

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

Nissan –Passover (part 1)

April 15, 2005

Dedicated in Loving Memory of
Rabbi Joseph Maza z'l,
Harav Yosef ben Harav Eliyah Mordechai Hacoheh Maza z'l
and
Reb Yitzchock ben Efraim Fishel (Fuchs) z'l

May their neshamos have an aliyah

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
April 15, 2005

B"H

Nissan –Passover (part 1)

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. How Does One Experience Exile?

The Torah states, **“V’eileh shemos...And these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt...”** The verse begins with the letter “vav – (which means “and”). This signifies that it is coming to include or continue what was discussed previously in the Torah. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains in his commentary that just as Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov were interested in the process of exile (golus) to atone for sin, so too Yaakov and his family went to Egypt to complete the atonement process (through exile.)

The Gemara in Tractate Niddarim explains that the reason the Jewish people needed to go into exile in Egypt was to atone and correct a failing of Avraham our Patriarch. The Gemara offers three possible reasons atonement was needed. The first opinion states that when Avraham was told by G'd that he and his offspring would inherit the land of Canaan, he asked G'd, “How shall I know that I am to inherit it (the land of Canaan)?” This question was considered a lack of faith. If G'd had promised Avraham that the land was to be unconditionally his and his progeny's there was no basis to ask this question. The Jewish people needed to go into exile in order to atone for this failing. As it is stated in the verse, “Know with certainty that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not their own – and they will serve them....” It is because of this lack of faith that the Jewish people needed go to Egypt.

The second opinion offered by the Gemara as to why the Jewish people needed to go into exile was to atone and correct for the sin that Avraham had interrupted the Torah scholars from their studies in order to assist him to rescue his nephew Lot. Lot had been taken captive by the Four Kings who had defeated the Five Kings.

The third opinion is that after Avraham had defeated the Four Kings and rescued his nephew Lot, he had the opportunity to take the members of the community of Sodom, who were pagans, and convert them to

monotheism. Avraham did not take advantage of this opportunity. It was because he had failed that the Jewish people needed to go into exile.

When Yaakov and his family went to Egypt, they understood that the reason for their descent was to affect a spiritual correction. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the letter “vav (and)” at the beginning of the Portion of Shemos is coming to indicate that the actions of Yaakov and his children are a continuation of the atonement process – namely being strangers in a land that was not theirs. They knowingly went to Egypt, despite the eventual bondage and suffering that would ensue, only to affect the spiritual changes needed for the Jewish people. The Egyptian exile is referred to by the Torah as “the iron smelter.”

The Midrash tells us that initially Esav wished to inherit Canaan; however, when he was informed that if he were to receive the land of Canaan he and his offspring would need to pay the spiritual debt incurred by Avraham. Meaning that he and his descendents would eventually need to experience exile. Understanding this, Esav chose to relinquish his claim to the land of Canaan and take for himself Mt. Seir, the land of the Edomites. Yaakov on the other hand was willing to inherit the land of Canaan despite the spiritual debt that would have to be paid– thus committing to a future of exile in Egypt. Why was Yaakov and his children prepared to do this when Esav was not?

The Midrash tells us that when Esav was born he had a ruddy complexion and his father Yitzchak was concerned that his complexion was an indication that his blood had not yet clotted. Thus, Yitzchak chose not to circumcise him because he would bleed to death. However, after some time had passed, Yitzchak understood that this was not the case but rather that it was simply Esav's complexion. Nevertheless Esav refused to be circumcised. In contrast, Yaakov was born circumcised. What is the effect of circumcision?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that as a result of Adam partaking of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, he introduced into himself a spiritual impurity. This impurity manifested itself within Adam's physical existence as a foreskin which covered his genital. Adam was created as being without a foreskin, indicating that the foreskin is only an outgrowth of the impurity brought upon him by the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. G'd gave Avraham our Patriarch the mitzvah of circumcision in order to correct and effect this impurity to give him and his descendents a potential to develop their spirituality. If a non-Jew were to remove his foreskin it would not have the same effect because only Avraham and his descendents have relevance to spiritual growth.

Esav initially had relevance to this spiritual correction because he was the son of Yitzchak. However, he chose to have no part of it. In effect, Esav was denying himself circumcision because he was denying and rejecting his spiritual essence. He believed that a man's essence was physical and not spiritual. In fact the Torah identifies Esav as "the man of the field" – indicating his affinity to earthiness and physicality. Yaakov on the other hand was "the man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah)." He lived his life as a spiritual being. With this we can understand why Esav chose to relinquish the right to the land of Canaan and thus not endure the exile to bring about the spiritual correction and refinement. Yaakov and his family, because of their appreciation of their spiritual essence, recognized and appreciated the value of the land and were willing to experience the exile- despite its cost.

It is interesting to note, as the Midrash tells us, that the physical enslavement/bondage in Egypt only began after the Jewish people stopped circumcising themselves. Had the Jewish people continued to circumcise themselves and acknowledge their essence as spiritual beings, they would not have been subjected to physical bondage in Egypt. How do we understand this?

If the Jew in Egypt understood that he had no relevance to the Egyptian culture and people because of his spiritual essence, then the suffering of the exile would have been experienced through being exposed to an environment that was contrary to his essence. However, when the Jew identified with the Egyptian and established a commonality with him, by choosing not to be circumcised, then experiencing Egypt alone did not bring about any level of suffering (which was needed for atonement). Thus, the physical bondage was imposed upon the Jewish people so that they should experience exile through their physicality.

We are currently experiencing the exile of Edom. If the Jew does not sense and experience the pain of his spiritual displacement in exile, then (G'd forbid) it may be necessary to experience the exile through other forms of suffering. It is only when the Jew recognizes and feels that he does not belong, that the exile itself provides atonement and spiritual correction. However, if the Jew feels comfortable and values his predicament in the displaced location, then it is an indication that he does not appreciate his spirituality sufficiently and thus requires a degree of physical suffering and displacement to bring about atonement.

During the time of Chasam Sofer z'tl Napoleon had destroyed the city of Pressburg, which was the jewel city of Czechoslovakia. Pressburg had a large and flourishing Jewish community. After the defeat of Napoleon, the Jewish community of Pressburg rebuilt the city, the synagogues, and the Torah centers. To celebrate the rebuilding of the community and all of its institutions thanks and praise were offered to G'd for allowing them to rebuild what was destroyed. At that event the Chasam Sofer broke down and cried profusely. He explained to the community that initially when Pressburg was destroyed by Napoleon, he believed that Moshiach was at hand. The Jewish people would soon be taken out of exile and brought back to the Land of Israel. However, now that G'd allowed Pressburg to be rebuilt in a way that it could stand for hundreds of years, it was only an indication to him that the exile would be experienced for an extended period of time.

It is only when the Jew understands that his proper place is not in his location of exile, despite the comfort and the equality which he may experience there, then the exile has spiritual value. However, if exile is not experienced in this manner, then G'd forbid Hashem may cause the Jew to experience the exile through physical suffering and discrimination in order for him to attain atonement.

2. Moshe – the Redeemer

The Torah states, "**A man went from the house of Levi and he took a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and gave birth to a son...**" The Torah does not identify the "man" mentioned in the verse as Amram, the father of Moshe Rabbeinu. The Torah also does not identify the "daughter of Levi" as Yocheved who was the mother of Moshe. Why does the Torah conceal the identity of Moshe's parents?

Maharal of Prague z'tl in his work *Gevuras Hashem* explains that most often a child's ability is determined by the characteristics that are passed down to him by his parents. By concealing the names of Moshe's father and mother, the Torah is telling us that his dimension of person was unrelated to the characteristics and genealogy, which his parents possessed. Although Amram and Yocheved were very special in their own right, who thus merited having a son such as Moshe Rabbeinu, they nevertheless did not contribute to his special dimension of person. Moshe was a unique and miraculous child with abilities that surpassed every human capacity. Thus the Torah only identifies his parents as: "A man went from the house of Levi and he took a daughter of Levi."

The Torah tells us that Shifrah (Yocheved) and Puah (Miriam) were the head midwives who oversaw the delivery of all Jewish children. Yocheved was called Shifrah because her role, as a midwife, was to clean and beautify the newborn children. Miriam was called Puah because she was the one who pacified the newborns. Why is it so important for the Torah to identify Yocheved and Miriam by their specific roles as midwives? Why does the Torah not identify them as Yocheved and Miriam?

It is interesting to note that the name used by the Torah to identify Moshe was not given to him by his parents; but rather, the daughter of Pharaoh. The Torah tells us that when the daughter of Pharaoh noticed a box floating in the Nile, she retrieved it and found within it a Jewish child. She thus named him "Moshe" because he was "drawn from the water." The Midrash tells us that Moshe was given seven names by his parents (Tov, Tuvia, Tuvi, Avigdor, etc.). Why does the Torah only refer to Moshe by the name given to him by the daughter of Pharaoh and not by any of the names given to him by his parents?

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that when daughter of Pharaoh went to bathe in the Nile she actually went immerse herself for the sake of conversion. As the Gemara states, "she went to cleanse herself from the idolatry of her father." It was at that moment that she noticed a floating box, which contained Moshe. Evidently the daughter of Pharaoh was an exceptional individual. Despite her pagan surroundings and upbringing, she was able to see the truth – that G'd is the Omnipotent Being. The Gemara tells us that after she converted she was called "Bisya – Bas Ka", which means "the daughter of G'd." The daughter of Pharaoh had a level of clarity and understanding to be able to identify and appreciate something for what it was. Thus, when she named the

child "Moshe" it must have been because she identified his essence as such. How do we understand this?

Sforno explains, "The daughter of Pharaoh called him Moshe because she understood from the circumstance in which he was found, that Moshe was destined to be a person to save others. When she saw him floating in the water it was obvious to her that he should have not survived. He should have drowned. The reason that he miraculously survived was because it was the Dictate of G'd that he should live because he was destined to save others." Thus the appellation of "Moshe" identifies his essence as the Redeemer. He is the one who would ultimately receive the Torah at Sinai and give meaning and purpose to all existence. The daughter of Pharaoh recognized this.

Moshe Rabbeinu lived his life selflessly for G'd. Moshe's greatness is attributed by the Torah to the fact that he was the most humble man who ever lived. He is the one who had said, "What are we?" This was an expression of his total negation. He lived his life without any degree of conflict of interest. Thus, his focus was only to live for others. As the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) tells us, "If you had studied a great amount of Torah, do not pride yourself in it because it is for that reason that you were created." Moshe lived every moment of his life as one who fully understood the purpose of his existence.

With this we are able to understand why Yocheved merited having such a special child as Moshe Rabbeinu. It was because of her own self-sacrifice and negation as the Jewish midwife who defied the Pharaoh at the risk of her own life. She thus merited having Moshe, who was that type of person, because she was "the Shifrah/midwife" and not because she was "Yocheved" - the mother of Moshe. It was only because she was Shifrah that she merited having the one who was drawn from the water to be the Redeemer.

3. Love of Your Fellow man is the Determining Factor

The Torah states at the beginning of the Sefer Shemos, "Yosef died, and all his brothers and that entire generation. The Children of Yisroel were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong - very, very much so; and the land became filled with them. A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef. He said to his people, "Behold! The people, the Children of Yisroel, are more numerous and stronger

than we. Come, let us outsmart it lest it become numerous and it may be that if a war will occur, it too may join our enemies, and wage war against us..." Rashi cites the argument between Rav and Shmuel as to whether or not the "new king" in Egypt was the same Pharaoh who knew Yosef, but who instituted a new mandate and acted as if he did not know him. Or, in fact, the Pharaoh was indeed a "new king" who did not know Yosef. In any case, this Pharaoh told his people that they must be "wisened" to the Jewish people because they had become numerous and that they may join with its enemies against Egypt.

It is difficult to understand how Pharaoh or the Egyptian people would actually believe this. It was Yosef, the Viceroy, who actually saved Egypt from extinction during the time of the great famine. It was Yosef's plan and control over the grain that caused Egypt to become the wealthiest nation in the world because everyone turned to Egypt to purchase grain. The Nile would rise in the presence of the Pharaoh only because of the special blessing given to him by Yaakov. After all of the contributions Yaakov and Yosef made to Egypt how is it possible that Pharaoh would make a decree against the Jewish people and suspect that the same people who saved Egypt would join with its enemies against it?

There is a Positive Commandment in the Torah that one must love his fellow as he loves himself. The Chofetz Chaim writes in his work *Shmiras HaLoshon* (Guarding One's Tongue), that if one truly loved his fellow man, he would not speak negatively about him. In addition, there is a mitzvah to give someone the benefit of the doubt. If a Jew truly loved another Jew, he would try in every possible way to put him in the most positive light. If one speaks negatively about his fellow Jew or does not give him the benefit of the doubt, it is a clear indication that he does not love him as he loves himself. All difficulties between man and man stem from the failure to observe this Positive Commandment.

Given everything that Yosef and his family had done for Egypt, one would expect that the Egyptians would be beholden and have an exceptional love for the Jewish people. The fact that Pharaoh and the Egyptian people could suspect the Jews would join their enemies is only an indication that they truly lacked the proper love and appreciation for the Jewish people. The Egyptians did not have the capacity to appreciate what the Jews had done for them. We see that this is inherent in the character of the Egyptian.

After Yosef had interpreted the dream of the wine steward while in prison, the man was subsequently released. Yosef had asked that he "remember" him and "mention" him to Pharaoh so that he too would be released from prison. The Torah tells us that the moment the wine steward was released, "he forgot Yosef." Rashi cites the verse in Tehillim (Psalms) which states, "Fortunate is the man who puts his faith in G'd and does not turn to the arrogant." The Midrash explains that "the arrogant" is referring to the Egyptian. The Egyptian does not have the capacity to appreciate the kindness that was done to him and thus cannot be relied upon to reciprocate.

Even if the Pharaoh was truly a "new king" who did not personally know Yosef, there is no way that he could have ignored the historical recording that Yosef and Yaakov had saved Egypt. Again, it is obvious that he did not have the capacity to appreciate what the Jewish people had done for Egypt. Thus, he was able to enact new and harsh decrees against the Jews and impose upon them an overbearing bondage.

The reason a person chooses to behave as a rasha (evil person) is that he does not appreciate the goodness that is bestowed upon him by G'd. If one truly appreciated that he was the beneficiary of G'd's Kindness, he would be completely beholden and would behave differently. If G'd continuously provides us with life and all other amenities, then how is it possible to have difficulty in carrying out His Will? It is only due to a lack of appreciation that causes one to fall short of serving G'd selflessly.

4. What Guarantees the Survival of the Jewish People?

The Torah tells us that after Yosef and that entire generation passed away, the Jewish people "were fruitful, teemed (*va'yishretzu*), increased and became strong." The Torah continues to tell us that a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef. The increase of the number of Jews in a short period caused Pharaoh to be concerned that they may align with Egypt's enemies and drive them from the land. On a literal level, we could see that what fueled Pharaoh's concern was the increase in the number of Jews in the land. However, we can understand it differently.

The extreme change in the status of the Jewish people only occurred after Yosef and that entire generation passed away. The Torah tells us that seemingly it was only after the Jews began *va'yishretzu* (teeming) that Pharaoh became concerned.

We find that after Yosef was sold into slavery and ultimately was purchased by Potiphar, he quickly ascended to become the head of his master's household. At that time, the Torah states, "**Now Yosef was handsome of form and handsome of appearance. After these things, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Yosef and she said, 'Lie with me.'**" Simply one could say that the reason his mistress took notice of him was his beauty and handsome appearance. However, Rashi explains it differently based on the Midrash. The Midrash says that when Yosef became the head of his master's household he began to focus on his looks by beautifying his eyes and grooming his hair. Chazal tell us that G'd said that Yosef's behavior at that moment was inappropriate because he was paying attention to his beauty when his father Yaakov was grieving over his loss. G'd said, "Because you were insensitive to your father's pain, I will set your master's wife upon you." The Torah is telling us that if it were not for the inappropriateness of Yosef's behavior (despite his beauty), his mistress would not have taken any interest in him. It was only because of his spiritual failing that G'd allowed her to take notice.

In a similar vein, one can now understand Pharaoh's concern with the increase in the Jewish population. Pharaoh had a sense of insecurity because G'd allowed him to perceive the Jewish people in a suspicious manner.

Sforno explains "va'yishretzu" to mean that after the generation of Yosef had passed away, the Jewish people began to behave inappropriately – similar to rodents (pejorative term for improper behavior). The Midrash tells us that the bondage of the Jewish people started only after they stopped circumcising themselves. As long as the Jewish people circumcised themselves, they were not subject to slavery. However, when the generation of Yosef passed away, the Jewish people in Egypt no longer wished to value their spirituality, which is represented through the circumcision (sign of the Holy Covenant). It was at this time that they were subjected to bondage.

Under normal circumstances, Pharaoh would not have felt threatened by the sudden increase in the Jewish population. However, because the Jews began to abandon their spirituality, Pharaoh began to take notice. The justification for Pharaoh's behavior was that the spirituality of the Jew had eroded to such a degree that he no longer identified them with their forbearers. Because Pharaoh could no longer recognize the spiritual influence

of Yosef and that generation, he was able to justify the bondage.

The Gemara in Tractate Chulin says that the only time an animal attacks a human being is when the animal sees the person as an animal (commonality with itself). However as long as the animal is able to sense the "tzelem Elokim – the Image of G'd" (the spirituality) of the person, the animal will not attack. It is only when the human being is put on the same level as the animal that he will be subject to attack.

Similarly, the non-Jew becomes insecure when he perceives the Jew on his level. If the Jew retains his spirituality, then he does not have commonality with the non-Jew and therefore G'd will not allow him to be despised. However, if the Jew should abandon his Judaism and attempt to assimilate with the non-Jew (even culturally), he will eventually become despised and rejected by the non-Jew. This is why Pharaoh became concerned with the increase in the Jewish population and thus instituted the bondage to subordinate and control the Jew. This unfortunate reality has repeated itself many times throughout history.

5. Moshe's Understanding of Purpose

The Torah tells us that Pharaoh decreed that all the Jewish newborn males should be thrown into the Nile. When Moshe was born, his mother Yocheved hid him until she could no longer conceal her son. In an attempt to save him from the Egyptians, the Torah states, "**...she (Yocheved) took for him (Moshe) a box fashioned of balsa wood gomeh and smeared it with clay and pitch; she placed the child into it and placed it among the reeds at the bank of the River.**"

It is interesting to note that the Torah is very specific about the material from which the box was made. Regarding Noach, the Torah tells us specifically that gopher wood was used to build the Ark. Rashi cites Chazal that the reason the Torah tells us this is that it is an allusion to the fact that the world will be destroyed by the sulfuric (gufri) water. However, regarding Moshe's box, what is the significance of identifying the material from which it is made?

There is an opinion cited in the Midrash (which is the opinion of Reb Elazar) who explains that the reason the Torah specifies the wood of the box is to tell us that it is of inferior quality. This teaches us that a tzaddik values his money to a great degree. Yocheved chose to purchase the

most inferior quality wood because of the degree to which she valued G'd's blessing, i.e. her personal assets. How do we understand this? How is it possible that she was concerned with cost of the wood when it was a question of saving the life of her child?

Yocheved was convinced that Moshe would survive the water regardless of the quality of the wood that was used, since he was to be the Redeemer of Israel. Miriam, Moshe's sister, had shared a prophecy with her father that Yocheved would give birth to the Redeemer. In addition, Chazal tell us that when Moshe was born, the house was illuminated by his presence and he was able to speak although he was only a newborn. It was evident to his parents that he was destined to be The Redeemer.

Yocheved understood that Moshe would have survived even if she had placed him directly into the water because she knew that G'd would perform the miracle necessary to ensure Moshe's survival. If this is the case, then why place Moshe in a box at all, regardless of its minimal cost?

Noach did not necessarily need to build an ark to survive the Great Flood because G'd could have performed a miracle by suspending him and all the other creatures above the waters. Ramban explains, the reason Noach was instructed to build an ark was so that G'd could bring about the miracle of his survival (and all that had accompanied him) in a concealed manner. If all of existence had survived through a revealed miracle, it would have been difficult to deny G'd's existence and thus free choice would have been diminished.

Yocheved understood that she had to conceal the miracle of Moshe's survival. Thus, it was necessary to fashion a box in order to cloak the miracle. Therefore, inferior wood was sufficient and spending more than what was absolutely necessary would have been considered wasteful. The Torah tells us that the basket was made of gomeh in order to inform us that Yocheved was aware of the destiny of her child.

From the time of his birth, Moshe understood that he was the Redeemer. The Torah tells us that when Moshe became an adult in the house of Pharaoh, he went out of the palace to see the suffering of his brothers (the Jewish people) and he came upon an Egyptian beating a Jew. Moshe first looked around, then killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. The reason Moshe killed the Egyptian was because he had raped the wife of the Jew who he was beating. How could Moshe kill the Egyptian

without taking into consideration the consequences of his actions? If it were found out that he had killed the Egyptian, he would be forced to flee Egypt or even be killed. Moshe knew that the Egyptians could not kill him. He knew that G'd would protect him because he was destined to take the Jewish people out of Egypt.

The fact is, unlike Moshe, most people do not know their mission in life. Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) says in "Koheles" that the day of one's death is greater than the day of one's birth. This is because when one dies, his life has shown its purpose (if he has succeeded). However, at the time of birth, one does not know how life will evolve and unfold. Although one's future is unknown because the course of our lives is dictated by our free choice, we do know that there is a baseline within which every Jew must operate. Regardless of who we are as individuals, we know that we are all obligated in the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvos. The Torah establishes the guidelines for every aspect of our lives and in that respect we know who we are as Moshe understood who he was. Therefore, we too should not compromise in our behavior.

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6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi

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11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
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Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham

1:30 – 2:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
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Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
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1:00—2:00 pm **Derech Hashem**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
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