

By Rabbi  
Warren Kasztl

**SEFER BERESHIT & SHEMOT – CONNECTED**

**Based on the Hashkafa of HaRav Shimon Kessin, SHLIT'A**

**In Memory Of:**

**Eliyahu ben Yehuda – Dr. Elliot Hahn**

**Chaya No'omi Malka bat Mordechai HaKohen – Naomi Weiss**

Hours after I forwarded last week's article, I realized that I had forgotten to include a remarkably important point. I would rather share it with you now than save it for next year. I heard this priceless pshat from my dear friend, Dr. Michael Paritzsky. All of us know the details regarding the blessings Yaakov gave to Menashe and Ephraim, Yosef's sons. He crossed his arms, placed his right hand on the younger Ephraim and his left on Menashe. Yosef was disturbed by this and attempted to correct what looks like a mistake. His Father told him not to worry leave everything as it is and that all is under control. Although both children will be great, Ephraim will be the greater of the two. As much as we know regarding what happened here, of much greater importance is what did not happen. No negative words regarding this event were ever exchanged between Menashe and Ephraim. Nowhere in the text or commentaries are we lead to think that there may have been jealousy between them relating to this Bracha, their destiny. From this we can conclude that Yosef went to great lengths – very great lengths – to make sure that the jealousy that tore his family apart never found its way into Yosef's home. His sons were raised in a manner that enabled them to celebrate each other's achievements and blessings with sincere hearts and authentic joy, one for the other. We can presume that Yosef shared with his sons what happened in his younger years. Menashe served as the interpreter between Yosef and his brothers before Yosef revealed himself to them. He knew everything that transpired decades earlier. For seventeen years, Yosef was never alone with Yaakov in order to make sure that his brothers would never suspect him of sharing with his father his side of what happened. Yosef always came with either Ephraim, Menashe or both. Of great importance is that we can conclude that the way Yosef shared all of this with his sons conformed with Halacha and all the sensitivities that accompany proper speech. Yosef would never have succeeded as he did if the lesson was transmitted the wrong way. Ephraim and Menashe loved each other as they did because Yosef taught everything to them proactively, making sure they learned from his past, not at the expense of their uncle's character.

Last week, we learned that Yaakov's casket left Egypt with Yosef's crown placed on top of it. By the time they arrived in Chevron to lay Yaakov to rest, there were thirty-six crowns representing the kings they met along the way. Those kings honored Yaakov and Yosef as they joined the procession, adding their crowns to Yosef's. We asked a question. What did this foreshadow for our young nation? In order to understand the answer, let's go back many centuries to the time immediately prior to the formation of Chava. Adam was looking for an "ezer k'negdo", "a helper against him". Rashi, (quoting the Gemara Yevamot 63a), explains that within the construct of marriage, if the man is worthy, his wife will be a help to him. If he's not, she will wage war against him. The same concept applies to how history unfolds for our people. If we are worthy, Jewish history will enjoy what Rav Kessin calls the "L'chatchila" track, while if we are not, the "Bidieved" track will become our destiny. The thirty-six kings placing their crowns on Yaakov's casket foreshadowed what would be if our people, while in Egypt, remained true to the spiritual values of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, values that Yosef introduced and exemplified for Egypt and the world to learn from. He was remarkably successful in this quest.

What would have happened had the l'chatchila track of Jewish history become the reality we should be reading this week? The storyline would have been radically different. The hard labor meant to curb our population growth would have never been required. When Hashem came calling for us to worship Him in the desert, Egypt would have joined us and would have been responsible to gather the other nations to be part of Ma'amad Har Sinai. As we learned a while back, those nations would have been on our coat-tails heading for the promised Geulah that would lead to zichuch world transformation. (Mount Sinai with us as the only attendants brought an end to that opportunity for the nations of the world.) Hashem was willing to give His precious Torah to those nations, proven by the fact that before Ma'amad Har Sinai He offered it to them and they refused it. The hard labor, the ten plagues, the potential war that culminated in the splitting of the Red Sea would never have happened. Everything would have occurred not just peacefully, but with great celebration. Egypt's status as the bechor amongst the nations would have been trans-

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# **TORAT HAR SHMUEL**

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ferred to Israel, and all of mankind would have moved forward together in a manner that is described in the Olaynu prayer we say three times every day.

What justifies the multi-national optimism expressed above is founded on everything Yosef accomplished in Egypt. His righteous status as a G-dly man, blessed with insight, wisdom, unparalleled Ruach HaKodesh and unquestionable character, paved the way for everyone in Yaakov's household to be respected in this foreign land as an extension of the way the Prime Minister of Egypt was respected. They would presume in us all the positives they associated with Yosef. All we had to do was stick to the program, maintain our identity, and the positive influence that would precipitate would result in the scenario described above. As history has proven, when we respect ourselves, the world respects us. We would have been ready and worthy of those events, and the nations of the world would have considered it a grand privilege to join us in the process of history unfolding along the l'chatchila track.

Those thirty-six crowns on Yaakov's casket testified to the fact that each of them knew who Yosef was and validated their thankfulness for Yosef having fed the world during the famine. That kind of honor was not only extended for what Yosef did, but more importantly, for who he was and **how** he did it: With humility and the professed knowledge that everything was from Hashem Yisborach, not Yosef. It was Chesed in a manner the world had never seen or experienced. They credited Yosef because he earned it, he deserved it, not because it was required. This was the image of Yaakov's family Yosef engineered before Bnai Yisroel arrived, and he continued to strengthen it until the day he passed away. Egypt and the world rightfully viewed Yosef as royalty and they were prepared to respect Yaakov's family in the same way.

**So, what happened??** We forgot who we were and assimilated. Eventually, we became so engrossed in the Egyptian god, Amun Ra, and abandoned our Heavenly Father that we sank to the forty-ninth level of ritual impurity. The "new" Pharaoh who arose did not "forget" about Yosef. The Torah's claim that he did not remember Yosef requires understanding. In the same way that no one in the United States can "forget" George Washington, even hundreds of years after he lived, so too no one in Egypt could "forget" who Yosef was or what he did. For many years following the passing of all the brothers, the values of the Avot and Yosef were exemplified and lived by Bnai Yisroel. The behavior of Bnai Yisroel reflected the greatness of Yosef. Egypt respected us accordingly. When our priorities shifted, when our allegiance shifted from Avinu She'ba'Shamayim to their idols, we were no longer viewed as Yosef's family, a holy nation with a remarkable destiny awaiting them, but as a different group whose numbers grew to the point that the threat of revolution had to be considered. What started out as a family headed toward nationhood with gifted Ruchniyut morphed into a political group whose threatening numbers had to be addressed. Indeed, the first time Moshe Rabbeinu meets Pharaoh and tells him he must let us go and allow us to worship Hashem, Pharaoh responds (Shemos 5:2), "Who is G-d that I should listen to His Voice". This was the age of "direct access" to the heavenly forces. The whole world knew

who Hashem was. The debate circled around how He divided and distributed His powers. Therefore, how are we to understand Pharaoh's statement? What Pharaoh was doing, (and what Moshe was hard pressed to answer), was calling Moshe's bluff!! What Pharaoh was saying to Moshe was, "Why should I recognize your G-d if your own people fail to do so"? What was Moshe to say when what Pharaoh threw in his face, the fact that they were no longer attached to Hashem Yisborach, but worshipping the Egyptian gods of Amun Ra was a truth Moshe was aware of. The hard labor imposed upon our people took place eighty years before Yetziat Mitzrayim as a result of our assimilation into the religious practices of Egypt. The slavery did not have to be. It was a consequence of our behavior, our disloyalty to Hashem Yisborach.

Let's understand the bidieved track of Jewish history recorded in the Torah. It comes with two purposes, one recorded and the other strongly alluded to. The recorded purpose is provided in three different verses that convey the infinite truth that Hashem's reality cannot be contested, that Hashem alone decides what direction human history will take and everything He desires will be done, and, most importantly, He alone is the Ruler of the universe. Ain Od Milvado means that the potential for a second in the form of an idol or heavenly force is an impossibility. Egypt, as the Bechor, the strongest nation in the world at that time and the nation that possessed ninety percent of the kishuf G-d made available to mankind was going to role-model for the world that challenging Hashem's Will was and is futile. How much they were to lose in the process of learning this Divine message was up to them. Cooperate, and they lose less, while if Pharaoh remains defiant as he did, they lose everything. Keep in mind, this Pharaoh chose to ignore everything Yosef did for Egypt and the world, and most importantly, the character lessons he imparted regarding the reality of Hashem Yisborach. Pharaoh did not walk into this conflict blind. He knew who he was challenging and chose through the first five plagues to remain defiant. His ego overwhelmed his ability to exercise free will based common sense, and his ego was rewarded with the downfall of the world's superpower.

Let's look at the bidieved track from the perspective of the Israelite people. What does it mean that we sank to the forty-ninth level of *tuma*, spiritual impurity? The answer to this explains why there were ten plagues. Although the ten plagues conveyed the reality of Hashem to Egypt and the rest of the world, that goal could have been accomplished with one plague, the killing of the first-born, during which the idols of Egypt literally melted away. The ten plagues were for Bnai Yisroel much more than for the message that needed to be conveyed to Egypt. In order for our people to achieve the worthiness required for redemption, they had to actively desire the opportunity to leave Egypt and start life anew. They had to trust Hashem and His servant, Moshe and be willing to walk into a desert that, under normal, natural circumstances cannot support life. Nonetheless, with Hashem, they had nothing to worry about. This was a state of mind that our people had to arrive at freely, on their own. The sad reality is

that this was one of the biggest failings associated with the entire Exodus process. Eighty percent of our people died in the quiet privacy of the night, during the plague of darkness. For them, the forty-ninth level of impurity imposed upon them a state of mind that deprived them of the light at the end of the tunnel, Geulah at the end of the shibud Mitzrayim. Why were they held responsible for their tuma? Why were they not exempt as accidental victims of circumstance? Because our people had the Messorah of Avrohom within their psyche. When Chazal express that they were worthy of Geulah because they retained their names, their clothing, and their language, it means that they had the ability to wrap their minds around their identity or they could choose to reject it. They also had the promise of redemption made by Yosef HaTzadik. That promise was guaranteed by the fact that, unlike his father, Yaakov, Yosef's body remained in Egypt after he passed away. A national promise was made that when it came time for us to leave, we would take Yosef's remains with. Not one moment before. Did Hashem pass judgment on them in haste? No!! He didn't give them one or two chances to find their way back to our people, our history, our heritage. Hashem gave them eight chances, eight opportunities before they signed their own fate. Their unwillingness to come to a state of mind that said, "I want to be a part of this redemption process" after eight examples of what Moshe did in the name of Hashem sealed their fate.

The sad fact is that within each of the three Chagim we celebrate, there are events that reflect the failings of our people. The fact that there was a contingent of Bnai Yisroel that at the Yam Suf openly expressed a desire to return to Egypt in combination with the eighty percent that died is the failure within the construct of Chag HaPesach. The fact that Kabbolat HaTorah ends on the seventeenth of Tamuz with the egel is the devastating failure we associate with Shavuot. The fact that our people were condemned to the desert for forty years after they listened and accepted the negative report of the spies regarding Eretz HaKedoshah is the "dark side" of Chag HaSuccot. The price we paid for these lapses in spiritual judgment is the reason we still await a Geulah that should have formally occurred four hundred and one years following the birth of Yitzchak Avinu.

Just to review a concept we learned earlier, all of world history is based upon what happens to the Jewish people. This is a result of the Middat HaRachamim being moved from outside our spiritual camp alongside the Middat HaDin to the inner-center of our nation. The role Middat HaRachamim has is to maintain an ongoing state of spiritual homeostasis, equilibrium, so that our nation remains worthy of the privilege promised to Avrohom Avinu at the Brit Bain HaBasorim: Via the zichuch process, we will transform Olom HaZeh into Olom HaBah, a process that begins in Eretz Yisroel proper. Our sins, individually and nationally, are atoned for in one of two ways. Either peacefully via Teshuva or yissurin that result in calamity and tragedy. That choice is ours. It's interesting to note that one of the biggest differences between the seven Mitzvot given to mankind and the six hundred thirteen Mitzvot given to us is that the seven are basic lifestyle instructions. They describe the behavioral norms in a society mankind should build and dwell in. Within Taryag Mitzvot, Ha-

shem considers that we will sin and provides every mechanism possible for us to cleanse ourselves so Hashem via the Middat HaRachamim does not have to. Within the Talmud, Seder Kodshim and Seder Taharot are dedicated to this cleansing process that operated while the Bait HaMikdash existed. Since then, we have the Teshuva process that is equally capable of reestablishing our unity with Hashem. The more we engaged these two opportunities, the less the Middat HaRachamim had to operate. We achieved our own homeostasis.

There is an interesting idea that I heard from Adam Siegel in the name of his father, Z'L. Chazal interpret from the word 'chamushim', (Shemot 13:18), that one-fifth of our people left Egypt. Men, women and children numbered three million. If three million make up twenty percent of our population, that means twelve million died during the plague of darkness. The plague is described as a double darkness in the words, "vayomesh choshech" (Shemos 10:21). There was a visual and tactile component to the plague, in that it rendered the Egyptian blind within a framework that could be felt to the point that they were rendered incapable of moving. If a double darkness cost twelve million Israelites their lives, then how many can potentially pass away in a single darkness? Half that number equals six million, which obviously reminds us of the Holocaust. Where do we see this in the words of the Torah? If we take the word "vayomesh" and replace the four letters with the letters that appear before them in the Hebrew alphabet, the Vov becomes a Hay, the Yud becomes a Tet, the Mem becomes a Lamed and the Shin becomes a Raish. Those four letters spell Hitler, y's, and define the difference between a double darkness and a single darkness.

Today, we must ask ourselves if our contribution to the Am HaNivchar in the here and now will be defined historically as being on the l'chatchila or bidieved track? One of the saddest realities of our people is in our failure to learn from the past and apply those lessons to the present. How many times has the pattern of immigration to a particular country and integration with the local population ended with assimilation, Antisemitism and either death or expulsion? This pattern characterized four hundred years in Spain, Jewish History in Russia and throughout Europe, ending with the Holocaust. We're responsible for the consequences each stop along the way that defines our history. We've always contributed and raised the standard of living accordingly, but it came at the cost of our spiritual identity, which precipitated our demise, compliments of the Middat HaRachamim. How do we appear today? Has anything changed? Have we learned from the past? The answer to these questions precipitates the most important question we must ask. What are we contributing in the here and now that will take the burden off the Middat HaRachamim and bring the Geulah we all await? That power is greater than we realize, and when we come together in unified form, the reality that comes with it is transformative at what I call the nuclear level. May we be zoche to experience this in the days (not weeks or years) to come.