we must never give up on our children. We must continue to love them, to re-open the paths of communication, and to let our children know that the Torah has the answers to their questions, welcoming them back into the Torah's value system with love and joy. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 6, p. 268) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

NOT ALWAYS EASY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"And it shall be a sign upon your arm..." (13:16)

When instructing us on the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* (phylacteries), the Torah tells us to place it on our weak hand (13:16). It uses a unique spelling for the word hand: ידכה instead of the standard "ידך" What is the reason for this unique spelling? The Gemara (Menachos 37a) tells us that the unique spelling is meant to instruct us to place the *tefillin* on our weak hand (יד כהה), symbolizing the focus we should place even on things that are more difficult for us to do. If we focus on doing everything with joy and love, even the everyday chores will become rewarding and meaningful.

HAFTORAH

SAVED FROM AFAR

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"But do not be afraid... I will save you from afar..." (Yirmiyahu 46:27)

According to the Sages, redemption will be hastened and will arrive before its appointed time if the Jews would repent of their sins. But they assure Jews that even if they don't repent of their sins in the end redemption will come, although it will not materialize before its appointed time.

Through His prophet, G-d tells the Jewish people that they need not be afraid because He will save them in due time even "from afar," even if they have drifted far away from Judaism and repentance.