

In this week's *Parashah*, *Bnei Yisrael* leave Egypt. *Hashem* had told Avraham (*Bereishit* 15:13), "Know with certainty that your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own; they will serve them, and they will oppress them four hundred years." *Rashi* z"l (to *Shmot* 6:16) points out, however, that one can calculate from the Torah's verses that *Bnei Yisrael* were not in Egypt anywhere near 400 years. Rather, say our Sages, *Bnei Yisrael* spent 210 years in Egypt, while *Hashem* counted the 400 years foretold to Avraham from the birth of Yitzchak, who also was an alien in a land that was not his own. From the time of Avraham's prophecy, 430 years passed until the Exodus, as we read in our *Parashah* (12:40-41).

R' Avigdor Nebenzahl *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* and former Chief Rabbi of the Old City of Yerushalayim) notes that this was not the only occasion when *Hashem* told a prophet when the redemption would occur, but He concealed from the prophet the true meaning of his own prophecy. Famously, Daniel prophesied about the time of the ultimate Redemption, but he did not know the meaning of his own words. And since then, the many commentaries who have tried to interpret Daniel's prophecy have hit on possible dates for the Redemption, but not the correct date because, in fact, Daniel's prophecy does not have only one correct interpretation. One reason for this, R' Nebenzahl writes, is that there cannot be a predetermined time for the Redemption since it is in our power to hasten the Redemption through our repentance and good deeds. When the Redemption does occur, *Hashem* will reveal, as well, how the ultimate date of the Redemption was always one of the possible interpretations of Daniel's prophecy.

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Shabbat

Our Sages say that *Shabbat* is equal to all the other *Mitzvot*. R' Chaim ben Betzalel z"l (1515-1588; brother of the *Maharal* of Prague z"l) writes: It seems to me that this should be understood like the statement, "Salt is equal in importance to an entire dish of food." Of course that is not to be taken literally. Rather, it means that salt brings out a food's flavor and, without salt, food lacks some of its taste. Similarly, R' Chaim writes, *Shabbat* brings out the "flavor" of the other *Mitzvot*. He explains:

Hashem has given us many of *Mitzvot*, and we could sometimes feel that He has weighed us down with a heavy burden. At times, we may feel as if He has placed a muzzle on our mouths to prevent us from enjoying life. However, when we look at the *Mitzvah* of *Shabbat*, with its injunction to rest and to enjoy good food and drink, we know without a doubt that all of the *Mitzvot* were given to us for our own good. *Shabbat* teaches us that *Hashem* wants a person to enjoy this world, but in a holy and pure way, and that He does not demand of us that we afflict ourselves.

In addition, R' Chaim continues, a person may have doubts about the legitimacy of the Torah. After all, we were not at *Har Sinai*! To remove any such doubts, *Hashem* gave us *Shabbat*, a sign of the covenant between Him and us. Specifically, when *Shabbat* enters and a person feels himself enveloped in its holiness, when he feels the joy that fills his soul as *Shabbat* arrives, he has no doubt that he is experiencing a "spark" of prophecy--the same prophecy that his ancestors experienced at *Har Sinai*.

(*Sefer Ha'Chaim: Sefer Parnassah V'chalkalah* ch.6)

R' Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal z"l *Hy"d* (1885-1945; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Pieštany, Czechoslovakia) writes: In light of the above, we can better understand the custom to sing *Zemirot* at the *Shabbat* meals. If one's soul is pure enough that he immediately feels the holiness and joy of which R' Chaim writes, then his soul certainly wants to sing. If, on the other hand, a person does not experience those feelings on his own, singing *Zemirot* can awaken his soul and bring him to have those feelings.

(*Seder Zemirot Mishneh Sachir* p.31)

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“It shall be a sign upon your arm, and an ornament between your eyes, for with a strong hand Hashem took us out of Egypt.” (13:16)

The *Tefilin* on the arm should be placed in such a way that when a person lowers his arm, the *Tefilin* will be pointing toward his heart.

(*Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 27:1*)

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and Eretz Yisrael) writes: The foundation of this *Mitzvah* of *Tefilin* is that we should place a written reminder of the Exodus on our arms and heads, paralleling the feelings in our hearts and the thoughts in our heads.

And now, *Ramban* continues, I will tell you the general reason for many *Mitzvot*. From the time idolatry first began to spread in the world, which was in the time of Enosh, a grandson of Adam, people began to have incorrect ideas about G-d. Some denied the existence of a Creator and claimed that the world always was. Others believed that *Hashem* exists but claimed that He does not know what takes place in our world. Still others acknowledged that He knows what happens in the world, but claimed He does not take an interest and does not get involved; thus, there is no such thing as reward and punishment. When *Hashem* chooses one nation and performs miracles for it, even changing nature, He demonstrates the fallacy of all of those beliefs. The fact that He can change nature at will shows that He is its Creator, and the fact that He intervenes on behalf of one nation shows that He knows and cares what is going on in this world.

However, because *Hashem* will not perform miracles in every generation to persuade every wicked person or heretic, He commanded us to create reminders as a sign of what we witnessed. Likewise, we are commanded to transmit these memories to our children and grandchildren until the end of all generations. This is why there are so many *Mitzvot* that remind us constantly of the Exodus.

(*Be'ur Al Ha'Torah*)

R' Meir Eisenstadter (“*Maharam Asch*”; 1780-1852; a leading Hungarian rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva*) asks: What is the difference between the *Mitzvah* to remember the Exodus daily and the *Mitzvot* we perform on *Pesach*?

He answers: The purpose of recalling the Exodus daily is to remind us of the fundamentals of which *Ramban* speaks--that we have a Master, that He watches us, and that He rewards and punishes us based on our deeds. Because we are obligated to remember these principles at all times, we are obligated to recall the Exodus daily.

In contrast, the purpose of remembering the Exodus at the *Pesach Seder* is to give thanks for the wondrous redemption which allowed us to receive the Torah and become the special people we are.

(*Drashot Imrei Yosher* #50)

“Moshe stretched forth his hand toward the heavens and there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt . . .” (10:22)

Rashi z"l writes: Why did *Hashem* bring darkness on Egypt? Because there were wicked people among *Bnei Yisrael* did not want to leave Egypt. They died during the plague of darkness so that the Egyptians would not see their destruction and say, “They, too have been stricken as we have been.” Another reason is so that *Bnei Yisrael* could search in the darkness and locate the Egyptian’s jewels. Then when *Bnei Yisrael* were about to leave Egypt and they asked the Egyptians for their jewels, and the latter replied, “We have none,” *Bnei Yisrael* could say, “We have seen them in your houses and they are in such and such a place.” [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Avraham Prostitz z"l (Moravia; died 1798) asks: Why did *Hashem* command Moshe (*Shmot* 11:2), “Please speak in the ears of the people: let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels”? If *Hashem* wanted *Bnei Yisrael* to have Egypt’s wealth, He could simply have planted the idea in the Egyptians’ heads to give *Bnei Yisrael* gifts, just as Pharaoh had given gifts to Avraham Avinu hundreds of years before. Moreover, why did *Hashem* want *Bnei Yisrael* to “borrow” valuables from the Egyptians when they had no intention of returning them?

R' Prostitz answers: Unquestionably, *Bnei Yisrael* deserved to be compensated handsomely for their decades of slavery. The reason *Hashem* wanted it to be done in this roundabout--at first glance, even unseemly--way is so that the Egyptians would chase *Bnei Yisrael* to the *Yam Suf*. Had the Egyptians given *Bnei Yisrael* their wealth voluntarily, they would not have chased *Bnei Yisrael* to the *Yam Suf*, and the Splitting of the Sea would never have occurred. But *Hashem* wanted the Egyptians to chase *Bnei Yisrael* so that He could demonstrate His power to the world and punish the Egyptians once and for all.

In this light, R' Prostitz writes, we can understand the verse (*Tehilim* 105:28), “He sent darkness and made it dark, and they did not defy His word.” R' Prostitz explains: The verse’s last phrase is praising *Bnei Yisrael* for following *Hashem*’s directions despite some uneasiness that they might have felt at “snooping” in the Egyptians houses and “borrowing” things from the Egyptians with no intention of returning them. *Bnei Yisrael* trusted that *Hashem* had a reason for what He was asking of them, and “they did not defy His word.”

(*Machmad Lev*)

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Not only the timing of the Redemption, but also how the Redemption will play out, is hidden, R' Nebenzahl writes. This explains why *Rashi* and the *Ba'alei Ha'tosafot* (*Sukkah* 41a), on the one hand, and R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt), on the other hand, appear to disagree about whether the *Bet Hamikdash* will be built by man (*Rambam*) or will descend from Heaven already completed (*Rashi* and *Tosafot*). They are not arguing, R' Nebenzahl explains; rather, each is setting forth one possibility. Which of those possibilities will be realized we can only wait and hope to see.

(*Shiurei Maran Ha'gra Nebenzahl Al Hilchot Bet Ha'bechirah* p.21)