

Seven of the Ten Plagues are found in this week's *Parashah*. R' Meshulam Feish Segal Lowy z"l (1921-2015; the *Tosher Rebbe* in post-War Hungary and Montreal, Canada) writes: The ultimate purpose of all of the miracles connected with the Exodus is so that all of mankind will recognize that "there is Someone in charge in the palace" (a phrase borrowed from a *Midrash* regarding Avraham's discovery of *Hashem*) and that everything is run with *Hashgachah Peratit*, i.e., Divine interest and involvement in world events and attention to detail. Moshe delivers this message in *Hashem's* Name repeatedly in our *Parashah*: "So that you will know that there is none like *Hashem*, our *Elokim*" (8:6); "So that you will know that I am *Hashem* in the midst of the land" (8:18); "So that you shall know that there is none like Me in all the world" (9:14); and "So that My Name may be declared throughout the world" (9:16). We likewise say in our daily prayers (quoting *Nechemiah* 9:9-10): "You observed the suffering of our forefathers in Egypt . . . You imposed signs and wonders upon Pharaoh . . . and you made a great Name for Yourself, as clear as this very day."

The *Tosher Rebbe* continues: Acknowledging *Hashem's Hashgachah Peratit* is the ultimate purpose of all of our prayers, beginning with *Pesukei D'zimra* and continuing through the Blessings surrounding *Kri'at Shema*. Each day, upon repeating the same prayers, a person can attain a deeper understanding of *Hashem's* greatness, and a person's *Emunah* can be strengthened. Thus we read (*Tehilim* 150:2--also part of our daily prayers), "Praise Him according to His abundant greatness"--i.e., "Praise Him (*Hashem*) according to (one's own, ever-increasing appreciation of) His abundant greatness." (*Avodat Avodah*)

## Shabbat

R' Yaakov ben Asher z"l (the "*Ba'al Ha'turim*"; Germany and Spain; 1269-1343) writes: Our custom is to say in *Musaf*, "*Tikanta Shabbat*, etc.," whose words are arranged in the order known as "*TaShRaK*" (ק"ת-ש"ר--i.e., in reverse alphabetical order). This is meant to allude to the future redemption, about which we read (*Zechariah* 10:8), "*Eshrekah* (אשרקה) / I will whistle to them and gather them, for I have redeemed them."

(*Tur, Orach Chaim* 286)

R' Yosef Karo z"l (1488-1575; Greece and Eretz Yisrael; author of the *Shulchan Aruch* and other works) adds: We allude to the future redemption on *Shabbat* because that redemption will come about in the merit of *Shabbat*, as we read (*Yeshayah* 56:4, 7): "So says *Hashem* to the barren ones who observe My Sabbaths . . . I shall bring them to My holy mountain . . ." It is further written (*Yeshayah* 30:15), "In *Shuvah* and *Nachat* (both terms suggesting restfulness) you shall be redeemed."

R' Karo continues by showing how each series of four letters in reverse order alludes to a word or phrase related to the redemption. For example, *Nun-Mem-Lamed-Chaf* contains the word "*Melech*" / "king," as in the verse (*Zechariah* 14:9), "*Hashem* will be King over all the world--on that day *Hashem* will be One and His Name will be One." (*Bet Yosef*)

R' Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l (1891-1982; *Rosh Ha'yeshiva* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav in Yerushalayim) explains further: Why should the redemption be alluded to by the alphabet in reverse? There are many people whose *Emunah* is weak because things seem to be backwards, i.e., the world is not operating in a way that makes sense to us. When *Hashem* redeems us, He will show us where He was in that seeming backward-ness.

(*Sichot Harav Zvi Yehuda: Devarim* p.436)

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**“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and I will multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.” (7:3)**

Many commentaries ask: If *Hashem* “hardened Pharaoh’s heart,” implying that He took away Pharaoh’s free will so that Pharaoh could not have emancipated *Bnei Yisrael* even if he had wanted to, why did the Egyptians deserve these punishing plagues? Commentaries give various answers to this question.

R’ Yaakov Moshe Hillel *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Ahavat Shalom in Yerushalayim) answers as follows, based on the *Zohar* and the teachings of R’ Yitzchak Luria *z”l* (“*Arizal*”; 1534-1572): The great philosophers in ancient times--for example, Aristotle--achieved a very sophisticated understanding of G-d as “*Ein Sof*” / limitless and beyond our comprehension. Ironically, however, their understanding of G-d’s greatness precluded them from acknowledging His *Hashgachah Peratit*, i.e., His interest and involvement in world events. Instead, they reasoned that He is too lofty to be involved in, or even aware of, such relatively puny matters as man’s affairs. (This, explains R’ Hillel is the significance of the *Chanukah* miracle, which demonstrates, contrary to Greek beliefs, that *Hashem* is, in fact, running the world with *Hashgachah Peratit*.)

Pharaoh, too, was a great philosopher, continues R’ Hillel. Pharaoh acknowledged *Elokim*, who Pharaoh understood as the G-d who established the rules of nature and now lets the world run automatically. (Note that the *Gematriot* of “*Elokim*” and “*Ha’teva*” / “the nature” are equal.) But, writes R’ Hillel, Pharaoh could not acknowledge *Hashem*, a G-d Who intervenes in nature with *Hashgachah Peratit*. (We know *Hashem* to be one and the same as *Elokim*. The different names of G-d merely represent different ways that we perceive Him.) Thus, when Moshe said (5:1), “So said *Hashem*, the *Elokim* of *Yisrael*, ‘Send out My people,’” Pharaoh responded (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*!”

The idea of “*Hashem*” -- a G-d Who is *Ein Sof* but also can intervene in nature--was so antithetical to Pharaoh’s world-view that just hearing the Name “*Hashem*” caused Pharaoh to become more entrenched in his position, thus hardening his heart, writes R’ Hillel. The more *Hashem* proved through the plagues that He can intervene in world affairs, and the more times Moshe mentioned *Hashem*’s Name, the more entrenched Pharaoh became. According to this understanding, concludes R’ Hillel, *Hashem* never took away Pharaoh’s free will; rather, our verse means: “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart when I will multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.” It was *Hashem*’s “signs and wonders” that caused Pharaoh’s heart to be hardened. (*Ruach Ha’yam: Chanukah* p.221)

**“*Hashem* spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them ‘*el*’ *Bnei Yisrael* and ‘*el*’ Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take *Bnei Yisrael* out of the land of Egypt.” (6:13)**

*Midrash Rabbah*, cited by *Rashi z”l*, interprets “*el*” (על) to mean “concerning” or “regarding.” *Rashi* writes: “Concerning *Bnei Yisrael*”--to deal with them in a gentle manner and to be patient with them. “Concerning Pharaoh, the king of Egypt”--that they should show him respect as they spoke. [Until here from *Rashi*]

The *Talmud Yerushalmi* interprets ‘*el*’ to mean “to,” and it asks: What commandment did Moshe give to *Bnei Yisrael* at this time? It answers: He commanded them regarding freeing Jewish slaves. [Until here from the *Yerushalmi*]

R’ Yosef Rosen *z”l* (1858-1936; the “*Rogatchover Gaon*”) writes: The *Yerushalmi* is teaching that the Exodus was conditioned on *Bnei Yisrael*’s committing that, in the future, they would free their Jewish slaves after six years of servitude (see *Shmot* 21:2) or at the *Yovel* / Jubilee year (see *Vayikra* 25:10). If *Bnei Yisrael* would not fulfill that condition, they would be returned to the status of slaves.

*Bnei Yisrael* did not, in fact, live up to that condition, and they were punished, as we read in the Book of *Yirmiyah* (34:14; see *Rashi* there). Specifically, the booty that *Bnei Yisrael* received from Egypt at the time of the Exodus had the status of the gift that a master must give his slave when he goes free (see *Devarim* 15:13). Since *Bnei Yisrael* failed to fulfill the *Mitzvah* that was the condition upon which they were freed, they became obligated to become re-enslaved to the Egyptians in some sense. Therefore, relates the *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 87b), the equivalent of the booty they received was recaptured by the king of Egypt in the days of King Rechavam, son of King Shlomo. (Tzofnat Pane’ach)



**“Entreat *Hashem*--there has been an overabundance of thunder of *Elokim* and hail.” . . .**

**“Moshe said to him, ‘As for you and your servants, I know that you are not yet afraid of *Hashem Elokim*.’” (9:28-30)**

R’ Pinchas Zalman Horowitz *z”l* (1832-1906; Krakow, Galicia) explains: The Name “*Hashem*” refers to G-d’s Attribute of Mercy, while the Name “*Elokim*” refers to His Attribute of Justice. Pharaoh did not believe that one deity could have both attributes, so he said: Entreat *Hashem* and see if He can stop the thunder of *Elokim*.”

Moshe replied: I will do that, but I know that you and your servants nevertheless will not believe that *Hashem* is *Elokim*. (*Ahavat Torah*)