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From Slavery to Freedom
Hashem's Hidden Kindness

—קונטרס שבועי—

פרשת וארא

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From Slavery to Freedom

From Slavery to Freedom

"לכן אמר לבני ישראל אני ה' והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים והצילתי אתכם מעבדתם וגאלתי אתכם בזרוע נטויה ובשפטים גדלים. ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם והייתי לכם לאלקים וידעתם כי אני ה' אלקיכם המוציא אתכם מתחת סבלות מצרים."

*"Therefore, say to Bnei Yisroel, "I am Hashem. I shall remove you from beneath the burdens of Egypt; and rescue you from their labors; and redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall bring you to Me as a nation, and I shall be your G-d; and you shall know that I am Hashem your G-d, Who has taken you out from under the burdens of Egypt."*¹

The four cups of wine that we drink on Seder night correspond to the four expressions of redemption stated in these *pesukim*: I shall remove (והוצאתי); I shall rescue (והצילתי), I shall redeem (וגאלתי), and I shall bring (ולקחתי).²

Between the first three cups of wine, it is permitted to drink. However, between the third and fourth cups, it is forbidden to interrupt by eating or drinking. This comes to teach us an important lesson. Some people view the awaited redemption as no more than a national liberation, in which we will be freed from the oppression we suffer under the hands of the nations. In their opinion, the first three expressions of redemption are sufficient. They wish to be removed, rescued and redeemed. However, they do not see the great importance of being brought to Hashem, as His holy nation. This does not play an important role in their vision of redemption.

In order to contradict their erroneous ideology, our Sages instructed us not to make any interruption before the fourth cup. Taking our place as Hashem's chosen nation is in fact the most crucial aspect of the redemption. This is the redemption of the *neshama* from the hands of the yetzer hara, as it returns to draw close to Hashem. This is our true aspiration, to see Beis HaMikdash rebuilt, and to see the Shechina rest upon Klal Yisroel.

The Ramban³ writes that the entire *Sefer Shemos* is one continuing story of redemption. It begins with the servitude of our forefathers and the miracles of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*; and it concludes with the resting of the Shechina upon the Mishkan. This symbolized how Bnei Yisroel had finally reached the ultimate stage

¹ *Shemos* 6:6-7

² *Pesachim* 99b, Rashi and Rashbam

³ Introduction to *Shemos*

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of redemption, in which the Shechina rested upon us again, as it had rested upon our forefathers. This crucial aspect of our awaited redemption cannot be overlooked.

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“Therefore, say to Bnei Yisroel, ‘I am Hashem. I shall remove you from beneath the burdens of Egypt; and rescue you from their labors; and redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall bring you to Me as a nation.’”

At times, a slave must suffer under the hand of a cruel and tyrannical master, who oppresses him without mercy. Such a slave is subject to incessant physical and mental abuse. However, even a slave with a merciful master usually suffers from the difficult labors imposed upon him. Some slaves are even more fortunate, and are only required to perform light household tasks. Nevertheless, they suffer from subjugation to the will of another, since they cannot lead their lives according to their own desire.

In describing the liberation of our forefathers from Egypt, the Torah addresses all these aspects of slavery. Pharaoh held Bnei Yisroel in an iron grasp of terrible wickedness. He subjected them to death, torture and grueling labors. From all these harsh decrees, Hashem rescued us. He “removed us” from beneath the burden of cruel abuse. He “rescued us” from the difficult labors they imposed upon us. He “redeemed us” from the degradation of slavery. Yet paramount in significance, was the great kindness He showed us, by “bringing us” to Himself, and making us into His nation.

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On Seder night, we conduct ourselves in the manner of freed men, by drinking wine, leaning to the side as we eat, and having others serve us. All this is in order to focus our full attention on our immense debt of gratitude to Hashem, Who redeemed us, and brought us from slavery to freedom. Why then do we also eat maror, which is the very symbol of our bitter servitude? Does this not contradict the theme of liberty, which is celebrated on this holy night?

Hashem's Hidden Kindness

By eating maror on Seder night, we instill in our hearts a firm awareness that even those things that appear to us as unfortunate, are in fact manifestations of Hashem's hidden kindness. Everything that Hashem does is for the best.

The *possuk* states, "You are children of Hashem your God. Do not cut yourselves, and do not shave between your eyes in mourning for the dead."¹ The Ibn Ezra comments that Hashem loves us more than any father could ever love his son. Therefore, we must not mourn excessively over the sorrows that befall us. Everything that happens to us is for our own best interest. We might not always understand Hashem's designs, just as a young child does not always understand his father. Yet a child knows for certain that his father would never harm him, and so too must be our faith in Hashem.

This was the lesson of Rebbe Akiva, who would always say, "Everything the Merciful One does is for the best."² Even after he was arrested for teaching Torah, he laughed as he was led to his execution.³ R' Akiva was able to see Hashem's benevolent hand at work, even when he witnessed the sickness and suffering of his beloved rebbe and mentor, Rebbe Eliezer ben Hurkenos. When Rebbe Eliezer was ill, Rebbe Akiva visited him and said, "Suffering is beloved" – since it encourages a person to do teshuva.⁴

When Rebbe Akiva and his peers saw a fox wandering among the ruins of the Beis HaMikdash, his peers cried, but he laughed. He explained to them that just as the prophecy of destruction was fulfilled, so too would the prophecies of consolation and redemption.⁵ Even in the most tragic event in the history of our people, the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, Rebbe Akiva was able to see the good.

I once heard from *Mori v'Rebbe*, the Klauzenberger Rav zt"l, that this is the reason we cover our eyes when reciting Shema.⁶ In Shema, we declare, "ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד." The Name ה' refers to Hashem's attribute of mercy. The Name אלוהים refers to His attribute of strict justice.⁷ Yet both Names are in fact one, since even the attribute of judgment is nothing but a manifestation of Hashem's hidden kindness. Although His judgment might seem harsh by all outward appearances, we cover our eyes to ignore the superficial aspect of the judgment. With perfect faith we declare, "ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד," firmly believing that everything He does is for our best.

¹ Devarim 14:1

² Berachos 60b

³ Talmud Yerushalmi: Berachos 9:5; Sotah 5:5

⁴ Sanhedrin 101a

⁵ Makkos 24. See *Minchas Asher on Maseches Pesachim, Maamar Derech Emuna*, 4

⁶ See Berachos 13a

⁷ See *Shemos Rabbah* 3:6

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In a similar vein, the Kol Aryeh⁸ explains the *possuk* in which Hashem tells Yaakov Avinu, "Do not fear to descend to Egypt... Yosef will place his hand over your eyes."⁹ At first, Yaakov viewed his descent to Egypt as a terrible misfortune. However, Hashem assured him that in the end he would see that this was for the best. Hashem told him to take as an example Yosef's descent into slavery. This also seemed like a terrible misfortune at first, but in the end it was revealed to be another manifestation of Hashem's hidden kindness. As a result of his having been sold as a slave, Yosef eventually became the viceroy to Pharaoh, and was able to support Yaakov's family during the years of famine.

Hashem told Yaakov that Yosef would place his hands over Yaakov's eyes. This refers to the practice of covering one's eyes when reciting Shema. He reminded Yaakov that we must ignore the misleading evidence offered by our senses, and trust that Hashem's attribute of strict judgment is in fact pure mercy. For this reason, the Zohar describes the incident of Yosef's sale to Egypt as "the secret of *Kerias Shema*."

The Kol Aryeh expands on this point by citing the Chasam Sofer, who explains the *possuk*, "וראית את אחורי לפני לא יראו" - You will see My back, but My face may not be seen."¹⁰ We cannot always see the face of Hashem and His kindness as tragedy descends upon us. However, many years later we can often see His kindness from behind, recognizing in retrospect that all was for the best.

With this we can understand the Gemara, which states as follows:

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: בשעה שעלה משה למרום מצאו להקב"ה שיושב
וקושר כתרים לאותיות. אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם, מי מעכב על ידך? אמר לו
אדם אחד יש שעתיד להיות בסוף כמה דורות ועקיבא בן יוסף שמו שעתיד
לדרוש על כל קוץ וקוץ תילין תילין של הלכות. אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם,
הראהו לי. אמר לו חזור לאחורך. הלך וישב בסוף שמונה שורות ולא היה יודע
מה הן אומרים תשש כחו. כיון שהגיע לדבר אחד אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי מנין לך
אמר להן הלכה למשה מסיני נתיישבה דעתו. חזר ובא לפני הקב"ה אמר לפניו
רבונו של עולם, יש לך אדם כזה ואתה נותן תורה על ידי? אמר לו שתוק כך
עלה במחשבה לפני. אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם הראיתני תורתו הראני שכרו.
אמר לו חזור [לאחורך]. חזר לאחוריו ראה ששוקלין בשרו במקולין. אמר
לפניו רבונו של עולם זו תורה וזו שכרה? א"ל שתוק כך עלה במחשבה לפני.

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: When Moshe ascended to Heaven, he found HaKadosh Baruch Hu sitting and attaching crowns to the letters of the Torah. "Master of the Universe, who

⁸ Introduction to *Teshuvos Kol Aryeh: Pesach Tov*, 7

⁹ *Bereishis* 46:3-4

¹⁰ *Shemos* 33:23

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forces Your hand?" he asked. (Rashi – What is lacking in Your Torah, that You must add these crowns?)

"Many generations from now, there will be a man named Akiva ben Yosef, who will expound mountains upon mountains of rulings based on every point of every crown," Hashem answered.

"Master of the Universe, let me see him," Moshe asked.

"Take a step back (חזור לאחורך)," Hashem said.

(Moshe then found himself in the academy of R' Akiva), and sat at the back of eight rows of students (signifying his relative lack of importance). At first, he was upset that he could not understand what they were saying. Then, he was relieved to hear a student ask R' Akiva for the source of one of his teachings, to which R' Akiva replied that it was a tradition they had received from Moshe Rabbeinu.

Moshe then returned before HaKadosh Baruch Hu and said, "Master of the Universe, You have such a man as this, yet You choose to give the Torah through me?"

"Silence! This is My will (כך עלה במחשבה לפני)," Hashem said.

"Master of the Universe, You have shown me his Torah, now show me his reward," Moshe asked.

"Take a step back (חזור לאחורך)," Hashem said. Moshe stepped back and saw R' Akiva's flesh being weighed in the butcher's market (after it was stripped from his body by the Roman executioners).

"Master of the Universe, this is Torah, and this is its reward?" Moshe asked.

"Silence! This is My will (כך עלה במחשבה לפני)," Hashem said.¹¹

When Hashem allowed Moshe to gaze into the future, and see what he could not possibly understand, He told Moshe, "Take a step back (חזור לאחורך)." Moshe was allowed only to see "אחורי" the back of Hashem, so to speak, of which Hashem said, "וראית את אחורי" – You shall see My back". From this perspective, Moshe could not understand why he was chosen as the emissary to deliver the Torah, rather than R' Akiva, who seemed superior. Nor could Moshe understand the terrible suffering R' Akiva was made to suffer.

¹¹ *Menachos* 29b

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To both of these questions, Hashem answered, “כך עלה במחשבה לפני – This is My will,” which is literally translated as, “This is what ascended in thought before Me.” In other words, these thoughts can only be understood from a perspective of “לפני”, of which Hashem said, “ופני לא יראו – My face may not be seen.” Human wisdom cannot possibly comprehend Hashem's infinitely benevolent design for His creation.

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The Gemara explains that the word *chasa* (lettuce used for maror) symbolizes how Hashem had mercy (*chas*) upon us.¹² So too, all the species of maror listed in the Gemara have deep symbolism. The Chasam Sofer explains the significance of another species, תמכא, the first letters of which spell out the words ל-א-ל מספרים כבוד א-ל - “Constantly proclaiming the honor of Hashem.”¹³ This teaches us, that in the most bitter and painful episodes of our lives, we must proclaim the honor of Hashem, in realization that His hidden kindness supports us in our hour of need.¹⁴

The Chasam Sofer's rebbe, R' Nosson Adler, invested much time and effort into identifying the vegetable known as *karpas*, which the Maharil had translated into the German dialect contemporary to his time as אפיא, the first letters of which spell out א-ל-פועל ישועות אתה: “You are G-d, Who performs salvations.”

The acronyms of these species signify the important message they convey. Although we often fail to perceive the hidden kindness inherent in Hashem's plan for His creation, we must firmly believe that from our very misfortune will sprout our greatest benefit. As we say in *Selichos*, “From the wound itself, He prepares the remedy.”

May we be worthy of witnessing Hashem's revealed kindness, when His ultimate plan for our benefit at last comes to fruition, with the coming of Moshiach, and the building of the Beis HaMikdash. May it be soon, and in our days, Amen.

¹² *Pesachim* 39a

¹³ From the beracha “*Yotzeir HaMe'oros*” recited before the morning recital of Shema.

¹⁴ *Teshuvos Chasam Sofer* O.C. 132