

By Rabbi
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UNDERSTANDING HACHNASAT MITZRAYIM

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

In memory of

Eliyahu ben Yehuda - Dr. Elliot Hahn, A'H

No'omi Malka bat Mordechai HaKohen, A'H

The entire Seder and the holiday of Pesach revolves around three magical words: Zecher L'Yetziat Mitzrayim – Remembering the exodus from Egypt. One question that receives little to no attention is why we ended up there in the first place? For those that think there was a cleansing process we needed to go through via the eighty years of hard labor our ancestors experienced, the fact is that the original seventy souls who descended to Egypt were righteous, as were a number of generations that followed them. Although the hard labor experienced during the last eight decades served a purpose, this was by no means the main reason we went through this galut. There had to be a far more positive opportunity revealed to Avrohom Avinu during the Brit Bain HaBesorim than the fact that would be slaves, especially since that amounted for only twenty percent of the time Hashem revealed to Avrohom. Therefore, we need to rethink the nature of the “affliction” the Egyptians were destined to put us through. Before I heard Rov Kessin's shiur on this, I thought I understood the essence of Pesach. I was wrong! I may have had the “guf” of the holiday, but I lacked its Neshama. Hopefully, this article will provide all of us with the soul of this meaningful holiday.

In order to answer the questions above, we have start at the beginning – Adam HaRishon – and bring this full circle. In the past, we've learned that the purpose of Adam's life was to earn the right of Zichuch that transforms Olom HaZeh into Olom HaBah. Adam lost this right because he ate from the tree of knowledge, so the opportunity shifted from him to the generations that followed. Many fail to realize how great Adam was. Adam lived in Gan Eden, the same Gan Eden that the souls of our dearly departed go to after one passes away. We have to die to experience the Ruchniyut with which Adam lived while he was physically alive. Any of the root nations that lived during the first ten generations could have earned the right to complete the task that Adam failed to achieve. Although these people chose to live wicked lives which culminated in the flood, their spiritual knowledge and connection to the heavenly powers in the age of direct access was unparalleled. There is proof for this. In Sefer Habakkuk (2:14) we read, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Hashem, like the waters that cover the sea”. Said waters are a metaphor for the knowledge of Hashem. In the days of Noach, Hashem destroyed the world with a flood. Think about that!! How much water was necessary to bring an end to all life? An earthquake would have been much simpler. There is a message being conveyed to Noach and by extension, to all mankind regarding the manner in which Hashem chose to act. These ten generations had the ability to bring the Messianic light and begin the Zichuch process of transforming this world into Olom HaBah. With a belief in Hashem comes the understanding of what the word “no” means. They invested in their egos, their wants and desires, leaving their Messianic potential totally unfulfilled. What killed them was the Ohr HaMashiach in the form of water as expressed in Sefer Habakkuk. They failed to bring the Mashiach in his real form, so they died in the form of the Messianic metaphor – its moshul – that being water.

After twenty generations, Avrohom served Hashem with love and devotion which earned him the right of Zichuch for his children, a right that came with a guarantee. That guarantee was a result of Avrohom choosing to observe all of the Taryag Mitzvot, a commitment that his children concretized at Har Sinai with Kabbalat HaTorah. Proper observance of one Mitzvah by Adam and seven by the generations that followed would have brought the opportunity of Zichuch. A commitment to Taryag Mitzvot, all six-hundred-thirteen, brings with the opportunity a guarantee that the privilege of Zichuch will forever remain with us, Avrohom's children. In the Bris Bain HaBesorim, when Avrohom asked “B'mah eyda”, in addition to the land of Israel where the Zichuch pro-

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cess begins, he wanted to understand the mechanics behind the guarantee regarding how the privilege would remain with his descendants. We've learned in the past how all of Jewish history flows through the Middas HaRachamim, which guarantees that we will retain a standard of Avodat Hashem that enables the privilege to endure.

To understand Egypt's role in the entire Pesach scenario, we need to understand the finer details of how Rachamim operates. In the Middas HaDin, the goal is living a life of shlaymut – perfection in Avodat Hashem. If one succeeds, what waits for them on the other side is a life of unparalleled simcha. If one fails, the consequence is “ibud” – total destruction. Hashem wanted the briya to endure, so along comes His Hanhogo of Rachamim and replaces ibud with a more positive alternative, that being death. The real chiddush in Rachamim is how the midda handles the sins committed by mankind. Every sin creates an impurity, a tuma called zuhama. This parasitic zuhama can be compared to an image in the mirror that takes on a quasi-life of its own. Sins give this zuhama the ability to literally suck the Kedusha out of sinner. We get our Kedusha back in one of two ways: Teshuva or yissurin - divine punishment and suffering. How do we know that the process as it relates to a particular sin has ended? As we walk away from a mirror, the image of us in the mirror disappears from reality. So too, the moment the zuhama we have precipitated tries to leave “the mirror” and take on an independent life of its own, it pops out of existence. The pain we go through is our sign that the zuhama is no longer extant and our Kedusha has returned. When someone shares with a friend that they have been through a difficult situation and the friend responds, “May it be a kapporah for you”, that statement is a comment on this philosophy. The zuhama taking on a life of its own is what we call Malachay Chavolo, angels of calamity or destruction. Our sins create these angels and on an individual and national level, they have the ability to suck the Kedusha out of any person/nation that sins, including us. For Bnai Yisroel, the ultimate consequence is that zuhama puts the Shechina in golus and uses our Kedusha to benefit our adversaries with their version of Oz and Tifferet – wealth, prosperity and power. Hashem guarantees all of mankind that our sins will not destroy us (ibud) but the Malachay Chavolo they create will deplete our supply of Kedusha, thereby draining the strength out of us until we earn it back via the cleansing processes of Teshuva or yissurin.

From a Din perspective, by the time Avrohom was in his fifties, the quantity and quality of mankind's sins were strong enough to destroy all the nations of the world. Hashem desired the ongoing existence of mankind. So, via His Middas HaRachamim Hashem took all the sins of mankind over the first twenty generations and poured all that zuhama based Kedusha into one nation – Egypt, thereby making them the bechor of mankind, the minutiae. Why was Egypt chosen for this? Mitzrayim was the

person who engineered the Migdal Bavel to rebel against

Hashem. It was not just a tower, but, from the beginning until that time, it was the grandest form of avoda zara ever built by man. Egypt with all of mankind's sins became a golus. There are 2 types of golus: A redemptive golus and a rehabilitative golus. The four exiles we experienced – Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome (Esav) - were a result of our own sins. Our sins caused our Ruchniyus, our Kedusha to leave, and where it went, we had to follow to get it back. This type of golus rehabilitates and cleanses the sinner because it's the golus of our personal tikkun. The seventy souls that descended to Egypt were all righteous. This was not a golus for our people but the exile of all mankind into Egypt because of their sins! The job of Avrohom's children was to go to Egypt for four-hundred years, (timed from the birth of Yitzchok) and with their full complement of Kedusha, acquire the Kedusha of mankind and the status of bechor which was in the hands of Egypt. Hashem promised Avrohom and his children Koach HaZichuch. In addition, the size of Olom HaBah, based on the number of individuals that could have been zoche to its nitzchius based kiyum, was originally meant to accommodate mankind. The nations were about to lose their ‘property rights’ in Olom HaBah, and those rights were destined to come to us. The problem is that their “land deeds” were muddled because of their sins. We had to acquire and purify them. That's why we ended up in that Egyptian “golus”. The process redefined and redeemed us making this a redemptive golus. As Chazal express, Avrohom was notal schar kulom, worthy of all the reward meant for them. All the Olom HaBah the nations had the potential to earn was going to come to us, a process beginning with Avrohom and culminating with the acquisition of the bechor four-hundred years later. First, we had to cleanse their ‘land deeds’, the accumulated zuhama, their parasites and rehabilitate the Koach HaZichuch/Olom HaBah process they contaminated. The Kedusha in the zuhama of the nations, (that which was “yonek”, extracted from the sinner) is how Egypt became a world power, a power they were destined to lose to us.

We know that when Hashem portioned out sorcery, kishuf, ninety-percent of it went to Egypt. Chazal express, “Ain Od Milvado, afilu b'keshafim – There is nothing but Him, even (as it relates to) sorcery”. Hashem rules over everything, including sorcery which appears to work independent of His Oneness. That means that Kedusha appears in 2 forms: That which is nigla, apparent Kedusha, OR hidden, extracted Kedusha in the form of zuhama, which is a consequence of one's sins. That Kedusha is the zuhama the Malachay Chavolo extract from the sinner. It is Kedusha but in corrupt form to the point that we don't recognize its inherent holiness anymore. Kishuf is Kedusha b'toch HaTuma. How did this operate? They would take certain kochos and make a pesel, an graven image representing it. Egypt worshiped Aman

Ra, the sun god. The symbol representing this god was a ram, so they took a stone and fashioned it into a ram. All the kochos of the heavens were/are brought down to our world via the heavenly entities that make up the constellations, the mazolos. These were the tzinorim, the pipes that connect the spiritual world above to the physical world in which we live. Avoda zara is the worship of these heavenly mazolos as gods. In kishuf, the perpetrator looked at a particular mazal and identified the strength associated with it. For Egypt, the greatest mazal was the sun. Even though it's a star, spiritually it represented the greatest level of strength in the realm of creativity and power. How did they connect to that power and make it work for them? They built an image that represented the sun, (a ram), or whichever astrological power they wanted to patch into. They didn't worship the stone – they realized that within a stone there is no inherent power. The stone became a symbol, a receiver and what brought the power of the mazal onto the stone were the shaymos, the divine names they expressed. This process enabled “idol worshippers” to benefit from the powers now planted on their graven image. How did Moshe split the sea? On his mateh, Moshe's staff, there was a Shaym of Hashem. When the Yam Suf saw that Shaym, it split. Today, if we had Moshe's mateh with that Shaym inscribed on it, we could split the Atlantic Ocean from New York to England. With the right Shaymos, we could revive the dead. The fact that the sorcerers could change their staff into a snake meant that they had the shaym that could achieve this transformation. Moshe's Shaym that converted his staff into a snake was stronger, as evidenced by the fact that his staff swallowed theirs. Ninety-percent of this power went to Egypt, which means that wherever the zuhama based Kedusha went, the kishuf followed. The Kedusha in the zuhama that represented the tuma of all of mankind from Adam until Avrohom went to Egypt. In Egypt, the Kedusha went into the form of zuhama – the product of mankind's sins. With that zuhama, came Kedusha and with that Kedusha came the knowledge regarding how to work all of this sorcery - the shaymos that energized everything.

Their primary worship was the sun. Why is the sun represented as a ram? Astrologically, the constellation of Aries is in the form of a ram and the earth passes through Aries during Nisan. Nisan/Aries was the new year for Egypt because it was astrologically connected to the sun. This time of year coordinates with the beginning of Spring, the vernal equinox, the days begin to get longer than the nights, (March 21). Longer days means a heightening of the sun's powers, and it was that very power that the Egyptians knew how to manipulate via the shaymos of kishuf. That's why their idol was in the form of a ram.

This concept as it relates to golus is very important. The Shechina is manifested as the zuhama based Kedusha of the nations which was in Egypt. When one sins, the zuhama they precipitate imprisons the Shechina and the Ohr of Olom HaBah in

golus. This redemptive golus, based on the sins of mankind, was placed in Egypt, and the accumulation of Kedusha caused the Shechina to be trapped there. That reality is the reason that Egypt was the world superpower during this era of history. Bnai Yisroel in Egypt had two goals: We had to extricate the Kedusha and the Shechina from that golus and in the process of doing so, purify it by not falling into the trap of Egypt's avoda zara and kishuf based lifestyle. When Klal Yisroel first arrived, what amazed them was not the immorality of the land, but its power!! Centuries later, our people assimilated because they thought that if Egypt had all this power and wealth, they must be doing something right. The goal for Klal Yisroel within this redemptive golus was not to fall prey to this deception but recognize that it was a result of the Shechina being trapped there, which brought great power and success to Egypt. If we remained faithful to our heritage, we would be able to take out the Kedusha from the zuhama and destroy the avoda zara and kishuf of Egypt. Indeed, Egypt would have gathered all the nations of the world to Mt. Sinai and along with us, would have coronated Hashem as King of the universe. If we fall for the deception, the “b'kochi v'otzem yodi” of Egypt founded on the wealth and power of the place, Egypt would then turn on us and become Anti-Semites. This is why we became hated slaves the last eighty years of our stay there, the realization of Hashem's prophecy to Avrohom that Egypt would afflict us.

When Moshe went to Pharaoh and said, “Let my people go”, he wasn't making a request or begging permission from Egypt's king. What Moshe was saying was that the power of Egypt was gone, and the slavery we went through over the last eighty years cleansed the sins, the zuhama of Israel. The power was now with us, not Egypt. People think that the plagues were to teach Egypt that Hashem is in charge, thereby forcing Egypt to let us go. It was much more. When Moshe put his mateh down the first time, he was telling Pharaoh that the power-shift had already occurred. Pharaoh denied this and looked in his book of kishuf to see which mazal Hashem was associated with. Hashem's Name was not found in that book because it was He who authored the book! Moshe told Pharaoh that Hashem is Ruler over the entire briya, in charge of all mazalos, and that everything answers to Him. Moshe was not asking for permission to leave. He was demanding of Pharaoh that he let them go because Egypt no longer had the ability to hold them as slaves. That power shifted to us. Pharaoh denied Moshe. With each plague, a piece of Kedusha along with the entrapped Shechina was freed and pulled away from Egypt toward us. There was no attempt at persuasion here, but a demand for our freedom. The briya was no longer in the form of an Egyptian snake on the ground, but in the form of Moshe's staff with the Shaim HaShem on it. The ten “statements” with which the world was created were now in the domain of

Moshe, manifested in the ten plagues. When did Pharaoh and Egypt finally understand this with great fear and dread? By the plague of darkness because it proved that their sun god was powerless. Hashem literally turned off the lights on Egypt, proving that their sun god, Aman Ra, was a false entity. The strength of the sun as a mazal is true, but only as a strength totally controlled by Hashem Yisborach. That is Ain Od Milvado, afilu b'keshofim. What mankind sees and understands kishuf to be is really Hashem manifesting the power He invested in the mazal system that enables the system to operate the way it does. Darkness demonstrated that Aman Ra and the sun which they saw as an independent god was totally dependent on Hashem to operate the way it does. It was Hashem working His creative process through the sun.

Why was the last plague the killing of the first born? Whoever has and controls the keys to Olom HaBah enjoys the status of bechor. The bechor enjoys a double portion of Kedusha. He is the Kohen of each family and his avoda represents the entire family. Adam was the Bechor of the briya, mankind. With the status of bechor came Koach HaZichuch. He failed. The opportunity moved to Kayin and Hevel, then from generation to generation until Hashem decided to make Egypt the bechor of the minutiae with the potential to achieve zichuch for the briya. Egypt inherited the status but by the time it reached them, its Kedusha was a golus in the framework of zuhama, as a parasite resulting from the sins mankind had committed. The bechor was theirs to hold in escrow, temporarily, and that's what Hashem revealed to Avrohom. Hashem told Avrohom that He wanted his children to go there, acquire the Kedusha and take the Shechina out of golus. This culminated in Bnai Yisroel acquiring the status of bechor during the tenth plague, qualifying them to do that which mankind could have done but failed to achieve: Koach HaZichuch that transforms Olom HaZeh into Olom HaBah. The last plague, the killing of the first born, was the formal transfer of the bechor from Egypt to Israel. What's the symbol that one king has defeated

another in war? The victor takes the crown of the defeated king and places it on his head. We took the bechor from Egypt and brought it into our possession. Koach HaZichuch was the crown of kingship and with it, the status of bechor for the entire briya. The cause of death for each bechor in Egypt was their Kedusha being sucked out of them and permanently implanted into Klal Yisroel. Every bechor in Israel took on the crown, the mantle that was previously in Egypt. We acquired our freedom as a "goy b'kerev goy" – one nation within another, culminating with the transfer of the status of bechor from Egypt to Israel.

Why is Rosh Chodesh the first national Mitzvah in the Torah. A badge tells us that a policeman is a policeman. What is the badge of the first-born? Nisan!! That month, that Mitzvah of "HaChodesh ha'zeh lo'chem" is the badge proving our status as bechor. Once our identity is secured, once we have the badge of Nisan symbolizing to everyone that we are the bechor, we can then go through the do's and don'ts of Halacha. This was Yetzias Mitzrayim. Not just freedom from slavery, but Kedusha, Koach HaZichuch, and the formal transfer of first-born rites from one nation to another. The Seder is not just the story of Exodus, but a reflection of our identity having experienced a mega-transformation. Seder is the recognition of what comes with the matza, marror and wine - of who we are and what we are destined to accomplish. Going through the Haggadah and eating/drinking what's required without this understanding means we have the "body" of Pesach without its soul, its Neshama. Strive for a Pesach of Neshama. It's impossible to understand where we are going, our destiny, unless we fully understand where we came from, how we got there in the first place, and the sacred goal behind the entire process. This began with two words asked by Avrohom: Ba'mo Eyda. The culmination of that answer, the Geulah is very near. May all of us be zoche to see that answer become the reality we've anticipated for centuries.