

In this week's *Parashah*, we read that Yaakov and his family descended to Egypt, they became slaves, and *Hashem* commanded Moshe to go to Pharaoh and obtain their freedom. Almost in passing, we learn that Moshe rescued Yitro's daughters from oppressors at a well, Yitro took Moshe into his home, and Moshe married one of Yitro's daughters.

In fact, R' Chaim Friedlander z"l (1923-1986; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) notes, our Sages derive an important lesson about performing *Chessed* / kindness from Moshe's encounter with Yitro. Approximately four centuries after that event, when King Shaul was about to go to war against Amalek, he sent a message to Yitro's descendants (*Shmuel I* 15:6), "Go, withdraw, descend from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them--for you performed kindness with all of *Bnei Yisrael* when they went up from Egypt." Say our Sages: Yitro performed kindness for Moshe only in the hope that Moshe would marry one of his daughters (see *Rashi* to *Shmot* 2:20). Nevertheless, Yitro's act was considered *Chessed*--not a minor *Chessed*, but one in whose merit King Shaul said 400 years later, "You performed kindness with all of *Bnei Yisrael*."

Indeed, so far does *Chessed* go that one must feel indebted even to inanimate objects from which he benefits. Thus, says the *Gemara* (*Bava Kamma* 92b), "Do not throw a clump of earth into a well from which you drank." (*Siftei Chaim: Mo'adim* Vol. III, p.151).

Tefilah

This year, we will iy"H devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we begin to examine the structure of our daily prayers.

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: There is a *Mitzvat Asei* / affirmative commandment to pray every day. . . The number of prayers is not from the Torah, and neither is the text of the prayers. According to Torah law, there is no fixed time for prayer. . .

The obligation imposed by this *Mitzvah* is as follows: A person should pray to and beseech *Hashem* every day. Each person according to his ability should state *Hashem's* praises, then ask for whatever he needs in a beseeching manner, and then give praise and thanks to *Hashem* for the goodness He bestowed upon him.

When the Jewish People were exiled by the wicked Nevuchadnezar [who destroyed the First Temple] and they assimilated among the Persians, Greeks, and other nations, and had children in the lands of those nations, those children's speech was a combination of many languages, and they could not formulate clear prayers in *Lashon Ha'kodesh* / Hebrew, using their own words. When Ezra and his *Bet Din* saw this, they established the *Shemoneh Esrei*. [*"Shemoneh Esrei"* literally means "eighteen." This prayer actually consists of 19 blessings because one was added later.] The first three blessings give praise to *Hashem*, the last three give thanks, and the middle blessings request the main categories of things that every person needs. (*Hilchot Tefilah* 1:1-2, 4)

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“During those many days, it happened that the king of Egypt died, and *Bnei Yisrael* groaned because of the work and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to *Elokim*.” (2:23)

R' Yitzchak Arieli *z"l* (see facing page) observes: Even “their outcry because of the work went up to *Elokim*.” A Jew’s sigh or groan always makes an impression Above, even when it is not consciously directed toward G-d. Why? King David explains (*Tehilim* 130:1): “From the depths, I called out to You *Hashem*.” Deep within his heart, a Jew is always calling to *Hashem*.
(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha'geulah* p.61)



“Moshe and Aharon went and gathered all the elders of *Bnei Yisrael*. Aharon spoke all the words that *Hashem* had spoken to Moshe, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed, and they heard that *Hashem* had remembered *Bnei Yisrael* and that He saw their affliction, and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. Afterwards, Moshe and Aharon came and said to Pharaoh . . .” (4:29-5:1)

R' Simcha Zissel Ziv *z"l* (1824-1898; the *Alter* of Kelm) asks: Why did Moshe gather the elders and the people before going to Pharaoh? Should he not have reversed the order so he could tell them, “I already went to Pharaoh”? Consider: Pharaoh was a powerful king, and Moshe had a death sentence hanging over him (see 2:15)! Would *Bnei Yisrael* not have been inspired to hear that Moshe had barged into Pharaoh’s palace uninvited, demanded, “Let my people go!” and lived to tell about it?!

The *Alter* answers: Without the merit of *Emunah* / faith, *Bnei Yisrael* would have been undeserving of redemption, and Moshe would not have experienced the miracles that accompanied him to his meetings with Pharaoh. The order had to be: “The people believed . . . Afterwards, Moshe and Aharon came and said to Pharaoh.” (*Chochmah U'mussar* No. 3)

R' Shmuel Yaakov Borenstein *z"l* (1946-2017; *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Kiryat Melech in Bnei Brak, Israel) adds: In light of the above, we can understand why some commentaries interpret the statement in the *Pesach Haggadah*, “‘With wonders’: This refers to the blood,” as referring to the sign that Moshe performed in front of *Bnei Yisrael* (in our verse), not to the plague of blood. When Moshe changed water to blood in the sight of *Bnei Yisrael*, it was not merely a sign to convince them that he was G-d’s messenger. Rather, it was essential to the redemption, for it strengthened their *Emunah*, without which Moshe could not have approached Pharaoh in the first place.
(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Zot L'Yaakov* p.135)

“The Egyptians enslaved *Bnei Yisrael* with *Fehrach* (פֶּרַח) / crushing harshness.” (1:13)

Our Sages interpret “*Fehrach*” as a contraction of the two words, “*Feh Rach*” (“פֶּרַח רַךְ”) (literally, “a soft mouth”), hinting that, at first, the Egyptians gently persuaded *Bnei Yisrael* to work for them until, gradually, they enslaved *Bnei Yisrael*.

R' Yitzchak Arieli *z"l* (1896-1974; *Mashgiach* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of *Enayim La'mishpat*) comments: It is the Jewish People’s experience that “soft words” from an enemy inevitably lead to “crushing harshness.”
(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha'geulah* p.72)

“Pharaoh commanded his entire people, saying, ‘Every son that will be born -- into the River you shall throw him!’” (1:22)

Rashi z"l explains: On the day Moshe was born, Pharaoh’s astrologers told him, “*Bnei Yisrael*’s redeemer was born today, . . . but we see through astrology that his downfall will be through water.” Therefore, Pharaoh decreed that every boy born that day be thrown into the Nile. In fact, the astrologers were foreseeing Moshe’s death as a consequence of hitting the rock to bring forth water, but they did not understand what they were seeing. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Yehuda Cahn *shlita* (Baltimore, MD) writes: One aspect of the conflict between *Bnei Yisrael* and the Egyptians centered on whether or not G-d created and controls time. Here, and again shortly before the Exodus (*Shmot* 10:10), Pharaoh invokes astrology, the idea that history is controlled by the stars, meaning that time is a force independent of G-d. And, when Moshe first demands that Pharaoh free *Bnei Yisrael*, Pharaoh replies (5:2), “Who is *Hashem* that I should heed His voice?” The four-letter Name of *Hashem* (“Y-K-V-K”) represents the idea that G-d “Was, Is, and Will Be” (see *Shulchan Aruch O.C.* 5:1), *i.e.*, *Hashem* is above time, for He created time. Pharaoh denied that concept, as Aristotle would centuries later.

R' Cahn continues: In *Parashat Bo* (11:4), when Moshe informs Pharaoh of the impending plague on the firstborn, Moshe says that it will occur at “approximately midnight.” *Rashi* explains that Moshe did not say, “exactly at midnight,” as G-d had told Moshe, lest the Egyptians miscalculate the time and deny the Divine nature of the plague. At first glance, this is hard to understand, writes R' Cahn: Why would the Egyptians deny the truth if they saw all of the firstborn die, but it appeared to occur a minute earlier or later than foretold? In light of the above, we can understand: The Egyptians claimed that *Hashem* has no control over time. Thus, had the promised event not occurred at precisely the predicted moment, it would have reinforced the Egyptians’ mistaken belief.

(*The Tov Lehodoth Haggadah* p.170)