

PESACH

תשפ"ב

Yetzias Mitzrayim is not just another story in Chumash. It is the basis of our connection to Hashem. When Hashem appeared at Har Sinai to Klal Yisroel, He identified Himself as the one Who took you out of Egypt. In parshas Bo, before makkas arbeh, Hashem told Moshe the purpose of the ten makkos is to get Pharaoh to realize that Hashem runs the world. There is the immediate message to Pharaoh to make him admit his weakness, to submit to Hashem's authority, and release Klal Yisroel. However, the main purpose is that Klal Yisroel should relate all of the details of the eser makkos for all generations.

There are the fundamental lessons about Hashem that Klal Yisroel learned from the makkos. There were three sets of makkos – each set teaches a different lesson about who Hashem is.

The first is that Moshe is representing an incredible power in this world. The second is that Hashem is an intelligent power that continually makes distinctions. The third is that Hashem's power is beyond any natural power that exists in this world. Makkas borod wasn't just the greatest hailstorm that ever was. It was an inherent contradiction to the laws of nature – of fire and ice coexisting in the same hailstone.

Why are all these types of lessons necessary? They are to deeply implant these ideas in the minds and hearts of Klal Yisroel – to last for all future generations about the truth of Hashem. We teach it to our children and grandchildren at the Pesach seder every year, and the chain of transmission goes all the way back.

We have to know how Hashem played with Pharaoh. This is an introduction to the concept of "ayn od milvado" – there is no other power that exists independently of Hashem. There is also a concept of reward and punishment which is middoh k'negged middoh. Yisro exclaimed about kriyas Yam Suf that it shows the dikduk hadin – the fine precision involved in Hashem's interaction with the world. Pharaoh and the Egyptians persecuted Klal Yisroel for 82 years. They were controlled and broken in all different ways, but in the last year, Hashem set the record straight and at the end He gave every Egyptian exactly what he deserved in front of Klal Yisroel's eyes.

When people's egos take over they lose all perspective. Their ego blinds them to obvious truths that are inconvenient and uncomfortable. Right now we are seeing an incredible war where one person's ego to take over the world has led to so much needless death and destruction. He is now realizing that all his ego ambitions were futile and will get him nothing in the end.

The Twin Towers were a symbol of America's dominance over the world. That illusion of American dominance came to an abrupt end when they were destroyed. Hashem humbles people. When people's ego gets too big and they start to think they run the world, Hashem sees to it that they are humbled and are shown that they are really powerless over world events. Hashem played with Pharaoh to show him that his belief that he is in control is just an illusion.

Pharaoh is an incredible human being. He actually convinced himself that he created the world –he didn't just convince his nation that he was a god with no physical needs. For 15 minutes every day he went to the Nile to relieve himself. But for the rest of the 23 hours and 45 minutes of every day, he actually thought he was beyond humanity and was above the physical. The ego took complete control of his mind. Hashem wanted to show him who controls this world.

Yetzias Mitzrayim, which began with the eser makkos, was a whole

educational process. It was to teach us that Hashem is not just a blind force. He is intelligent and knows everything that is happening and runs the world down to the finest detail.

The Rambam and Ramban have a slight machlokes about the first mitzvah of the aseres hadibros – Anochi Hashem Elokechoh. It is to learn the lessons of yetzias Mitzrayim. One of the lessons is that Hashem gives existence and runs the entire world.

The Ramban adds that it includes the mitzvah to believe in creation from nothing. People think this can refer to the Big Bang. This is a mistake. The Greek philosophers starting with Aristotle believed the world was finite in size and infinite in time. Never created – it always was what it is now going all the way back in time. Newton said the world is infinite in size and infinite in time. If you keep going out, there will always be stars. They refused to admit that Hashem created the world. The Big Bang theory says that the world we see today is finite in time and expanding out – it is not infinite.

We disagree with all of the above. We say that Hashem created the world out of complete nothingness. Big Bang Theory says something was always there, which at one point in time exploded into the universe we now see.

We believe Hashem gives the universe ongoing existence minute by minute. The Ramban says this belief is derived from yetzias Mitzrayim. It proved that Hashem created everything and gives it existence.

The Rambam agrees that we must believe this, but it doesn't come from yetzias Mitzrayim. It is part of the mitzvah of Shabbos, when we testify that the world was created in six days. Shabbos is the eternal bris between us and Hashem and the bris is based on our testimony that Hashem created the world in six days. If one violates the bris and is mechallel Shabbos in public, he is treated like a non-Jew. Our bris with Hashem is to testify that He created the world from nothing in six days.

The Ramban asks: why is yetzias Mitzrayim so important? Can't we see open miracles happening all around us all the time? The Ramban answers that Hashem created a world that runs according to the laws of nature. Hashem's will is not to violate those laws and to run the world through manipulating those laws. This is the story of Purim. It is a string of very strange coincidences which resulted in the salvation of the Jewish people. First Achashverosh got drunk and Homon has sholom bayis problems, and as a result, Vashti was killed at the party. Then, somehow, Esther was chosen to be queen, and then Mordechai just overheard the plot and saved the king, etc. But they were too fortuitous for all of them to be just an accident. It was Hashem orchestrating the events behind the screen of natural law and human nature.

But very rarely, Hashem will violate the laws of nature to teach a particular lesson. Either to a novi or to Klal Yisroel. Once that lesson is learned, Hashem wants the world to go back to being run according to natural law. Hashem made it clear – at one time in history – that Hashem knows everything that is happening and makes everything happen with reward and punishment. Once that was made clear to everyone openly, then we can go through the rest of history knowing that Hashem is running the world behind the screen of nature. Hashem doesn't have to break nature to prove this truth again and again to every generation. Yetzias Mitzrayim was designed for us today to learn this lesson from the ones who saw it and gave it over to their children

and grandchildren till our time.

This is the mitzvah of sippur yetzias Mitzrayim. The Rambam says the main mitzvah is to retell the nissim and niflaos. It is to teach our children and grandchildren that Hashem is in total control of nature and can do whatever He wants. The Ramban says that once we believe Hashem can control nature by breaking nature, we can perceive this control even when Hashem works through nature. Hashem uses natural forces to give us reward and punishment for our actions.

This is why the Torah says when we don't obey the Torah, the rain won't come. The rain happens to be a totally unpredictable phenomenon till today – even after all the scientific advancements we have made. Five years ago there was a drought in Eretz Yisroel and the scientific community was absolutely convinced that because of climate change, Israel will have a permanent water shortage from rain. To respond to this certain permanent water shortage, Israel invested billions in desalination plants to remove salt from ocean water to make it usable. Hashem showed them they were wrong. Most years since, the rain has nearly overflowed the Kinneret. That is Hashem running the world.

But how do we know that it is really Hashem controlling the rain and not some freak weather pattern? It is because 3500 years ago, Hashem broke all the laws of nature in Egypt and showed everyone how He is running everything. He also told us that He is in control of rain specifically to respond to our mitzvos and aveiros. We can't control it. And till this very day – as the gemara in Taanis says – we can't even predict it. Every time we are certain about our climate control tactics and our predictions about the weather, it is proven wrong. The gemara in Taanis says there are three aspects of the world which Hashem retained His control over – rain, the exact time of childbirth, and techiyas hameisim. The first two things are in the natural world and Hashem says you still can't figure it out. Doctors think they can predict exactly when a woman goes into labor and is ready to deliver. But in the end they don't really know.

This is why when we will sit down two weeks from now, we emphasize the nissim and niflaos. Hashem runs this world intelligently. The Ramban says, we have to connect this story to the fact that it teaches

us that Hashem is running the world even today with hidden miracles – through the laws of nature. That is the foundation of the emunoh of the Torah.

The Ramban says an additional thing. We have to study the story of yetzias Mitzrayim in order to be the basis for our kabbolas haTorah. The knowledge that Hashem created everything and runs everything helps us appreciate that Hashem decided to choose us out of the entire universe to be His people. He fed us and took care of us and provided everything we needed in the desert. He elevated us from the depths of slavery and tumoh in return for our commitment to fulfill an important task – representing Hashem in this world. Hashem doesn't need anything from anyone. He owns the entire Universe, yet He chose us and did everything for us in order to give us this tremendous, unique relationship with Him.

The verses in Ha'azinu say – remember our history because it is the basis for our mission to be Hashem's nation in the world. Hashem separated us from the rest of humanity. Every other nation has an angel in Heaven who watches over them. We have Hashem who is the only One who takes care of us. We are not subject to any other force or power in the universe.

Hashem established that exclusive relationship with us at yetzias Mitzrayim. This is the extra reason why the Pesach seder is central to our entire Yiddishkeit. We tell over this lesson to our children and grandchildren because we heard it from our fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers going all the way back.

People often get distracted by all the dozens of commentaries on the Haggadah that are available today. They get caught up in the vortlach and the dikdukim of the mitzvos of the seder and miss the main message of the whole thing! We have to focus on the main message of the seder which is telling over the nissim and nifla'os of yetzias Mitzrayim – how that forms the basis of our emunoh in Hashem's control over the world and His involvement in our lives, and how that forms the basis of our deep, personal relationship with Hashem. This is what keeps us going throughout our entire history.