

In this week's *Parashah*, the enslavement and oppression of *Bnei Yisrael* begins. R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) writes: It is built into Creation--R' Charlap calls it "one of the secrets of Creation"-- that every philosophy and world-view, no matter how false or corrupt, must have its opportunity to be realized in practice so that it can be shown to be a bankrupt lie. This is why, for example, *Hashem* gave the gentile nations a prophet (Bil'am), *i.e.*, to demonstrate that they are not fit for prophecy.

The Egyptians believed that their success depended on oppressing *Bnei Yisrael* and blotting out *Hashem's* Name, G-d forbid, as Pharaoh said (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*!" In order to demonstrate the Egyptians' error, *Hashem* first allowed them to succeed for a time. Then, as we will read in the coming weeks, *Hashem* showed them that their behavior towards *Bnei Yisrael* was offensive even to nature itself, as the plagues demonstrated by striking every aspect of nature -- water, land, animals of all types, the weather, etc.

The Egyptians' philosophy, continues R' Charlap, led them to act with unimaginable cruelty, including drowning *Bnei Yisrael's* babies. This shows how low the nations would fall if, G-d forbid, there would ever be a world without the Jewish People. We show that the only success is that which comes from serving *Hashem*; therefore, our existence is essential to the world. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom* p.67)

Shabbat

In "Retzeh," the paragraph that we insert in *Birkat Ha'mazon* on *Shabbat*, we say, "For this day, it is great and holy before You . . ." R' Zvi Yisrael Thau *shlita* (founder of Yeshivat Har Ha'mor in Yerushalayim) writes that this sentence alludes to two different aspects of *Shabbat*.

One of those aspects, writes R' Thau, is *Shabbat* as we know it, a day of holiness and rest, of Torah study and prayer, that elevates and sanctifies the entire week. This aspect of *Shabbat* is alluded to by the words, "For this day," for the word "this" implies something one can point to.

Higher than this revealed sanctity of *Shabbat*, there is the aspect of *Shabbat* that is found in *Hashem's* storehouse--a reference to the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 10b) that teaches: "*Hashem* said to Moshe, 'I have a good *Matanah* / gift in My treasury, and its name is "*Shabbat*.'" I wish to give it to the Jewish People; go inform them!" This aspect of *Shabbat* is alluded to by the phrase, "It is great and holy before You." The third-person pronoun "it" suggests something that is not present. Moreover, we say that it is a great day "before You," implying that it is not before us.

What is that aspect of *Shabbat*? It is the "*M'ein Olam Ha'ba*" / a little bit of the World-to-Come that *Shabbat* allows us to experience. R' Thau adds: To us, who experience the passage of time and who cannot imagine life any other way, *Olam Ha'ba* seems like something that will exist in the future. To us, *Shabbat* is merely a taste of a future world that does not yet exist. But *Hashem* is above time and, from His perspective, *Olam Ha'ba* is already as real as this world is. To *Hashem*, *Shabbat* is actually a little bit of *Olam Ha'ba* crossing the boundary into our world--a gift from His storehouse that He gives us.

(*Am Mekadeshei Shevi'i* p.39-41)

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“Behold, he [Aharon] is going out to meet you, and he will see you and will rejoice in his heart.” (4:14)

Rashi z”l explains: “Not as you believe, that he will be upset with you because you have attained a high position.” [Until here from *Rashi*]

Midrash Rabbah comments on the verse (*Shir Ha’shirim* 8:1), “Who will make you like a brother to me”-- Like which brother? Like Kayin to Hevel? But Kayin killed Hevel! Like Yishmael to Yitzchak? But Yishmael hated Yitzchak! Like Esav to Yaakov? But Esav hated Yaakov! Rather, like Moshe and Aharon. About them it is said (*Tehilim* 133:1), “Behold! How good and how pleasant is the dwelling of brothers in unity.” Moshe was the king and Aharon was the *Kohen*, and each was happy for the other. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Yedayah Ha’penini z”l (13th century; Provence) writes: Moshe and Aharon’s happiness for each other and their lack of jealousy shows their praise, especially considering that sibling rivalry is very natural. These traits of Moshe and Aharon demonstrate their lofty level; in particular, they demonstrate that they did not hold their positions for their own honor, only to serve *Hashem*. When that is a person’s motivation, he will be happy with his own role, and he will be happy for others who also have been assigned important roles.

(*Be’ur Haggadot*)



“Has He struck [Yisrael] as He struck those who struck him, or has He slain him as He slew those who slew him?” (Yeshayah 27:7—from the Haftarah)

R’ Shlomo Zalman Pines z”l (1874-1954; lay leader and educator in Minsk, Russia and Zurich, Switzerland) writes: The prophet is looking back (prophetically) at the long exile, and noting the *Chessed* / kindness *Hashem* has shown us even in exile. No matter how much we have suffered, says the prophet, we still exist--unlike so many of the evil powers that have oppressed us.

(*Panas Shlomo*)

From the same work:

“Therefore, through this shall Yaakov’s iniquity be atoned for, and this shall be the fruit of his sin’s removal--when he makes all the altar stones like ground chalk-stones, and Asheirah-trees and sun-idols shall rise up no more.” (Yeshayah 27:9—from the Haftarah)

R’ Pines writes: Sometimes a sinner is punished less severely than he deserves because of some benefit that will result. For example, instead of imprisoning a convict in a dark dungeon, the authorities may imprison him in a light-filled room where he can produce goods from which the public will benefit.

Likewise, writes R’ Pines, as harsh as our exile has been, it has, at times, been less harsh than our sins deserved. The reason is that *Hashem* wants to leave us in a position where we can influence the other nations. “Through this shall Yaakov’s iniquity be atoned for,” says our verse. Not through harsh punishment, but through serving as role models so that the nations will abandon their various false gods, as our verse describes.

“He replied, ‘Who appointed you as a dignitary, a ruler, and a judge over us? Do you propose to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?’ Moshe was frightened and he said, ‘Achein / Indeed, the matter has become known!’” (2:14)

Rashi z”l explains: Moshe had been wondering, “Were *Bnei Yisrael* more sinful than the seventy nations of the world such that *Bnei Yisrael* deserved to be so oppressed in Egypt?” But when Moshe saw that there were informers among *Bnei Yisrael* (How else did this person know that Moshe had killed an Egyptian?), it became known to him why *Bnei Yisrael* were subjugated. [Until here from *Rashi*]

(One can suggest that Moshe’s words have, in effect, a double meaning: Indeed, the matter--the reason for the subjugation--has become known; it is explained by the fact that the matter--that I killed an Egyptian--has become known.)

R’ Yehuda Loewe z”l (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) explains further: When Haman wanted to put down the Jewish People in front of Achashveirosh, he said (*Esther* 3:8), “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your realm. Their laws are different from every other people’s.” Haman was saying, in effect: “The Jews are different--they dress differently, they eat different foods, and they do not drink our wine.” What Haman did not realize, writes *Maharal*, was that he was expressing exactly those characteristics of the Jewish People that protect us in our exile. When we live as a unique nation and limit our participation in the gentile world, we are strong. When we try to blend in, we are weak. Indeed, that is why the Jews’ participation in Achashveirosh’s feast (described at the beginning of the *Megillah*) was such a grievous sin -- the reason, according to one opinion in the *Gemara* (*Megillah* 12a), that *Hashem* decreed extermination on them.

When Moshe saw that there were informers among *Bnei Yisrael*, he understood that *Bnei Yisrael* had become too close to their host nation, the Egyptians. Therefore, he said, “*Achein*” (אֶחָיִן), the matter has become known!” The *Gematria* of the Hebrew word “*Achein*,” notes *Maharal*, is 71. Why are *Bnei Yisrael* being punished? said Moshe. Because the “one”-- *Bnei Yisrael*, represented by the letter *Aleph* of “*Achein*,” whose *Gematria* is one--has joined with the “seventy”-- the seventy nations of the world, represented by the other letters of “*Achein*,” whose *Gematria* totals seventy. (*Ohr Chadash*)

“Elokim called out to him from amid the bush and said, ‘Moshe, Moshe!’” (3:4)

R’ Shlomo Ephraim of Lunschitz z”l (rabbi of Prague; died 1619) writes: Our Sages teach that *Hashem*, so-to-speak, shares our pain. Therefore, He called to Moshe twice, as a person in pain calls repeatedly for help.

(*Kli Yakar*)