

This week's *Parashah* continues to discuss the *Korbanot* / sacrificial offerings. A *Midrash* notes that Noach offered *Korbanot* and the Jewish People offer *Korbanot*. Which is more beloved to *Hashem*? asks the *Midrash*. It answers: Since *Hashem* commands Moshe (*Vayikra* 6:2), "This is the law of the *Olah* / burnt offering," we know that our offerings are more beloved. Thus it is written (*Malachi* 3:4--from the *Haftarah* read today in honor of *Shabbat Ha'gadol*), "Then the offering of Yehuda and Yerushalayim will be pleasing to *Hashem* . . ." [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) explains: After Noach offered *Korbanot*, *Hashem* promised that the laws of nature would never again be suspended as they had been during the Flood. Thus, He initiated a world where a person could achieve physical and intellectual perfection within the bounds of the natural order.

When *Hashem* gave the Torah, He initiated a different type of world--one where a person can achieve supernatural perfection based on prophetic revelation. Only we were commanded to bring *Korbanot*; Noach was not. And, while Noach's offerings are called "sweet-smelling" (*Bereishit* 8:21), only the *Korbanot* that *Bnei Yisrael* offer are called "sweet smelling" and also "My bread" (*Bemidbar* 28:2). A smell is a passing interaction, while bread involves an integration of one thing (the food) into another (the one eating). Our sacrifices bring us closer to *Hashem* than Noach's could have brought him--they are pleasing to *Hashem*. (*Midbar Shur*)

Shabbat Ha'gadol

The *Zohar* teaches that *Bnei Yisrael* in Egypt sank to the penultimate 49th "Gate" or level of *Tum'ah* / impurity. Commentaries add that, had they fallen to the 50th level, they would have been unredeemable.

Why did *Hashem* wait until *Bnei Yisrael* had nearly hit rock bottom before taking them out of Egypt? R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) explains:

Hashem wanted to reveal the hereditary holiness of every Jew. The Egyptians wished to strip us of our special character, but they could not uproot the holiness that is our heritage, R' Charlap writes. Certainly we can be, and often are, affected negatively by our surroundings--as were *Bnei Yisrael* in Egypt. Still, beneath any coarseness, rust, or tarnish (so-to-speak) that may appear on our outsides lies a hidden "point" of holiness that is hereditary and cannot be extinguished. By waiting to redeem us until we had fallen to the 49th Gate of Impurity, *Hashem* was teaching that we still merit to be redeemed even if that "point" is all that remains. (On the visible level, writes R' Charlap, the preservation of this "point" of holiness was reflected in *Bnei Yisrael's* maintaining their own language, names, and dress throughout their exile in Egypt.) [Ed. note: Unlike the commentaries referred to above, R' Charlap appears to understand that falling to the 50th level of impurity and being unredeemable is an impossibility, which is what *Hashem* was teaching by redeeming us when we reached the 49th level.]

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Pesach

“Had not the Holy One, Blessed is He, taken out forefathers out from Egypt, then we, our children, and our children’s children would have remained enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.”

(From the Pesach Haggadah)

Many commentaries wonder how we can make such a statement. Even if *Hashem* had not taken our forefathers out of Egypt, perhaps Pharaoh would have freed that generation or a later one, or another king would have conquered Egypt and freed our ancestors!

R’ Yitzchak Shmelkes z”l (1828-1906; rabbi of Lvov, Galicia) explains: Egypt practiced a caste system. There was a priestly caste, a royal caste, a military caste, a tradesmen’s caste, and so on. Lowest of all, was the slave caste--and it was there that *Bnei Yisrael* were classified. As in other societies with such systems, an Egyptian could not move from one caste to another. Thus, even if Pharaoh had freed our ancestors from physical labor, they would still be members of the slave caste and so would we, their descendants thousands of years later. In name and social standing, we would, forever, be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.

R’ Shmelkes continues: The Egyptian’s caste system was intimately connected with their belief in astrology. A person was born under a certain star and into a certain family, and that determined his fate. This is what Pharaoh meant when he said to Moshe (*Shmot* 10:10), “See that evil is opposite your faces.” *Rashi* z”l explains based on a *Midrash*: “There is a certain star whose name is ‘Evil.’ Pharaoh said to Moshe and Aharon: ‘Through astrology, I see a star rising towards you in the wilderness where you wish to proceed. It is an emblem of blood and slaughter.’” Pharaoh was saying: You are doomed by the stars and you cannot escape.

When *Hashem* redeemed us from Egypt, He took us out from more than physical slavery. He redeemed us spiritually and taught us not to see the world the way the Egyptians did. He taught us that man is a ladder standing on earth, but his head can be in the Heavens. He taught us that a fool can be born into a family of geniuses, and a genius can be born into a family of fools. Indeed, our Sages take pains to point out that Torah scholarship is not hereditary. Rather, say our Sages, a person has three names: the name by which *Hashem* calls him, the name his parents gave him, and the name he makes for himself. Of all of these, the name man makes for himself is the most beloved. It is because we do not believe as the Egyptians did that we have a *Mitzvah* of *Chessed* / performing acts of kindness, R’ Shmelkes writes. If a person is doomed by the stars and by the caste into which he was born, why bother helping him? The Exodus teaches us that such a viewpoint is incorrect. (*Bet Yitzchak: Orach Chaim, Tzalot Ha’bayit* 3)

Shabbat Ha’gadol

“Behold--I send you Eliyahu the prophet, before the *Gadol* / great and *Nora* / awesome day of *Hashem*.” (*Malachi* 3:22)

There is a dispute between the Sages of the *Mishnah* Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua. The former says that the ultimate redemption will occur in *Tishrei*, while the latter says it will occur in *Nissan*.

R’ Gedaliah Silverstone z”l (1871-1944; rabbi in Belfast, Ireland and Washington, D.C.) writes in the name of R’ Menachem Nochum Kaplan z”l (1811-1879; popularly known as “Reb Nachumke of Horodna”): Our verse is teaching that either way, Eliyahu Ha’navi will herald the redemption. The “great” day is *Shabbat Ha’gadol*--originally, as this year, the 10th of *Nissan*. The “awesome” day is *Yom Kippur*--the 10th of *Tishrei*.

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Korban Pesach* [2nd ed.] p.6)

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R’ Charlap continues: Even the *Rasha* / wicked son of the *Haggadah* has this hereditary point of holiness within him; otherwise, he would not be at the *Seder* asking questions (see below). Thus, our work on the *Seder* night is similar to the mission of Eliyahu Ha’navi described in today’s *Haftarah* (*Malachi* 3:23), “He shall restore the heart of fathers to children and the heart of children to their fathers.”

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom: Shabbat Ha’gadol*)

How can the above attitude be reconciled with the *Haggadah*’s uncompromising response to the *Rasha*? R’ Charlap writes:

The *Rasha* has no conception of *Mitzvot*, even after setting in *Eretz Yisrael*, and he therefore asks: “Of what purpose is this work to you?” Someone who lives in *Eretz Yisrael* and does not value *Mitzvot* is [currently] a *Rasha*, writes R’ Charlap. Therefore: “Blunt his teeth and tell him, ‘If you had been there, you would not have been redeemed.’” Had he been in Egypt, he would have died during the plague of darkness (see *Rashi* z”l to *Shmot* 13:18).

However, R’ Charlap continues, once he did leave Egypt and enter *Eretz Yisrael*, it is impossible for the *Rasha* to remain separated from the Jewish People forever. Whether he likes it or not, he is destined to repent. This explains why *Bnei Yisrael* bowed to *Hashem* joyously when they heard that they would have children in *Eretz Yisrael*--even though they were informed that some of those children would be wicked (see *Rashi* to *Shmot* 12:27). *Eretz Yisrael* has to power to purify and refine even the wicked and to return them to *Hashem* and His Torah.

(*Ibid* p.32)