

R' Azariah Figo z"l (1579-1647; Italy) writes: When we study the incidents of oppression that the Jewish People have been subjected to throughout our history, we find that they fall into four categories: (1) economic; (2) physical; (3) psychological; and (4) religious. In Egypt, they experienced all of these. We read (*Shmot* 1:11), "So they appointed tax collectors over [*Bnei Yisrael*] in order to afflict [them] with their burdens." This indicates that the Egyptians did not need our taxes, nor did they need the cities of Pitom and Ramses that were built as a result. Rather, their sole purpose was to oppress *Bnei Yisrael* economically. Likewise, the Egyptians oppressed *Bnei Yisrael* physically--by enslaving them, psychologically--by lowering them to the status of slaves, and religiously--by turning *Bnei Yisrael* into idolators, as our Sages record.

Corresponding to these four types of oppression, *Hashem* spoke to Moshe of four types of salvation (in our *Parashah*, *Shmot* 6:6-7): "I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments; I shall take you to Me for a people . . ." Paralleling these four expressions, we drink four cups of wine at the *Seder*, each one relating to one of the forms of oppression, as follows:

The first cup accompanies *Kiddush*, where we acknowledge that G-d has sanctified us through His *Mitzvot*--the opposite of religious oppression. – *Continued in box inside* –

Shabbat

"If you restrain your feet because of the *Shabbat*; refrain from accomplishing your own needs on My holy day; if you proclaim the *Shabbat* 'Oneg' / 'A delight,' the holy one, *Hashem*, 'Honored One,' and you honor it by not engaging in your own ways, from seeking your needs or discussing the forbidden--then you shall be granted pleasure with *Hashem*, and I shall mount you astride the heights of the world. I will provide you the heritage of your forefather Yaakov--for the mouth of *Hashem* has spoken." (*Yeshayah* 58:13-14)

R' Eliyahu E. Dessler *shlita* (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak; not to be confused with his cousin and namesake, the *Michtav M'Eliyahu*) writes: The prophet Yeshayah is informing us what our *Shabbat* should "look" like. Of course, one must refrain from performing prohibited *Melachot* / labors on *Shabbat*. However, even if one did no *Melachah* on *Shabbat*, taking care to observe *Halachah*--both Torah laws and Rabbinic laws--to the most minute degree, and even if he made sure to begin *Shabbat* early and end it late, he still has missed one of the main points, says the prophet. Complete *Shabbat* observance requires that one proclaim the *Shabbat* "Oneg" / "A delight." In other words, it is not enough to refrain from performing *Melachah*. One must also make the *Shabbat* pleasurable.

R' Dessler continues: Surprisingly, perhaps, the pleasure referred to here is physical pleasure--in particular, food and drink. This is stated unambiguously by the commentators on our verse, such as R' David Kimchi z"l ("*Radak*"; 1160–1235; Narbonne, France), and by *Halachic* works, such as the *Mishnah Berurah* (242:1). Surely, writes R' Dessler, *Radak* would have derived greater pleasure from several consecutive hours of Torah study than from food, but that is not what the requirement of *Oneg Shabbat* demands. [To be continued . . .]

(*Sha'arei Ha'zemanim: Shabbat Kodesh* ch.1)

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Sponsored by Faith Ginsburg

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(Sara Chaya bas Nassan a"h - 29 Tevet)

and her brother-in-law, Samuel Allen Schwartz

(Yeshayahu Asher ben Yoel Fishel a"h - 2 Shevat)

“Moshe and Aharon left Pharaoh’s presence. Moshe cried out to Hashem concerning the frogs that He had inflicted upon Pharaoh.” (8:8)

We know that the subject is “the frogs that He had inflicted upon Pharaoh.” What, then, is the last part of the verse teaching?

R’ Yitzchak Ze’ev Yadler z”l (1843-1917; Yerushalayim) explains: Moshe did not pray for all of the frogs to disappear. Indeed, we read (verse 10), “They piled them up into heaps and heaps, and the land stank.” Moshe merely prayed that the frogs would cease their unusual behavior that was tormenting the Egyptians (see 7:28-29), *i.e.*, he prayed regarding that unusual aspect of the frogs that *Hashem* had inflicted upon Pharaoh.”

(*Tiferet Zion*)

“And as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear Hashem Elokim.” (9:30)

R’ Shlomo Eliasof z”l (1841-1926; leading early 20th century kabbalist; grandfather of R’ Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z”l) writes: Moshe Rabbeinu’s use of two Names of G-d (“*Hashem Elokim*”) can be explained based on the teaching of the *Arizal* (R’ Yitzchak Luria z”l; Tzefat, *Eretz Yisrael*; 1534-1572) that Pharaoh believed in “*Elokim*,” but denied “*Hashem*” (*i.e.*, Y-K-V-K). Pharaoh recognized the deity of *Bnei Yisrael* as “a” power, but not as “the” sole power, the Creator and Operator of everything. We see this from that fact that, long before our verse, Yosef had said to Pharaoh (*Bereishit* 41:16), “It is *Elokim* Who will respond with Pharaoh’s welfare,” and Pharaoh responded (*ibid* verse 39), “Since *Elokim* has informed you of all this . . .” The pharaohs knew “*Elokim*.” In contrast, when Moshe first came to Pharaoh, the latter said (*Shmot* 5:2), “Who is *Hashem* that I should heed His voice to send out *Yisrael*? I do not know *Hashem*, nor will I send out *Yisrael*!”

R’ Eliasof continues: Whether or not the world recognizes that “*Hashem*” and “*Elokim*” are one and the same--not only “a” power, but “the” power--it is, of course, so. We are commanded to know this, as we read (*Devarim* 4:39), “You shall know this day and take to your heart that *Hashem*, He is the *Elokim*--in the heaven above and on the earth below--there is none other.” We read likewise (*Devarim* 4:35), “You have been shown in order to know that *Hashem*, He is the *Elokim*! There is none beside Him.” That the world ultimately will recognize that *Hashem* and *Elokim* are One is what we refer to when we say (*Zechariah* 14:9, and many times in our daily prayers), “*Hashem* will be King over all the world--on that day *Hashem* will be One and His Name will be One.”

(Quoted in *Niglot Leshem Shevo V’achlamah*)

“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Say to Aharon, “Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt . . .”’ (7:19)

Rashi z”l writes: Because the river had protected Moshe when he was cast into it, it was not smitten by him, neither at the plague of blood nor at that of frogs; rather, it was smitten by Aharon.” [Until here from *Rashi*]

The *Gemara* (*Bava Kamma* 92b) teaches: “If you drink from a well, do not throw a stone into it.” R’ Bezalel Ashkenazi z”l (1520-1594; Chief Rabbi of Egypt) quotes R’ Menachem Ha’meiri z”l (“the *Meiri*”; Provence; 1249-1306), who writes: This *Gemara* is meant to be a clever metaphor. It is teaching that, though one should take care not to treat any person in a degrading way, one should not even think of denigrating someone who acted kindly towards him. One who does so demonstrates extremely lowly *Middot* / character traits, the *Meiri* writes.

R’ Ashkenazi adds, in the name of R’ Yosef ibn Migash z”l (Spain; 1077-1141), that the *Gemara*’s lesson is demonstrated by the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu was not the one to strike the water, which had protected him as an infant.

(*Shitah Mekubetzet*)

R’ Nosson Zvi Finkel z”l (1849-1927; the *Alter* of Slabodka) elaborates: The *Gemara* is teaching the degree to which a person must feel and practice the *Middah* / trait of gratitude. Not only does a person who does good deserve gratitude, even inanimate objects from which we once benefitted deserve our gratitude. The purpose of the plagues was to reveal *Hashem*’s greatness and power, and, ultimately, to teach the Egyptians to believe in Him. Even for such an important purpose, Moshe Rabbeinu could not ignore the gratitude he owed to the inanimate waters of the Nile.

(*Ohr Ha’tzafun* I p.190)

Of course, inanimate objects do not need, and are not aware of, our gratitude. Rather, explains R’ Daniel Haymann *shlita* (Tel Zion, Israel), the reason for the obligation discussed here is to imbue us with good character traits. If we do not feel gratitude to everything that provides us with some benefit, we soon will not be grateful to the people who do good for us.

(*Hakarat Ha’tov Ke’halachah* p.18)

- Continued from front page -

The second cup accompanies the reading of the *Haggadah*, which speaks of our salvation from physical slavery.

The third cup accompanies *Birkat Ha’mazon*, where we acknowledge the bounty on our tables--the opposite of economic oppression.

Finally, the fourth cup parallels *Hallel*, beginning with “*Shefoch chamat’cha*,” a prayer that *Hashem* take vengeance on the nations “that devoured Yaakov”--alluding to the extra cruelty of humiliating us in our exile. (*Binah L’ittim: Drush L’yom Rishon Shel Pesach*)