

PARSHAS BO

תשפ"ג

This parsha is a very essential parsha.

We discussed the three stages of the ten makkos. Moshe Rabbeinu is in touch with a great Power, an intelligent Power which makes distinctions, and it is an overwhelming power beyond anything natural. But after makkas borod, why was it the necessity for makkas arbeh? Hashem says He needs to impress these lessons deeply into the heart of Pharaoh. Why was this important? Pharaoh has to say he is sending the Jews out of Egypt for good.

Before makkas bechoros, Moshe makes an announcement in the name of Hashem. He predicts that Pharaoh's servants will come to bow before him begging the Jews to leave Egypt. Then Moshe walked out of the palace. Pharaoh calls Moshe after makkas choshech. He tells Moshe that Klal Yisroel can go worship Hashem. Moshe responds that we need to take all the animals with us too. Why? We don't know what Hashem may ask of us and we need to be prepared to give Him anything and everything.

In the Aseres Hadibros in Parshas Vo'eschanon, Hashem says He redeemed us from slavery to Pharaoh, so that we can be His servants instead. The Jews never became free people. We simply switched masters from Pharaoh to Hashem. We have to be ready to give Hashem everything He demands – like a slave.

At makkas bechoros, Hashem wanted to cause such a trauma and cause such a panic that the Egyptians will chase the Jews to leave Egypt. That will be the end of it for the Egyptians. It doesn't need to be an ongoing part of their history. But for Klal Yisroel, the lessons will be with us and our children and grandchildren for the rest of human history. Klal Yisroel is unique because we have a strong continuity of an unbroken mesorah from generation to generation that stretches all the way back. The average Jew today knows who his great-grandparents were – where they lived in Europe and which Jewish community they belonged to. We have a strong sense of family heritage and mesorah. The average non-Jew does not have such a deep connection to his roots and his family history. They have no clue about who their direct ancestors were because there was nothing to pass on.

But Hashem wanted the generation that left Egypt to have such a deep impression of the makkos that they will pass it on for century after century for 3500 years! Why? We need to know who Hashem is.

The first of the Aseres Hadibros is Anochi Hashem Elokechoh, who took you out of Egypt. According to the Rambam and Ramban, this is a mitzvas assei to pass on for all generations the lessons of Yetzias Mitzrayim. What are these lessons in particular?

This is the first mitzvah of the Rambam in Sefer Hamitzvos. We have to believe in the existence of Hashem. He is the cause of everything and anything that happens in this world. Hashgocho protis. In the first perek in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah, he adds that Hashem is the source of our existence and causes everything to happen.

There are different stages of Klal Yisroel's understanding of the yesodos of Torah. Klal Yisroel were under the influence of Egyptian belief in avodo zoro for many years. They believed there are many forces in the world. A large part of the lessons of the makkos were to show the falsehood and the bankruptcy of the belief in avodo zoro. The first lesson of the makkas dam was to turn the Nile, which was worshiped as the source of life, into a source of death. Hashem is YKVK – there is only one Absolute power and He is the source of all

the forces. Hashem uses the entire year of the makkos to show this concept in various ways – devastating Egypt, punishing the Egyptians and showing that Hashem runs the world completely and there is no power like Him.

But all these lessons were delivered through miracles – open displays of the breaking of natural law. He didn't want to give any opportunity to wiggle out of them and explain it away. This is why Moshe said makkas bechoros will happen around midnight instead of exactly at midnight. So that if the Egyptians' clocks were off, they wouldn't have an excuse to dismiss the fact that all the Egyptian bechoros died simultaneously as some kind of freak accident. These miracles shook people up and made them rethink how they understood the world.

Then we have kriyas Yam Suf. Another overwhelming miracle. The posuk says Klal Yisroel now understood even better about what happened in Egypt, and they now believe in Hashem and Moshe. What is happening? The Rambam explains that Klal Yisroel are being built up, step-by-step, to reach higher and higher levels of nevuah. At Yam Suf, Klal Yisroel are raised to the level of every regular novi – like Yechezkel. But there can be higher levels. At Har Sinai, Klal Yisroel are raised to one level just below that of Moshe Rabbeinu to the point that they overhear Hashem talking directly to Moshe. At this level of nevuah, every member of Klal Yisroel understood with an absolute clarity all of reality, the truth of Hashem and the falsehood of avodo zoro. This required the accumulation of all the lessons of the makkos and Yam Suf.

Who stood at Har Sinai? We are told that all the neshomos of Klal Yisroel throughout history were also there. Why? It was essential that every neshomo realize that only Hashem runs the world and that avodo zoro is false. The truth of Hashem was embedded deep into the neshomo of every Jew.

Where does this truth within the neshomo show itself?

The Rambam in Hilchos Geirushin tells us the great fundamental principle of what it means to be a Jew. The halacha is that a husband must be willing to give a get to his wife and not be coerced. But if a husband becomes obligated by halacha to give his wife a get, beis din is allowed to beat him up until he "agrees" to give it. But why does this agreement make any difference? He is obviously only "agreeing" because he doesn't want to be beaten up! The Rambam asks this question and answers with the following fundamental principle: Deep down in the neshomo of every Jew is that he wants to believe in Hashem and obey His mitzvos. But he also has all kinds of yetzorim and pressures and confusion which push him in the wrong direction. So we beat him and put pressure in the other direction to neutralize the pressure of his yetzer. Then the real inner will of his neshomo can come out and say he wants to do the will of Hashem and give a get.

Where does this deep will of a Jew come from? The Rambam understood that it came from the fact that all our neshomos were at Har Sinai and we all recognized the truth of Hashem in the deepest part of ourselves. Nowadays we have to use all kinds of techniques to get rid of our confusion and allow that original understanding of ein od milvado that we received at Sinai to come to the fore.

This was the lesson we received in Egypt. Hashem is the only power in this world. He is the source of our existence and runs the world down to the finest detail. The first mitzvah of Anochi is to simply internalize these lessons and make it a part of who you are and how you go

through your day in everything you do. Hashem is the original cause Who causes everything to be.

Rav Avrohom ben HoRambam says we know that having bitochon is a mitzvah because this is what we were taught in Egypt. The Ramban has a slightly different understanding of the mitzvah. The lesson we are supposed to take from Yetzias Mitzrayim is that we accepted upon ourselves Hashem's malchus, and at Har Sinai we accepted His mitzvos. Who is Hashem? He acts intelligently and willfully – not through some random process. He created the world yesh me'ayin. Because He created it, He can control it at will and break its laws whenever He wants. He is not limited by anything in nature. As the Ramban writes at the end of Parshas Bo. He runs this world hands-on because He created it yesh me'ayin.

In the end, there is much overlap between the Rambam and the Ramban with some subtle differences.

There is another lesson we learn from Yetzias Mitzrayim which is discussed in Parshas Yisro. When Yisro came to the camp of Klal Yisroel in the desert, Moshe told him all about how Hashem saved Klal Yisroel from the Egyptians. Yisro proclaimed that now he understands that Hashem is the only true power and all avodo zoros are sheker. But what exactly was the critical thing Yisro heard which convinced him?

There are three opinions in the midrash. One says he heard about Amalek. He learned that there is absolute evil in this world. When Amalek heard about a nation that is devoted to Hashem and living an elevated life of ruchniyus, they couldn't tolerate it. They came out of nowhere – with no prior connection to Klal Yisroel – and attacked them simply because they are good and Amalek is evil and evil cannot tolerate good.

Another opinion says he heard about kriyas Yam Suf. He heard that Hashem controls nature in an unbelievable way. Another opinion says he heard about matan Torah.

Many people hear things and hear more things that should shake them up, but it is just too uncomfortable to accept – so it goes right past them. It is called cognitive dissonance. Yisro heard what everyone in the world hears – but he allowed what he heard to change his whole direction in life.

But there was one thing which made the biggest impact and pushed him to make a final decision – the idea that Hashem punishes middoh keneged middoh – reward and punishment with total precision and exactitude. Everything we do in this world has a consequence. If the Egyptians tried to destroy Klal Yisroel with water, they were destroyed

with water. The midrash says that each Jew at Yam Suf saw how the Egyptian who abused him was punished in the exact area that he wounded the Jew. The precision of the judgment of HaKodosh Boruch Hu was what shook Yisro to his core. Many people drift through life without realizing their actions have consequences.

The world isn't hefker. Everything we do makes a difference – for better or for worse. This is what really shook up Yisro to make him turn the corner.

The mitzvah is to ingrain the lessons we learned in Egypt about hashgocho protis. He created the world in six days and controls it completely.

There is an interesting halacha that someone who is mechalel Shabbos in public is treated like a non-Jew. Why this mitzvah in particular? Rashi and Tosfos in Eiruvim explain that in the Aseres Hadibros we are told that we have to keep Shabbos because Hashem stopped creating the world after six days. By keeping Shabbos we are giving testimony to the world that Hashem created the world. By being mechalel Shabbos in public, you are canceling the testimony that you should be giving about Hashem creating the world.

The Rambam has a different explanation. Shabbos is a bris between Hashem and Klal Yisroel. By violating Shabbos you are violating the bris. The Kesef Mishna says the Rambam is incorporating the idea of Rashi and Tosfos about giving testimony or contradicting testimony, and adding an extra dimension to it. The bris between ourselves and Hashem is based on the recognition that Hashem created the world in six days yesh me'ayin and He controls it in an ongoing way.

Bitochon is a hard mitzvah to keep in our modern world. We live in a scientific age where people believe everything that happens in the world can be understood as nature, can be predicted in advance, and can be controlled by technology. But we say that nature is merely a tool that Hashem uses to control the world and everything is really run by Hashem. When you are sick, you have to do hishtadlus and go get treatment. But you have to know at the same time that getting better is up to Hashem. You need to engage in parnossoh, but your success is completely up to Hashem. This is the mitzvah of bitochon. You need to internalize that Hashem is the only power in the world.

These are the lessons of Yetzias Mitzrayim and we have to convey these lessons to our children on a regular basis. We discuss these parshiyos at the Shabbos table and at the Seder table every year, over and over. The whole purpose of the process of geuloh was to teach us that Hashem runs the world completely. It is the basis of all Yiddishkeit.