

Sefer Shemos - Overview

ספר שמות deals with the birth of the Jewish people and their purpose and mandate, which is the Torah. It ends with the Mishkan, which is the way of permanently maintaining the Sinai experience, i.e. the resting of the Shechinah in the midst of the Jewish people. The Mishkan is like a portable Sinai, allowing the Jewish people to be permanently in that state. The redemption of the Jewish people from the Galus which begins in earnest with the opening of Sefer Shemos is only complete with the giving of the Mishkan at the end of Sefer Shemos. Only then do the Jewish People achieve the national spiritual level which the Avos attained as individuals. Sefer Shemos is therefore the actualization of the potential that the Avos created. Chazal point out that the word אור is mentioned five times in Sefer Bereishis, corresponding to the חמשה חומשי תורה יהי אור, *let there be light*, corresponds to Sefer Bereishis while ויהי אור, *and there was light*, the actualization of the command, corresponds to Sefer Shemos, for Shemos is the actualization of the potential of Sefer Bereishis.

Since it was essential that there be a Torah-keeping people for the purpose of the world to be fulfilled, Sefer Shemos is the moral and spiritual completion of ספר בראשית. Historically, Sefer Bereishis is ספר הזריעה whereas Sefer Shemos is ספר הגאולה or הצמיחה. When we study Bereishis, we gain an understating of HaSh-m's Hashgacha. When we study Shemos, we gain a higher understanding of His יחוד.

Since the purpose of the world can now be completed by the Jewish people accepting G-d's Torah, Sefer Shemos begins with the Jewish people:

אלה שמות בני ישראל

Given that the first words of each Sefer reflect the theme of that entire Sefer (and the same is true of each Parsha), it can therefore be said that the totality of the names of Bnei Yisrael, the whole Jewish People, collectively contain all the wisdom and holiness of the Torah.

שמות

Slavery

Sefer Shemos begins the slavery of the Jewish people in earnest. Yosef and his brothers die out, and the next generation of Jews grows up in Egypt. They multiply and begin to move out of Goshen into Egyptian neighborhoods. As has often been when the going has gone well with the Jews, they underwent a process of rapid assimilation, quickly mastering the culture and ascending right to the top of this most 'civilized' of nations. In possession of full civil rights, they applied the full force of their acumen to becoming wealthy, prominent socialites disproportionately represented in halls of theatre and culture. In so doing, they abandoned their mandate as the chosen people, and gave up the most obvious sign of their uniqueness, Bris Milah. This was already full-blown Galus, for in the end, Galus is really Galus of the mind – full identity and enthusiasm with the Galus civilization to the point where thinking as a Jew becomes an alien and difficult undertaking.

It was well known that the Egyptian borders were such that no slave could ever flee Egypt. The Jews had become slaves of Egyptian civilization. It was unthinkable for them to leave this cradle of human progress. The physical slavery that occurred later was just a reflection of this. For it was only when the Jews realized the physical pain of being in Egypt that they realized the spiritual price they were paying. The suffering made it very clear to them that they had to get out of there.

Throughout history, the attempt by the Jews to assimilate ironically triggers massive anti-Semitism, and Egypt was no different. G-d takes the hatred of the non-Jew and turns it into a positive message: If the Jews will not choose to be Jews, I will force them to separate themselves using the stick of anti-Semitism. Even more ironic, they will not only survive the anti-Semitism, but will emerge purer and greater. Just like a drop of pure olive oil requires the crushing of the olive to produce it, and just as oil, once produced, will sooner or later emerge to float on the top even when mixed with other substances, the crushing of the Jews not only separated them but was a source of their greatness. It is the very core-goodness of the Jews to begin with that allows for the suffering to help in this way.

Still, Egypt was not to be an ordinary master-slave relationship. The slaves were unique and the masters were unique.

The Egyptians, civilized as they were, could not just act capriciously. Egyptian law did not allow for a discriminatory policy of killing baby boys and not girls, or for killing babies of any sort. Pharaoh could only appeal to the midwives to become accomplices in his crime, and even then, only before the baby had actually been born. In fact, it was only when Pharaoh's death left a power gap that the Egyptians reached the depraved cruelty that they did

The Egyptians therefore cleverly disguised their plan as a social action plan, designed to help the Jews overcome inequalities. **בפה** - ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך. **רד**: With a soft mouth, under the cloak of civilization. There will be no Torah learning; this will help the Jews to integrate. We will ban Milah; this will save them from barbaric mutilation. We will abolish Shabbos: This will help them get Parnosa. We are not Jew-haters, the Egyptians declared. We are concerned only with humanity and progress. *The Egyptians acted in a friendly manner towards us* (from רע as כסילים). The work was initially proclaimed as a national,

non-discriminatory public works program. The Jews went enthusiastically along. וירעו אותנו המצרים - Rather than enslave the Jews, the Egyptians tried to corrupt them.

So much for the plans and actions of the masters! And what of the slaves? The Jews are a nation that knows no mediocrity. We either go up and up or down into the abyss. The Jews have a deep relationship with spirituality, which is by its nature hidden below the surface. But the moment we lose that relationship, we tend to the opposite, revealing all. And one of the consequences was to become tattle-tales on each other. Moshe Rabbeinu saw the tale-bearing and shuddered. The unity of the people was beginning to shatter, and with it, the best hope for redemption.

The suffering itself caused a purification of the Jews, like an iron furnace, which in and of itself made the Jews ready for redemption. כאשר יענו אותו כן ירבה וכן - the very act of the ענוי, the affliction, is what caused their rise to holiness. The darkness itself served to elevate and raise the Jews. ומרר את חייהם - מרור became a part of the Geula, not just the שעבוד. And this in fact is the lesson of suffering everywhere. Somebody who is graced with all manner of pleasure becomes more physical thereby. Someone in pain will actually find himself greatly aided by that very pain in his quest for spirituality.

But for this to be true, the core of the person must be holy. The Avos had certainly given this core to their descendents in Egypt. It was now maintained by G-d Himself, who entered exile together with Yaakov Avinu and personally guaranteed that even if the Jews were to sink they were never to disappear. G-d explained this to Moshe Rabbeinu, who was wrong to give up on the eternal nation. אהיה אשר אהיה – “Just as I will be with them in this Tzora, so will I be with them in future Tzoros.” Or, as Seforno understands things: “I will always be there to establish and maintain things for their own intrinsic value. The death or demise or destruction of something is never why I created it. Therefore, I will always be opposed to perversion and cruelty, which lead to loss and destruction. Therein lies My opposition to the Egyptians.”

The first spark of holiness that was triggered by the suffering was Jewish unity. The Egyptians, having already enslaved the Jews, no longer hated them because they were rich and powerful. They now began to hate them because of their fear of their spiritual greatness - ויקוצו מפני בני ישראל -

This unity was not just praiseworthy – it was vital to the future redemption of the Jewish people. For, in the end, all the potential of each and every Jew was to be redeemed, and this could only be done in all its dimensions when each Jew became a part of a greater whole.

The potential of all of these Jews – of the whole Jewish nation – was contained within the 70 people who entered Egypt – Yaakov and his flock. All the potential that went into the Egyptian exile was to be redeemed. The exile itself was like the sowing of a seed, the redemption the flowering of the seed. The seed seems to begin to rot in the ground, but, just at the right moment, it begins to sprout again. Of course, if it would rot any further it would never be able to sprout. But it also cannot sprout too early. So, in the end, the Jews had to be redeemed בחפזו, at the right moment without a further moment's delay, for redemption would not have been possible after this time.

The need for the Galus to complete each person is also reflected in the fact that none of the Jews changed their names in Egypt. A name reflects the essence of the person, their full potential. Keeping their names means that the Jews never lost touch with their true spiritual potential and that the Galus itself helped them to actualize this. The Jews were in Egypt for 210 years. This comprised at least 4 generations. Someone in the fourth generation would be aware that he was born in

Egypt as was his father and grandfather. As far back as he could know, his family had roots in Egypt, and they were still there. Yet, the Jews kept their names. Reuven went in with all his potential and Reuven, all that potential, came out through his descendents.

The Making of Moshe

Moshe Rabeinu was born into slavery. He was inarticulate and humble, and still he became the greatest person ever to live. From his very birth, he seemed destined for greatness; yet he was born with all human frailty and had to grow into his greatness. Until he and Aharon confronted Pharaoh, Aharon was, in fact, greater than him.

Moshe faces three challenges and grows with each one. First, he strikes an Egyptian. It is relatively easy to hate the outsider who is hurting one of one's own. Then he intercedes between two Jews, two of his own. This is a step up. Finally, he intercedes with complete strangers, Midianites, to save the daughters of Yisro from the other shepherds. Moshe was not the first nor the last person with a potential for greatness. He was the only one to take it that far.

In a single parsha we read of a baby that has to be hidden and then abandoned, of being adopted by a non-Jewish mother, of murder and flight to a strange country, of life as a shepherd tormented by the knowledge that his people are in great pain, of his rise to prophecy and return to Egypt to confront Pharaoh. His birth triggers a horrible outburst from a Pharaoh desperate to trace and exterminate him, and the irony of him growing up right under Pharaoh's nose.

After three months, Yocheved sees that her attempts to hide Moshe at home are failing and places him on the Nile, the god of the Egyptians. This same Nile into which Pharaoh had commanded that all males to be thrown becomes the source of redemption for Moshe Rabbeinu. Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, takes this baby, and calls him Moshe – literally, I have drawn him from the waters. Pharaoh, who claimed to have created the Nile-god, and who calls his daughter the daughter of god (the literal translation of Batya), now has an adopted grandchild which Batya is claiming was given birth to by the Nile. This future savior of the Jewish people is being presented to the Egyptians as a son of their god!

Providence decrees that Moshe should grow up in a house of royalty, quickly reaching a leadership role of actually running the palace. While Pharaoh kills even the Egyptian male babies in a desperate attempt to prevent this Jewish savior from surviving, he, Pharaoh, lands up unwittingly providing the one person he is trying to kill not only with sanctuary, but with vital lessons for the future. Moshe grows up unencumbered by the slave-mentality of his brethren and far more able to earn their respect later. He is also thereby given one of the prerequisites of prophecy (עשיר חכם (וגבור), physical strength and good health. How he grows up with such a strong Jewish identity and passion for G-d is a mystery. For two years he is nursed by his mother, and perhaps he remembers something from there and maintains contact thereafter.

Moshe develops a strong sense of justice and a deep feeling of the pain of others, which he carefully nurtures by walking around his people. Because of this, he becomes a murderer and has to face Pharaoh in a trial that would ordinarily mean certain death. Miraculously, this inarticulate man says the right things. Miraculously, he is allowed to go scott free, though the murmurings of his own people all around him force him to flee, somehow managing to escape that impenetrable hell-hole of Egypt.

Here, Moshe begins to follow in the footsteps of his Forefathers. Yaakov found a wife at a well. He will search there. Yaakov helps a female shepherdess who becomes his wife – so does Moshe. Both find themselves as shepherds of idolatrous

father-in-laws, although Yisro, unlike Lavan, is already a man of great principle on a desperate search for the truth. Both learn how to be great leaders by looking after helpless sheep with all the care, concern and responsibility later to be lavished on a whole people.

Moshe's concern for others also prepares him for the early stages of prophecy, and suggests that his killing of the Egyptian and interfering in the quarrel of the two Jews was accompanied by Ruach HaKodesh. The Midrash contrasts Noach to Moshe Rabbeinu, who starts out as an Ish Mitzri, living a messy, difficult life. He is involved in murder; he is brought up in the intrigues and impurity of the Egyptian court; he runs to Midian and back – and through all this messiness he becomes an איש אלוקים. The difference is that Noach's spirituality was ultimately egocentric, while Moshe dedicated himself to the Klal.

But, it took periods of intense meditation and reflection in the plains of Midian for Moshe Rabbeinu to prepare himself for the next level, that of prophecy. And so, while utterly alone with his sheep, a great event in Jewish history takes place. Although the Sinai experience had to be in front of the whole nation in order to assure its authenticity, other great events, such as Yaakov's struggle with the angel, are completely private events. For it is just through the underlying hiddenness of spirituality that the Geula will take place. G-d calls on him from a lowly bush, a physical vision to communicate to Moshe's as yet not fully developed prophetic abilities. In the very same prophecy, Moshe graduates from experiencing an angel telling him of G-d's hidden ways in Galus to a direct prophecy from G-d Himself.

G-d instructs Moshe to go back to Egypt and to do the impossible – confront Pharaoh and secure the release of his people. Remarkably, Moshe doesn't doubt for a minute that such a thing can be done. He only questions whether he is the right person for the job. And did not G-d promise to Yaakov that He would personally take them out? Moshe claims that he is כבד פה, hard of speech. But that very thing is the proof that he is the right choice to lead the redemption. It was Moshe's very spirituality that had led to his loss of speech, for speech is but the physical translation using physical instruments – a mouth, a pallet, lips and a voice box – of one's abstract and spiritual thoughts. Moshe had now risen to a level where he was above the physical and therefore felt that he could no longer serve as G-d's messenger to reveal His redemption in this world.

G-d responds by giving Aharon to Moshe. Aharon would come right up to Moshe's spirituality and translate it into the revealed world. After speaking to Moshe for a full week, G-d finally convinces him.

But Moshe has a more difficult question: do the Jewish People in fact deserve to be redeemed? Moshe's doubts were kindled when he had to flee because of talebearers from within.

Moshe returns, speaks to Pharaoh with Aharon, and, shockingly, things get worse. Sefas Emes says that this is because Moshe was Midas HaDin, and through his intervention Klal Yisroel was now being judged at this higher level.

Moshe Rabbeinu never stopped growing. By the end of his life he was so great that merely looking at the Holy Land gave its air an ethereal quality - אורא דארץ - ישראל מחכים. His spiritual power was such that, had he gone into the land, the presence of the Jews there would have been permanent.

The Burning Bush

In Moshe's first known prophetic experience, G-d calls on him from a lowly bush that represents the oppressed Jews. In the middle of the bush is a fire which does not spread to the sides of the bush. The fire is the Galus, or the Midas HaDin which causes it. The bush does not burn but rather gradually conquers the fire, teaching that the Jews will survive the exile.

G-d (or His messenger) now speaks to Moshe from within the fire. This teaches that G-d's Providence works from within the exile experience to bring it to redemption. G-d now tells Moshe, "Do not approach any further," for you will not understand everything. At the same time, G-d begins to instruct Moshe about the nature of His mysterious ways in this world, and, in particular, His hidden ways in Galus. "Take off your shoes", your material overlays, in order to prepare yourself for an even clearer prophecy. "I will be as I will be": I, G-d, am the essence of existence and all justice and righteousness which nurtures and consolidates existence. My whole Being is against the destructive essence of the Egyptians and of any perversion of cruelty."

The very exile, the bush, causes the flame, the holiness, to burn bright. The darker the exile, the more light there is hidden within it. וכאשר יענו אותו כו' וכך יפרוץ – to the same degree that the Egyptians inflicted the Jews, the Jews multiplied and grew. G-d did not leave the Jewish people to suffer. On the contrary, the suffering itself was part of the unfolding plan for redemption.

This is like a seed that needs to rot in the ground before a new plant can grow from it. If it does not rot, it cannot create the space for the new plant to grow. If it rots completely, it will lose its kernel of life and no new plant will emerge. The new plant emerges exactly at the point where the seed lies between destruction and existence.

The suffering and the slavery were all a part of this process. But, they were about to become like a fully rotted seed that would no longer be capable of producing a new plant. G-d then hastily redeemed them at the last moment, at the last level of Tumah, in order to create enough of a vacuum for the kernel of spirituality within them to flower anew.

This is what surprised Moshe when he enquired why the bush, the Jewish People, was not being consumed by the fire: "And he said, I will approach and see this great appearance, why the bush is not being consumed." Moreover, he saw that the fire of the Midas HaDin that was causing the exile would eventually go out, but he did not understand the mechanism.

Initially, Moshe Rabbeinu did not want to go and save the Jewish people, partly because he thought the kernel of Jewish life, their faith, had already been snuffed out. Therefore, he told G-d that the people would not listen to his voice. G-d's response was to "Take off the shoes from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." "The place where you are standing" refers to the Jewish people, for you are standing and talking about them. They are still holy, G-d tells Moshe, and deep in the depths of their souls, they believe. A Jew should always believe that he believes, even when he cannot feel his faith on the surface. And so the bush is burning but is not consumed. You, Moshe Rabbeinu, should take off your shoes to that and dedicate yourself to their cause, for nothing should separate between your feet and this ground, between you and this holy people.

There are other reasons why Moshe does not want to return. He sees that the Jews would have to repeat the exile experience. G-d tells Moshe that the Egyptian slavery is a paradigm for exiles to come, for the Egyptian exile was a concentration of

all the other exiles within it. But "I will be as I will be", and just as G-d is with the Jewish people in this exile, so He will be in exiles to come." The redemption from Egypt also contains within it the redemption from all other exiles.

Moshe Rabbeinu knows that the Jewish people would have to flourish anew and that there would be something unnatural about this growth, but by what merit, he asks, would this happen? This is not because he does not believe in the Jewish people, but because he is simply perplexed. G-d's answer is that the Jews will receive the Torah and that this is the merit and the means through which they will be raised up. Moshe Rabbeinu is now convinced, and he agrees to return to Egypt.

וארא

Miracles and the Makkos

G-d hides Himself in the laws of nature, and it was the Avodah of the Avos to discover G-d behind this veil. Now G-d tells Moshe that He will reveal himself in a clearer fashion – a revelation of שמי די through the Ten Plagues.

The Ten Sayings of Creation showed that G-d created the world. The Ten Plagues showed that He continues to be involved in the creation. The Ten Commandments showed the moral purpose behind the creation – the spiritual world.

The purpose of all miracles is to reveal HaSh-m's השגחה, and the Makkos were no different. The plagues happened only to the Egyptians and not to the Jews; Moshe announced the precise time when each would begin and end. The difficulty was to show the Egyptians that this wasn't just an advanced form of כישוף. In acts of כישוף, things always return to the way they were before afterwards. However after the frogs died, they remained real, rotting and all piled up. The frogs in the water survived, and remained in and around the water forever more. Pharaoh's magicians soon noticed the pattern – מצבע אלוקים היא, but Pharaoh was to push on without them.

Miracles and nature are not substantially different. Miracles reveal what nature hides, but for someone who sees clearly below the surface, miracles are not necessary to see a revelation of G-d in this world. Nature is essential for day-to-day living. Without a life of nature we would not know how to regulate our lives, how to anticipate things, how to plan and respond. For this reason, open Nisim are not only limited, but even when they do happen, they ordinarily require that man go as far as his normal actions will take him before G-d will activate the miracle. Thus, Noach had to build a large Ark even though it wasn't big enough in the end to accommodate all the animals. We have to light the fires under the Mizbeach even if the fire from heaven will ultimately do the job. The Nes always remains a little hidden, never fully revealed. G-d divides the Red Sea, but the wind must blow for this to happen. G-d uses the כלים of nature in order to effect miracles.

We might ask, "Does not a miracle show that G-d wasn't able to plan everything He needed to do in His original creation?" However, miracles are also a part of מעשה בראשית and have their own order. When G-d created the world He created two orders of laws. The first were the natural laws and the second was the order of miracles. The order of miracles is, like the natural order, an order that follows laws and patterns. We are accustomed to thinking that G-d implemented the order of nature into the world and suspends this when He does a miracle. But that is not what happens. G-d did not place either one of the two orders, natural or miraculous, as the permanent order. אין סדר הטבע מוחלט. Sometimes He activates the natural order and sometimes the miraculous. Therefore, miracles are as much a part of the creation as is nature.

It is just this order in the miraculous which makes it so hard for Pharaoh to accept that all this is coming from G-d. He sees the order and misinterprets it again and again. After all he goes through he walks right into the split Red Sea. He thinks, "You make blood out of water. So will I. It is true that yours is really blood and mine is but reddish water. But that just shows that your G-d is stronger than mine at this time. You make frogs. I can also make frogs. True, my frogs can not give birth to any more, and yours can. True, whatever I do with magic soon returns to its former state whereas you can ask your G-d to stop at a precise, predetermined time. True, I cannot

produce something which has true movement and you can. Your G-d is now very strong. But the constellations will change. My super nature will eventually match or defeat yours.”

We have shown that nature and miracle are different sides of the same coin. However, the miracles of the Exodus until the Jews went into Israel reflected a change in the whole order of nature. Starting with the plagues, the very laws of nature were changed (but continued to operate normally for the Jews). The plague of blood meant that H₂O combined to create not water but blood (while the Egyptians merely made the water look like blood). The plague of darkness changed so that it was no longer merely the absence of light but had active (photon) properties. At the crossing of the Red Sea, water changed so that it no longer acted as a normal liquid, spreading over a surface. Rather, it piled up.

Changing the order of nature in this way showed that G-d not only supervises the world, as regular miracles show, but that He is its Creator as well.

The Egyptians had destroyed the moral world, and this was beginning to impact on the physical world. These masters of impurity had succeeded in infusing all of reality with their anti-holiness. The plagues worked backwards, re-establishing the purity of creation and its moral purpose. The plague of the blood was to correct הנה נרתת לכם את כל עשב זרע וזרע. For it is through the blood that the food is taken to all parts of the body. The abundance of blood now became a curse, for over-supply and deficiency are two sides of the same coin. The frogs came to fix ישרצו המים שרץ נפש. Darkness, the second last plague, was against the second saying of creation, *Let there be light*. The last plague, the slaying of the first born, was against the first creative act – *In the Beginning G-d created the Heaven and the Earth*.

But the plagues themselves, as we have seen, unfolded in an orderly fashion. The first two of each set came with a warning, while the third came without warning. The plagues were graded. Each Makkah affected the Mitzrim in a more and more substantial way. The first three plagues (blood, frogs and lice) came from the earth, the second (animals, animal plagues and boils) from the middle domain, and the third (hails, locusts and darkness) from the heavens. Finally, the plague of the firstborn struck at the soul of man, that which is above everything.

In the first of each group of three, Moshe and Aharon were not allowed to approach Pharaoh in his house. They were constrained to wait until he went out, showing a certain lack of control over Pharaoh. The second of each three already had them go to the house, showing greater control over him, but still in the form of a warning which Pharaoh was seemingly at liberty to reject (and face the consequences). The third was without warning, showing the maximum amount of control. This cycle then repeated itself, but in ascending order of showing G-d's control over everything. In this way, the Egyptians were afflicted with all of the reality that constituted the original creation of the world.

There was a great danger that Pharaoh would react violently after any one of the Makkos and destroy all the Jews in one shot. The Makkos had to be perfectly spaced to keep up enough pressure on Pharaoh that he would not be able to think of such a thing.

Pharaoh began to suspect that G-d really is all powerful, but his invested interests were so vast that he kept on vacillating. Pharaoh was to learn of his mistake at the crossing of the Red Sea. Here all waters in the world split. G-d's miraculous Hand was no longer confined to Egypt. He was now shown to be King of the Universe.

Galus Mitzrayim and Other Galuyos

Galus Mitzrayim is the archetype Galus. All other exiles are but another twist in the forces unleashed through Egypt. And our redemption from Egypt ensured a built-in redemption to every exile. Galus Mitzrayim is also an archetype for personal exile, which is any situation where we fail to actualize our spiritual potential. For the soul is in exile in the body, and the redemption from Egypt gives each one of us the inherent potential to redeem our souls.

Had we completed all the Tikun that was inherent in the potential of Galus Mitzrayim, we would never have needed another Galus. We would have gone straight into Israel after receiving the Torah, and never come out again. Moshe Rabbeinu would have been the Mashiach. His spiritual power was such that had he led us into the Land of Israel, no force on earth could have overturned that.

When Moshe first demanded of Pharaoh to let Bnei Yisrael go, things initially seemed to get worse. Pharaoh now made the Jewish People gather the raw material (the straw) for making their bricks without reducing their quota. The Jewish people were now forced to spread themselves over all of Egypt, losing their unity. The Jews now suffered not only the hardship of the slavery but the total despair of thinking that nothing would help – they would be slaves forever.

Moshe was so holy that he was operating at a level of Midas HaDin, and, as the new leader of the Jewish People, he caused the Jewish nation to now be judged by this higher standard, by the standard of Midas HaDin. Since this was a time when G-d was reconstituting the world, He now came to elevate the Jewish people so that they would be operating according to the level of these higher worlds. But the Jews were not entirely up to this higher level. This required that they have a premature redemption, which in turn meant that they would have to go through subsequent exiles to make up what was lost.

Our Parsha brings four languages of redemption:

והוצאתי, והצלתי, וגאלתי, ולקחתי

Each one of these redeemed the Jewish people from an Egyptian decree, each decree harsher than the next. But the decrees themselves purified the Jewish people and therefore became a part of the redemption.

The fourth and worst decree was that Bnei Yisrael should gather their own supplies of straw, triggering a level of redemption defined as ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם – to become G-d's Chosen people. The decree had led to the lack of unity of the Jewish people. Since this fourth decree was ended prematurely, future exiles would require that we be spread throughout the nations of the world.

Golus, however, is not only a consequence; in its abject impurity, it provides the opportunity for Tikun. It is both the illness and the medicine. For, as in Egypt, G-d Himself accompanies us into Golus, and we go there to find the sparks of spirituality hidden in the midst of the טומאה.

Galus is ultimately an unnatural phenomenon, a breach of the natural order of the world. It is not natural for the Jews to be dispersed and it is not natural for us to be subject to other nations. And, being unnatural, it is therefore destined to end. Neither the Shechina nor the Jewish people belong in Galus. Galus defies the laws of natural spirituality. Because of this, it has no permanence. Perforce the laws of spiritual nature will prevail to end our exile. Geulah is no mere wish or hope. It is the

intrinsic natural forces of history which will drive the world to this resolution. For only that which is natural has continuity.

The reason that Galus is possible to begin with is because the world is composed of both physical/material and spiritual components. These two dimensions, the material and the spiritual, reflect mirror images of each other. The Jews, who chose to attach themselves to core spiritual endeavors, are able to unify all forces. On the other hand, their failure to do so leads to a dissipation of these forces into the fragmented reality of the material. In the material world, things have their own identity and separate themselves into different directions. The four Galus nations represent this reality. In practice, fragmentation, division and even divisiveness of some sort, even amongst the Jewish people, is as much a natural state of this world as is its opposite. Only in the Messianic Era, when there is a true revelation of G-d's Oneness, is this fragmentation fully resolved.

The Egyptian exile was both the paradigm exile as well as the paradigm redemption. After Egypt, the Jews suffered four exiles: the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek and the Roman. Yaakov Avinu dreamt about these four exiles and Daniel prophesized about them. Why four? Four represents all directions - the maximum atomization away from the unity of spirituality.

The letter of this world, the Heh (ה), is really a combination of two letters. The larger part of the Heh is really a Dalet (ד), while the smaller part is actually a Yud (י). The Yud is the symbol for the next world. So it seems that something of the next world is already present in this world.

The Dalet is the numerical value of four. This is the ultimate unit of fragmentation, and is always used in the Torah to express maximum diversity. Thus, for example, when the river in the Garden of Eden leaves the Garden into a lower plain of the earth, it splits into four rivers. We are also told that there are four animals that have only one of the two kosher symbols; they either chew the cud (three of the four) or they have a split hoof (the pig) but do not have both.

The physical shape of the Dalet reinforces this idea. The Dalet (ד) is made up of two Vavs (ו) which amounts to two straight lines going in all four directions of the earth, so to speak.

In the beginning, G-d created something other than Himself. As a result of this there was a multiplicity of realities, dependent on G-d for their existence, but appearing superficially as fragmented, independent realities. Therefore, the earth was without form and empty, with darkness on the face of the depths (the second verse of the Torah).

The Sages note that four words are mentioned here and point to the similarity of the exiles. The exiles were predictably four in number because there are certain laws of human history just as there are certain laws of nature. Historians have always searched for such laws, and there have been great debates on issues such as whether history is cyclical or linear. The historical law of exiles need not have been inevitable in its expression. There are numerous historical scenarios which would have avoided the actualization of this idea. But the law itself existed from the moment the world came into being.

Why should these forces of exile operate specifically on the Jews? Because the Jews represent that force in the world which is capable of combining those four forces into one force. In other words, the one force of the Jews can translate itself into the four forces of the exile - the expression of the four exiles is really the disintegration of Jewish civilization energy into separate components.

The Last Three Makkos

The fact that the last three Makkos – the locusts, darkness and the slaying of the firstborn - are placed in a separate Parsha tells us that they are unique.

The locusts were unique in that, for the first time, there was a Makkah involving an edible, kosher animal. Like other kosher animals, Arbeh is not essentially destructive. Its destructiveness lies only in the sheer size of the swarm. So too, the darkness was a revelation of hidden light, too powerful to be seen and therefore blinding. Makkas Bechoros happened because of the appearance of the Shechina – also a good thing - automatically driving out the Tumah. Since the whole Chiyus of the Bechoros of the Mitzrim was from Tumah, when the Tumah left they died.

The first seven plagues came to teach G-d's ongoing involvement in the world in all seven levels of nature. But the last 3 Makkos came to reveal His Malchus in this world – a revelation of His Glory.

Had the purpose of the ten plagues been just to punish the Egyptians, G-d could have achieved this through one plague alone. But the ten plagues came to do much more. The Ten Sayings of Creation were a process whereby an initial creation light was successively brought further and further down, the light becoming more and more hidden. The ten plagues came to reveal these layers of hiddenness, working in reverse. As these plagues unfolded they not only punished the Egyptians but peeled away successive layers of impurity on the part of the Jews. This was in the reverse order of the original act of creation, which went in the order of the most spiritually revealed (*In the Beginning*) to the most spiritually hidden.

Our Parsha begins with the plague of the locust, which parallels the Third Saying in the act of Creation, *Let there be a firmament* (יהי רקיע). The second day of the creation was a day when separate, multiple beings were created – the angels, for example. The fragmentation of the creation now became apparent. The purpose of יהי רקיע is to make a separation – a Havdala, the ability to distinguish between these multiple forms. The mechanism which makes Havdalah is Daas. Daas is the ability to connect, i.e. after distinguishing one object from another, one has to then connect with the right ones and separate from the others. Therefore, Daas also comes into being on the second day.

The Hebrew name for locusts (ארבה) comes from the word ריבוי, destroying only because of its size. This is the essence of the second day. The Mitzrim had created a situation where that fragmentation became an end in and of itself. This was a world of Kishuf, of multiple G-d's, of great Zenus and Tumah. פרעה comes from the word פרוע, to be unrestrained. The Mitzrim were trapped in their רקיע, their מצרים (= מצרים). Locust herds are unique in that they are leaderless, and seem to reinforce the fragmentation of the Egyptians. But these locusts, with their seemingly leaderless formation, came in at the behest of G-d and left at His behest. The Mitzrim were being shown that their civilization was their own self-made trap, turning even the good into evil. The antidote to this was Daas. Just as the second day produced Daas, so did the plague of the locusts. It was now that the Egyptians recognized clearly that G-d is connected to His creation - הטרם תדע כי אבדה מצרים. Although Pharaoh also had a highly developed sense of Daas, his was a completely perverted understanding of reality.

The next plague was darkness. The darkness was a revelation of hidden light too powerful to be seen and therefore blinding. The light was only good for someone who was very spiritual himself. For the impure Egyptians, this was a great darkness.

In the future world, G-d will bring the sun out of its sheath so that it is fierce: the wicked are punished by it, the righteous are healed by it. So too, the verse says יצר אור ובורא חושך. G-d forms light but above that he creates darkness (בורא vs יוצר), a light that is so great that it is perceived as darkness.

Finally, there was the plague of the firstborn sons. The first nine plagues had worked through successive layers of Egyptian impurity. Now, the deepest, most spiritual aspect of Egyptian impurity was to be confronted. This required a revelation of G-d's Shechina. The firstborn always represents the core of the nation. The Egyptian firstborn drew on the deepest depths of Egyptian Tumah. When G-d's Shechina appeared, it drove this impurity out. The result was the loss of the life-source of the Egyptian firstborn sons and they consequently died.

Anything which was a power of impurity now got destroyed. Egyptian idols melted. Even the firstborn of slaves and animals died. The revelation of G-d was so powerful that the Jews needed special protection not to be affected. For, if they had any impurity themselves, they could suffer the fate of the Egyptians.

The source of this impurity was atheism. Pharaoh had never even heard of G-d. From this G-dless society emerged the great Egyptian cesspool of incest and immorality. Without faith, there is little break on sensual desires. These are what are presented by the word 'firstborn' – the firstborn of our desires and passions, the core of what moves and motivates us.

The Tikkun of this was not only for the Olam HaGadol, with its Ten Maamaros of Maaseh Bereishis, but also for the Olam HaKatan, the world of man and his ten Kochos. The first seven Makkos were in the Middos, whereas the last three were in the Sechel. The firstborn, too, reflect this idea. There are 3 types of first born. There is the firstborn of the free Egyptian – sensual passions that have an intellectual component; Taavah with a cultural overlay. There are the sensual passions of the firstborn slaves – passions that may be seen by the broader society as fun, but with no elevating or redeeming features. Finally there are the sensual passions of the animal firstborn – debased sensual desires that would embarrass the person were they to be publicized.

The same cause of death to the firstborn sons of the Egyptians served to elevate the Jews to the highest possible levels. What the Jews experienced at that moment of Shechina-revelation was such a delicious taste of the holy, that they were able to take every sensual pleasure and connect it to G-d. This is what G-d meant when He said, "*Sanctify for Me every first born from the womb.*"

The Jews had been purified by their hellish experience of slavery, but their faith had been battered by the dominant atheism surrounding them. Now, they begin the road to elevation in their faith as well. Each of the ten plagues taught them a further lesson in this, until Makas Bechoros provided them with the most powerful insight into G-d's Omnipotence, Providence, hatred of evil and love for His people. They were now ready to meet their Maker at Sinai and to find out from Him how to fulfill their purpose and the purpose of the world.

Rosh Chodesh

At the point where the Jewish people are about to leave Egypt, they are given their first Mitzvah, Rosh Chodesh. Until then, as slaves, their time had not been their own. Now they were to be given the months as the first indication of their freedom.

Moshe Rabbeinu had trouble understanding what G-d was telling him, and G-d has to actually show Moshe a picture of the moon. Clearly, it was not the physical moon which was puzzling Moshe. There was something hidden, something profound about this Mitzvah, which Moshe was struggling to grasp.

What was clear to Moshe was that this was not just some neat division of the year – a way of recording time. Every time the Jews sanctify the new month they testify to their own power of renewal. This is why these months did not even begin at the beginning of the year, Rosh Hashana, but rather at Pesach, the time of Redemption. There is more to this, however. This was the beginning of some new relationship with time. It represents a seed change in the nature of the Jewish people, in their emerging out of the shackles of nature to control time itself. For, by being able to determine the final dates of Rosh Chodesh, the Jews can dictate the exact dates of the festivals. G-d will then respond by bringing down His holiness on the day so determined to be Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, etc.

Yom Tov Sheni is our best illustration of this power today. In anticipation of our exile, our months were all sanctified in advance by the Sanhedrin. The second day of Yom Tov, a man-made Chag, keeps alive the imprint of free choice expressed in the original sanctification by sight. *It is therefore a profound truth that for Israel in Galut, it is only the second day of Yom Tov that ensures the first day its sacred Jewish character.*

Hence the Jews, with this Mitzvah, began the transition from being a nation subject to the laws of nature to a nation that came to control time. In Egypt, time was in exile – the time of the Jews belonged to the Egyptians like everything else. The Jews had entered into the world of nature, where time rules all. In that world, life moves in an endless series of cycles – *There is nothing new under the sun.*

Now that the Jews were in the process of redemption, their time was redeemed as well. They received the Mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh, giving them control of time, returning to them the source of spiritual life and the ability to innovate above the level of time.

At the beginning of creation, G-d blew a Neshama into man, blowing into man the spirit of speech. With Rosh Chodesh, the Jewish people receive the inner content of that original creation. This first Mitzvah is the ability to sanctify time. G-d speaks through the mouth of Moshe, as he had once breathed the breath of speech into the first man, and tells him that the Jewish nation will use this speech to sanctify time.

This is the power to innovate – to create a new cycle of time, to be able to do Teshuvah and to be able to innovate. The Jews are given this power of Chidush because they connect themselves to the Source of all Chiddush, HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The moon – the Jewish people - is but a reflector of the light of the sun, after all, and therein lies its great secret.

The Jewish lunar calendar reflects this idea by being coordinated with the sun. It is therefore the only calendar that is both lunar and solar. Non-Jewish calendars are either exclusively solar or lunar. Solar calendars show a lack of understanding of original creation *יש מאין*, and therefore of the real concept of Chiddush. The Moslems with their lunar calendar are all innovation - turning everything into a miracle. The

Moslems therefore have no concept of a G-d whose laws govern an orderly world with consistent laws.

The Jews, however, understood that they could forever renew themselves, maintaining their faith through the darkest hours. Just as they appear to be waning like the moon, they renew themselves again. Was not the redemption of Israel just at that point not only of total slavery but also at a point where all of Egypt was dirtied by the idolatry of the Jews?

Rosh Chodesh is indeed very holy, but its Kedusha is hidden – it is not one of the festivals. In the Messianic Era its full Kedusha will be revealed. Then, when our recognition of ה'שם will always be new and fresh, we will always be in a state of renewal. Today, the Kedusha of Rosh Chodesh is recognizable mainly in the impact of Rosh Chodesh on other elements of time, the Chagim.

The innovation of Rosh Chodesh today is that, since it is not explicitly given to us as a חג by the Torah, it is a day of our initiating a relationship with the Almighty. The half-הלל we say becomes an act of our own spiritual creativity. Hallel is a form of Shira, and Shira is sung whenever we reach a level of recognition of G-d as if He is in front of us.

The full holiness of Rosh Chodesh had already been revealed once, when the Mitzvah was originally given, but we lost Rosh Chodesh as a Yom Tov with the sin of the Golden Calf. It will again be revealed during the Messianic Era. However, women were given Rosh Chodesh as their special day as a reward for not participating in that sin. At that time, holiness was also clouded over. Moshe Rabbeinu was thought to be dead. The calf was thought to be a holy receptacle to bring down holiness. The mob pressure was almost irresistible, and the whole thing seemed to have had the tacit consent of the holy Aharon. Jewish women were able to cut through all of this and see where holiness really lay. It is this capacity to relate to hidden קדושה even in the midst of this crisis that is exactly the quality needed to feel the Kedusha of the new moon when it seems to be completely dark. Indeed, women seem to tune into this cycle at a very deep level, as reflected in the female menstrual cycle. It is the power of renewal, the ability to begin a fresh cycle at the very point when things seem dark and hidden. Thus, a women's monthly cycle is symbolic of the ability of the Jewish nation to renew itself after its long exile.

It is not just that Klal Yisroel is compared to the waxing and waning of the moon, but that each waxing and waning is a part of a definite direction required for the completion of the purpose of the world. Women, it would seem, have a greater spiritual, intuitive grasp of this ultimate purpose.

בשלה

Yitzias Mitzraim

Although the Jewish people experienced many miracles, only those miracles centered around the Exodus became the source for a Chag. In fact, the Exodus is one of the great foundations of the Jewish faith. Many other Mitzvos, such as Shabbos and Sukkos, have as their reasoning, or part of it, the Exodus experience.

The rapid exit from Egypt was necessary to give the Jews the cleanest break from their current reality. The Jews were to become the eternal nation, and the Chipazon was as close to timelessness as they could come. Indeed, the Exodus became the spiritual model for all future spiritual undertakings, to begin with a leap. Yet, strangely, we celebrate the Exodus in just the opposite way – by spending as much time as possible around the Seder Table – כל המרבה לספר הרי זה משובח. For, after the original leap of faith, it is necessary to consolidate the holiness in a slow but sure manner.

This is what happened in the original Exodus as well. On the surface, Yetzias Mitzraim seemed like a sudden event: At midnight, the Egyptian firstborn sons started dying. By morning, two million Jews from all over a large country were on their way out. Those same Jews, some of them slaves and some of them free men (the Leviim), who had become totally part of the fabric of Egyptian society, instantly emerged a nation like a baby delivered from its mother. However, a deeper look will show that the Exodus was a 40-year process. It began with a jolt of אתערותא דלעילא – a pulling of a slave people out of the 40th level of Tumah by their bootstraps.

But, because this initial burst of holiness was all from G-d, the Jewish people had not integrated it. Indeed, whenever there is a gift from G-d, an אתערותא דלעילא, we may be saved from that particular challenge but there is no lasting impact on us. For example, if we have a great sensual urge G-d may save us from sinning in a particular situation, but we will not have resolved our control of the underlying urge. Only when we get to work on ourselves, אתערותא דלתתא, can we turn a one-time act into a long-term achievement.

In Egypt, we were so spiritually and culturally assimilated that we were no longer in a position to initiate, in a spiritual sense, our own Exodus (אתערותא דלתתא). Therefore, when G-d took us out of Egypt we still had much of Egypt inside of ourselves. We walked out of the country physically but carried much of its culture in our bones.

There is a Posuk in Tehilim that says that G-d took us out of the iron furnace, implying the huge heat that is required to separate gold, the form or essence of the matter, from the original gold ore. Another verse is understood by Chazal as saying that we were as connected to the Egyptians as a fetus is to the womb of its mother. The former is talking about the physical control the Egyptians exerted on us; the latter our cultural and spiritual integration into Egyptian society to the point where we had no independent identity.

Thus, although it was G-d who took us out of Egypt, the verse states that Pharaoh took us out: יג יי: ויהי בשלה פרעה את העם. The fact that he accompanied the Jewish People to see them off indicated that they, the Jewish people, still had some connection with him. Immediately after, we see how skin-deep the Bitachon of Am Yisrael was. G-d takes the Jews on a detour instead of the most direct route, which

would have pitted them against the Plishtim. For the Jews were in danger, with the slightest trouble, of turning around and going back to Egypt.

It would take the difficult conditions of the desert to challenge their slave past and nurture their growth towards full freedom. The desert has another advantage – it would keep the Jews utterly isolated, just them and their G-d. As ex-slaves, they had to now take control of their lives, learn strength of character, acquire sympathy for others and deepen their trust in HaSh-m.

The next leap in Klal Yisroel's transformation was Krias Yam Suf. The night was the redemption of the body, the day the redemption of the Nefesh. קריעת ים סוף was the גאולה שכלית. A huge nation of 600,000 males is suddenly terrified of the shattered remnants of the Egyptian army. They are ready to give up without raising a single hand in defense. But these were their former masters, and they were slaves, not fighters.

Things would go well for a short while, but at the next challenge the old slave psychology would set in: "In Egypt, at least we were secure. We knew that we would get a little food every day. We knew that we would eventually get to sleep with some roof over our heads. At least there we stood a chance of surviving." In fact, the Mechilta is of the opinion that food was not a problem at all in Egypt. It really was a pot of flesh.

The slightest thing could throw them off. One moment they were competing with each other to jump into the sea. The very next, a bit of mud causes an immediate regression. "The sea has mud just like Egypt. Let's go back."

The Mannah provides further lessons. The resulting total dependence in HaSh-m was vital to allow trust in G-d to build up. And once they trusted G-d to look after their physical lives, they would come to trust Him to be their doctor in their spiritual lives as well.

Food supplies are one problem. Water is more serious. Klal Yisroel first face a challenge of bitter waters and then a higher challenge of no water at all.

All of these desert experiences are graded challenges to purify Klal Yisroel, as rapidly as possible, in preparation for the Sinai experience. Just as the Jews had to leave Egypt physically, Egypt had to spiritually leave the soul of the Jew. The Zohar interprets the words וחמושים עלו בני ישראל (lit. *and they left Egypt armed*) as: And they left Egypt fifty times, i.e. once for each of the fifty levels of Egyptian impurity. Every day until the Torah was given at Sinai the Jews left another level of impurity, until finally, when they heard G-d begin the Ten Commandments with the words *I am the Lord, your G-d*, they completed this process. It was only then that the last connection with the Egyptians was cut off.

However, despite this fantastic leap into the highest levels of prophecy, despite witnessing the greatest Nisim of all time, Ibn Ezra is of the opinion that this generation would never fully get over their slave status. Their exalted spiritual level was not, could not be, fully integrated. It would take the next generation to go into Israel and take on the powerful Canaanim.

Krias Yam Suf

There were many great miracles (for example, the Mannah or the Clouds of Glory) for which there are no festivals. Yet, we dedicate a Yom Tov to Krias Yam Suf, the seventh day of Pesach, and we repeat “the Song of the Sea” every morning in our prayers. Clearly, something extraordinary, even by the criteria of miracles, happened at the Red Sea, something which led to Shira as it had not with all the plagues before.

The miracle at the Yam was performed with water. Water is that which gives life, and, when life is no longer justifiable, takes it away. Water represents a transition from the primordial waters at the beginning of creation into the holiness of life, as is done with the Mikveh and Noah’s ark. But those very same waters were the flood waters of destruction.

The uniqueness of Krias Yam Suf was that whereas the plagues had freed all the individual Jews, it was only at Krias Yam Suf that the Jews were freed as a nation. It is only here that the Chumash uses the term redemption of the Jews for the first time.

Until then, the Jews were still captives of the pervasive Egyptian civilization. They had become more like freed Egyptians, and when they actually left, they felt like expatriates, exiled from the world’s greatest civilization. They certainly recognized G-d’s Hashgacha, and they knew that they were Jews, but they somehow thought that now that the nightmare was over, life as Jews in Egypt could begin. They had no illusions - they knew that at any time they could be enslaved again at any future stage, and that, as in other historic times of Jewish emancipation, their rights might be given in fits and starts. But, they still thought that this was the best place to be.

The Egyptians who now pursued the Jews are mentioned in the singular. For, it was a unified nation of Egypt – a civilization - that came to return the Jews. At Krias Yam Suf the Jewish nation finished their romance with Egyptian culture for good. Now the national identity of the Jews, their readiness to be permeated by Jewish values (the Torah) was complete.

This also opened the Jews up to a much deeper experience of מעשה כולה ביד ד' without our involvement at all. When ד' says מה תצעק אלי He is saying, “Do not even think that your השתדלות of תפלה will help. This is totally up to Me.” תפלה would not help here because it was just not powerful enough to merit G-d overturning Midas HaDin with His Midas HaRachamim. What was needed was a higher level of Bitachon, one which was reflected in action, not in prayer. Hence G-d’s instructions to Moshe for the Jewish people – “Why are you crying out to me? Speak to the Jewish people and go forth.”

When Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped into the sea, it was not an act of Hishtadlus. Rather, it was an act of pure Bitachon. Normally, we do our Hishtadlus up to a certain point and then we hand ourselves over to G-d. “G-d, I have gone as far as I can go. It is now up to You!” But for Nachshon, there was nothing about his stepping into the water that was, from a natural point of view, going to help the process. The water may split at his toe, at his knee or his belly – it was all the same to Nachshon. The Jews had now reached a level of clarity of G-d’s involvement in man where they could point and see tangibly – זה קלי – this is my G-d.

Here was a nation so poor in faith that they could not be taken directly to Israel because they were likely to return to idolatry, a nation who, in fact, later

committed the sin of the Golden Calf; a vast nation who saw their old masters, the Egyptians, coming with but a remnant of their army and yet would be led meekly back to Egypt. This nation was to shoot to a level of absolute clarity of G-d and His Presence on earth at this one seminal event.

Whereas the plagues showed G-d's Hashgacha over the world, Bnei Yisrael now reached a kind of Messianic level, a גילוי יחודו, when they saw everything come together. The result was song. אז ישיר, then when it entered their hearts to sing, they sang a song that really lives in the future, the time of the resurrection of the dead.

The Jews sang because they reached a new level of clarity of G-d's Mastery of all, forever (יהי מלך לעלם ועד). Because they believed, they were able to sing. (לא) ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו: (א) אז ישיר. ואנוהו. ואשירה לה'. To Him alone, for there is none beside Him. ה' שמו: G-d's Name was shown to be so vastly dominant over every mighty earthly being, unifying as it does the seemingly contradictory facets of mercy and judgment all in one. נורא תהלות: To understand all of these, and to give expression to it all, is almost an impossible task.

The Jews now saw the harmony of the lower worlds with those more spiritual realms above (מכון לשבתך). The whole picture now came together. Their thanksgiving "were not merely for the miracles but for the trial, not merely for the salvation but for the suffering," for they now knew that these, too, were a part of the blessing.

Their song was sung together with all of creation in one large symphony – for it was now clear that all of creation is but a revelation of G-d. When Klal Yisrael see this, they too become a part of His revelation – G-d speaks through them as He does through the rest of creation. They open their mouths and become instruments of G-d's revelation.

We carry something of that song with us in all generations. אז ישיר (future tense – as they sang then, they will sing again and again) – the song that they spoke then caused them to continue uttering song in all the generations. We have a name for the Shabbos on which the Jews crossed the Red Sea: it is called Shabbos Shira.

יתרו

Yisro – Derech Eretz Kadmah LeTorah

Yisro was the first Ger. The Parsha that leads up to the giving of the Torah is therefore the Parsha of Geirim. In truth, all of the Jewish people underwent a process of conversion at Sinai. The males did Milah, while both males and females did Tevila and were Mekabel Ol Malchus Shamayim. We learn what the requirements of Geirus are from this mass Sinai conversion. Yisro, then, was the first to convert after Sinai. Some commentators hold that Yisro came to the Jewish people before Sinai, left, and returned after Sinai with his whole family to convert.

It seems strange that the portion of the week dedicated to the giving of the Ten Commandments is called after a non-Jew, Yisro. It may be that Yisro contributed a vital systemization of the Jewish legal system and that we Jews show by this that we are not ashamed to learn from anyone. But for this it would have been enough for Yisro to have been included in the Torah. That one of the most fundamental Parshios of the Torah bears his name is a mystery. In some way, the story of Yisro is a vital introduction to the giving of the Torah.

The Sages address this by saying that Derech Eretz Kadmah LeTorah. Yisro's gift to the Jewish people was this Derech Eretz. Derech Eretz can be widely described as common human decency, good character traits and anything which can be considered a natural or universal moral law. Sefas Emes defines it as the intellectual recognition of truth. This leads to an appreciation of all the good G-d does to all creatures in His world and the consequent gratitude and desire to serve Him. Let us see how this expresses itself through the story of Yisro.

Yisro was the world famous Kohen Midyan, the much-honored authority on idolatrous practices. Yisro had tried and rejected them all. Here was a giant of the spirit who, until recently, had put everything into idolatry and had had a close working relationship with the most evil of nations, Amalek. He had used his enormous human qualities to become totally corrupt and impure. Now he brought those same prodigious forces in service of G-d. His seven names, which indicated a complete range of aptitudes, abilities and character traits, were now all put under G-d's holy mantle.

Yisro, who had long suspected that the Jews were a special people, saw the miracles which G-d had wrought and was convinced. As clear as these miracles were, this was no easy step. Had not all the people of all the nations seen the same things as he saw and not come around? Most simply felt overwhelmed by the enormity of the changes involved, to give up house, career and society and jump into an alien universe. Yisro was condemned by the idolatrous priestly hierarchy – no one was allowed to use his services and no one was allowed to work for him. He was reduced to using his two daughters as shepherdesses. The extreme of this is Amalek, who felt an urgent need to get rid of the Jewish people lest they become a constant rebuke to the world. Yisro was the anti-Amalek, willing to give up everything he had to become a simple Jew, and a convert at that.

Yisro humbly sent a message to Moshe in the Ananei HaKavod that he had arrived to the barren desert spot where Am Yisroel were about to receive the Torah. It is not clear whether any of them knew that this man, Moshe's father-in-law, had saved Moshe's life with his quick-thinking advice to Pharaoh when Moshe was but a baby in the palace. In an act of enormous courage, he had taken Moshe in when he was wanted for murder by the most powerful nation in the world and married him off to

his daughter. A sixth sense told him that this man would be one day great and he would bask in the shadow of his glory.

And so, the greatest Jew and King of Israel goes out to meet Yisro, followed by the entire nation, and bows down to him. While the news of Yitzias Mitzraim made world headlines, Moshe is now Mekarev Yisro by telling him the inside story. Still, Yisro couldn't help identifying with the sorrow and suffering of that great, now destroyed, civilization of Egypt. Yisro had struggled with truth all his life, and now, when it stared him in the face, he needed to process it and integrate it. Despite his greatness, he had to struggle to integrate his new religion and to stare the evil of the Egyptians in the face as every simple Jew knew how to do.

According to one scenario, Yisro met Klal Yisrael at Sinai, paid tribute to G-d for all the kindness He had done for the Jewish people and then left before the Torah was given. Ostensibly, the reason was to go and get his family, but surely he could have waited for the grand event. It would seem that he was simply not ready. In fact, Yisro returned with his family after Sinai (who all converted to Judaism) and was again on the verge of returning to Midian once again if not for the imploring of his son-in-law, Moshe. Yisro thought that, as a convert, he would not get a portion of Israel, but Moshe told him that he was wrong. According to his own logic, Yisro was not willing to live in a city with the Leviim or in Yerushalayim. The same man who had risked his life for truth now felt that he was too old to live without the comforts of a plot of ground. He would rather be in his old and familiar environment, surrounded by his comforts (and by idolatry!), than make further sacrifices. "It is wonderful what you are doing," he encouraged his family. But he would sit out the most glorious chapter in Jewish history. He would make the most of the situation, he thought, by converting all the idol worshippers around him to Monotheism.

In this respect, Yisro can be contrasted to another great convert, Ruth. Like Ruth, he came from royalty – he a grand king, she the daughter of one. Both were willing to give this up. But here lies the difference. When Naomi tried to send Ruth back, she insisted on continuing on with her. She understood that her conversion could only fully express itself if she was to join the people in its land.

Yet, despite his deficiencies, Yisro made a major innovation in the Torah legal system, wiser even than Moshe Rabbeinu on this point, and having the very Parsha in which the Ten Commandments are contained named after him. This was the Derech Eretz Kadmah LeTorah.

Yisro saw a classic problem of great leadership: Between acting as judge of disputes, giving sagely advice and teaching Torah, Moshe Rabbeinu was so overwhelmed that the backlog and waiting lines had become a serious problem. Yisro told Moshe that he had to delegate the less-serious cases. A hierarchy of the courts was launched and no less than 78,600 new judges were installed overnight – quite a revolution.

Yisro is written for eternity in the Torah. He achieved, with his own mind, an innovation that was in total harmony with the Torah, and hence his contribution is recorded in the Torah in his name. He achieved this greatness over a long period of time and with great self-sacrifice. His was the last of the preparations for the giving of the Torah.

Later on in Jewish history when Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel had a Halachik dispute, a Heavenly Voice went forth to say that both views represented the words of the Living G-d (ie. the truth of Torah), but that the Halacha in practice is like Beis Hillel. The Talmud then asks why this is so if they both represent the words of the Living G-d. To which the Talmud answers that Beis Hillel was amiable and forgiving,

and always studied Beis Shammai's opinion carefully before formulating their own. In addition, they presented Beis Shammai's ideas before they presented their own. So we see that someone with better character is more in harmony with the truth than someone with lesser character – we see that the Derech Eretz of Yisro is actually woven into the very fabric of the Torah.

The Nation Witnessed the Revelation Themselves

Through the Sinai revelation, the Jewish nation has a claim to the truth of its Torah. The fact that the entire nation experienced all the Sinai events and all heard G-d speak to them, **פה אל פה**, is the bedrock of our knowledge that the Torah we have is indeed G-d given. The nation experienced the revelation in the light of day, in full control of their senses. No philosophical or scientific argument, however powerful, can stand up to this empirical proof.

Moshe himself had to reach the highest levels of prophecy so that the message he received would be crystal clear. The question is, how do we know that Moshe Rabbeinu had such a prophecy for us to rely on this? The answer is that, at Sinai, the entire nation experienced prophecy. Prophecy is the only reliable way to reveal G-d's wisdom accurately to man. National prophecy is the only reliable way of knowing that the prophecy indeed happened as claimed.

Already at the crossing of the Red Sea, the Jews achieved a level of prophecy greater than Yechezkel's. Now they went even higher than that. The Sages tell us that over 49 days the Jews left their 49 levels of impurity, one a day. Each time they left a level of impurity they entered a new level of purity.

Had the nation relied on Moshe's prophecy for the revelation, this might have been challenged at some future time by another "prophet". While it is true that the Jewish Nation did not receive the whole Torah at the Sinai revelation, receiving some of it through Moshe, the revelation was also proof for them that the prophecy of Moshe was also authentic. Since the whole nation heard G-d speak to Moshe Rabbeinu they were able to authenticate his prophecy for the future as well. This was necessary because the Jews only heard the Ten Commandments from G-d and not the whole Torah. The Ten Commandments were a highly contracted form of the Torah, containing within them all the 613 commandments. Therefore, when the Jews heard G-d speak it was as if they had heard the entire Torah.

But, in order to verify that the Torah is G-d-given, we must first be absolutely clear that G-d alone created and maintains and guides the world. All of this was achieved by the plagues and the subsequent Exodus, i.e. by the miracles which preceded the revelation. The Exodus was not just a physical prerequisite for Sinai; it was part and parcel of the revelation package. Just before G-d gives the Luchos, He reminds the Jewish People of all the proofs of His intimate involvement with man, as witnessed by them personally in the events of Yetzias Mitzrayim. He reminds them of the special care for them, as the future Torah nation, which this involved. G-d has no intention of repeating miracles on the scale of the Egyptian experience for every person who comes along to doubt the process. Therefore, remembering for ourselves and for all future generations is essential.

The **תורה** makes an exact accounting of how many Jews witnessed these events, and then introduces mechanisms to ensure that all of them (i.e. the whole nation) will pass on their testimony to future generations. We are all commanded to be exceedingly careful not to forget that which we saw, nor to forget the crystal clear intellectual clarity with which we understood all of these events. The **תורה** introduces many **מצוות** which are **זכר ליציאת מצרים** or which include mention of that experience (e.g. Tefilin, Mezuzah, Kiddush). We are told to remember **יציאת מצרים** twice daily. As the Ramban puts it, someone who buys a Mezuzah for one Zuz gains entry into this entire tradition. He has, by so doing, confirmed his belief in the existence of G-d and His Providence, in prophecy and the truth of the Torah, as well as the kindness

which G-d does to those who listen to His Will. He will become a 'G-d-aware' person.

Both the Chagim and the Shabbos require us to remember Sinai as well. Through this, it is the whole nation, and not just one group, who are charged with keeping this historical reality alive and accurate. Parents are charged with communicating this information to the people for whom they care the most, their children, further ensuring that distortions do not enter.

Therefore, there is an empirical basis to our belief in the Torah. We therefore do not consider G-d's creation of the world as the basis of our faith, for there was no one alive to witness those events. Rather, the Sinai experience is the source of our Torah belief.

But what if, in fact, the Sinai event had never taken place? What if we are carefully and diligently perpetuating a rumor? To this the Kuzari responds that a mass rumor involving the whole nation cannot be fabricated. At whatever point it had been fabricated, it would surely be denied by certain elements of population and it would have taken on different forms. If the attempt to introduce such a rumor had taken place at a later a stage, those who had not been told of such an event from their parents would surely have rejected it. Indeed all false rumors – UFOs and the like – are always 'seen' by solitary figures in isolated places. For no rumor of this sort could ever take place in a population where there ought to have been many witnesses. No other religion has ever made such a claim, nor could they. For such a thing cannot be invented. As the verse testifies:

ספר דברים ד (לב) כי שאל נא לימים ראשנים אשר היו לפניך למן היום אשר ברא אלהים אדם על הארץ ולמקצה השמים ועד קצה השמים הנהיה כדבר הגדול הזה או הנשמע כמהו : (לג) השמע עם קול אלהים מדבר מתוך האש כאשר שמעת אתה ויחי

Ma'amad Har Sinai –Unity and Awe

The Jews arrived at Maamad Har Sinai in the third month – בחודש השלישי – i.e. in Sivan. The “third month” means the third in a series of critical dates in the history of the world. The first was at creation; the second the Exodus – at which point it says החודש הזה לכם, the power of Klal Yisrael to imitate G-d in being creative – כח החידוש. And the third was now, the receiving of the Torah, an act which was to complete the world under very exacting conditions of time and place. Every time we read the Parsha of the giving of the Torah we re-arouse into time itself the potential to receive the Torah anew.

Sinai comprised the giving of the Ten Commandments, but it was also a covenant between G-d and the Jewish people. Hence, the tablets are called לוחות הברית – tablets of the covenant. A covenant means a connection between two parties, a connection of unique and exclusive depth. This covenant required two components, unity and awe.

The Jews could not simply walk up to Mt. Sinai and receive the Torah. They required considerable preparation. Indeed, this preparation had begun from the Avos. The Avos themselves could not be given the Torah because they were solitary individuals, and the Torah could only be given to the collective Neshama of the Jewish people. The Torah forms one total spiritual reality comprised of its letter. Each one of the letters of the Torah relate to each one of the Neshamos of the Jews.

It was therefore a pre-condition of the Sinai experience that the nation be totally united to form this larger Neshama. The entire thing became the responsibility for all of the Torah, some through their own fulfillment and some through the fulfillment of others (כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה).

The second covenant-requirement was awe of G-d. G-d now gives the Jewish People a deeper understanding of what it means to be the Chosen, Torah-bearing Nation. You will be a holy, protected people, but only if you keep My covenant. You are chosen not for privileges but for responsibilities, and you are going to be held accountable for those responsibilities. You will be an עם סגולה, a nation that does not operate according to the normal sociological rules of history. You will be a ממלכת כהנים, priests to the nations of the world but also princes over yourselves.

A person who rules over himself is completely integrated; all his potential (desires, thoughts and actions) unite in a common goal. Just as a nation we are to be united, so we are to be united within ourselves. This internal unity allows one to connect, in turn, with others sharing his goal, creating ever-widening circles of oneness.

You are to be a גוי קדוש - not only staying away from evil, but doing positive good, promoting holiness in this world. The responsibility – and the consequences – are terrifying for the Jewish people.

This is an awesome, frightening challenge, and the Jewish people are terrified: terrified by the responsibility and by the unfolding of the events before them. Things were to get more frightening still. By holding the mountain over their heads, G-d showed the people that without fulfilling the moral purpose of the world there is no purpose to their existence. The natural consequences of non-acceptance was destruction of the world.

The Torah now describes the convulsions of nature, the Kolos and Brakim. This was nature's way of showing that it, too, was included in the Torah. The sensory input was so extreme that the nation begins to hear visions and see sounds.

All this awe at a time of the Jews' loving acceptance seems strange. Had not the Jews responded with *נעשה ונשמע*, an unconditional acceptance of the Torah?

Yet, the baseline of our Torah commitment cannot be sustained by love alone. When the chips are down, Yirah is a much clearer basis for acceptance. Love can lead to a certain lightness with respect to obeying G-d's Will: 'G-d will forgive me and overlook my faults – He loves me!' Hence, G-d gives the Torah with an element of both love and fear: *כה תאמר לבית יעקוב* – the softness of love; *ותגיד לבית ישראל* – the toughness of fear.

First we must be G-d's servants and then we can be His children: We start with the awe of realizing that He is the Creator and the Master of all the universes; nothing can exist without His sustaining them. We therefore owe G-d our allegiance, for it is futile to rebel against Him.

We accept G-d's ruling over us as humble and obedient servants, ready to do whatever He asks of us. Since we realize that He is watching our every move, we serve Him with constant awe and trepidation as one would if standing before a King. Sinai entered this idea so deep into our hearts that even simple Jews have found it within themselves to give their lives rather than surrender their beliefs. Love is something which can build on this service of awe, but while love alone does constitute "serving" G-d, it does not comprise the acceptance of the Yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and it was just this Yoke which led to the unique holiness of the Jewish people. It is clear that the awe we are talking about is not simply the fear of sin and its consequences, what the Tanya calls the lower fear. Rather, we are talking of something much more exalted, rooted in a recognition of the greatness of G-d, as we described above.

Just as love of a husband to a wife which is not based on a foundation of respect and trust will not last, so too our love of G-d, if it is not based on the awesome realization of who G-d is, will be like a bird without one of its wings. A human being needs a wing of love and a wing of awe to soar to spiritual heights.

The Jews are now ready for their Torah. The preparations were such that the effect of the actual commandments on them caused the Jewish People to literally become the embodiment of the commands – they and the commandments literally became one. 'Do not kill', 'do not steal' were so integrated by the nation that every fiber of their body, every feeling in their heart and every thought in their head contradicted any possibility of them committing an act of murder or theft, or anything which even vaguely related to these prohibitions. This is what Rabbi Akiva meant when he said that the Jews answered "yes" to all the commandments, even the negative ones. This does not refer to their verbal response but to the total harmony they had with the commands – their whole essence was "don't steal" and "don't kill".

This also explains how G-d could have commanded us 'not to covet', not to have desire. For how can someone control such a thing? But, since the Jewish people reached a level where they became the living embodiment of the command, they were not so much commanded as they were given in their hearts and minds the absolute clarity that something which belongs to someone else has absolutely no connection with them at all.

Further, this idea explains the statement of the Sages which says *Zachor VeShamor Bedibur Echad*. For a Jew who lives Shabbos – who is the embodiment of

זכור – such a Jew will want to guard and keep his precious Shabbos. The Shamor will emerge naturally out of the Zachor.

Bringing the Torah From Heaven to Earth

G-d created the world for a purpose, and that purpose was contained in the Torah. The Ten Sayings of Creation were but the outer physical body for the Ten Commandments, which was the inner spiritual content. Without this inner content the world would have remained a formless mass, as it was at the beginning of creation. This is also how a child is created – in the beginning he is totally egocentric and self-absorbed – all Yetzer Hara. Only later does he develop a spiritual and moral sense.

The Torah is the mechanism by which the spiritual life-blood, whose roots come from G-d, can be clothed by the physical world, giving the latter holy potential and purpose. Without the Torah, the spiritual and the physical realms would be totally separate and there would be no way of cleaving to G-d in this world. The Jews got a taste of this separateness when, upon hearing the Ten Commandments, their souls leapt out of their bodies. The experience of standing at Sinai was so spiritually intense that their physical bodies could no longer contain their soaring souls. But, after the Torah was given, a mechanism was now provided where the body could soar with the soul and the two were united once again. Hence, on the day that we celebrate the giving of the Torah we are required to engage in foods which are physically satisfying (בעצרת הכל מודים דבעינן לכם) in recognition of the purifying effects of the Torah.

This Torah was not given in one fell swoop. In its original form, it was the blueprint from which the world was made. At another level, this Torah relates to the world of the Malachim. In fact, those same Malachim could not understand how this Torah could go any further. The Torah had to be brought down many levels before it finally entered into the world of man and was comprehensible by him. Once it was, man was able to grasp all aspects of the Torah, though not all of its depth.

The Torah was first shown by G-d to Moshe, 'written in black fire over white fire.' From that Torah, Moshe Rabbeinu made a copy on parchment. He also heard by ear, directly from G-d, all the words which he was transcribing. Moshe Rabbeinu wrote in the 3rd person, for, since the Torah preceded the creation of the world, Moshe was like a scribe copying from an original book. This was the first Torah scroll. It is not clear whether this scroll was written over 40 years or in one shot at the end of the 40-year period.

Moshe Rabbeinu further transcribed twelve scrolls of the Torah, of which he gave one Sefer Torah to each tribe. All subsequent Torah scrolls were transcribed from these scrolls in turn.

The **דבר די** is the **לבוש גשמי** of the **שמים** in **תורה**. The **אותיות** are to the **נפש** what the **גוף** is to the **נפש**. Those same **אותיות** translate, at a lower level, into the actual physical world (**בדבר די שמים נעשו**). Because the source of the Written Torah is the **דבר די**, the **כתב** has **חיות** (**המכתב מכתב אלוקים**).

The **לוחות** are one of the things that were created **בין השמשות**, essentially after the 6 days of creation. Therefore, they are not a special creation but rather represent the **סיום הבריאה**. All the **בריאה**, in a sense, is reconstituted in the **לוחות**.

The Ten Commandments were given, at first, in the sound of the Kol Shofar. This was G-d's Shofar, and it represented the words of the Torah before they had been divided into their individual letter sounds. G-d then brought the Torah further into the world by speaking all of the Ten Commandments at once. This was still impossible for us to understand, but it made an impression on the highest level of our souls, which allows us to connect to the Torah at a very deep level - a Torah for the souls. It had to be that the Torah was first heard as one utterance around the world. For the

Torah, being that it is Chochma Elyona, could not be contained by any one place in particular.

G-d now spoke directly to the Jewish people. According to the Rambam, G-d spoke only the first two of the Ten Commandments to the Jews, and the Jews did not understand even these two. However, according to the Ramban and most other commentators, G-d first spoke all Ten Commandments to the Jewish people in one shot, but the Jewish people were not able to understand a word. Nevertheless, the Jewish people gained a sense of the totality, the harmony and the unity of the Torah and all its Mitzvos. He then repeated the first two commandments, one after the other, for these are the two fundamentals on which all the other Mitzvos stand - and these the Jews did understand. Hence these, and only these, are written in the first person addressing the second person – על פני, אשר הוצאתיך, etc.

The voice that the Jews heard when G-d spoke the first two commandments came from G-d's essential Unity. This was the first time that the Jewish People could comprehend the content of the Torah. Still, the experience was too intense for the Jewish people. For, so attracting was G-d's Dibur to the Neshamos of Klal Yisroel that they flew out of their bodies towards it. G-d had to revive the nation, who now asked that Moshe tell them the rest of the commandments.

The Maharal explains that the first two commandments had to be said by G-d Himself because they involved the communal acceptance of G-d's Yoke. Perforce, Moshe Rabbeinu had to be identified with Klal Yisrael in order to be included in the commandment.

These Ten Commandments are then brought down on two tablets of stone. These stones were carved and written by G-d. Therein lay their greatness – too great, in fact, for this world. The first of the tablets were more worthy of angels than of man, and this contributed to their being broken. The Torah had to undergo a process of coming into this world in this aspect as well. The second tablets were written by Moshe Rabbeinu – a human endeavor – and therefore more worthy of relating to the spiritual realities of this world. Hence the words כי טוב are said in reference to the second and not the first tablets.

The Ten Commandments were a highly contracted form of the Torah, containing within them all the 613 commandments. Therefore, when the Jews heard G-d speak, it was as if they had heard the entire Torah (see the essay *The Entire Nation Witnessed the Revelation* in this Parsha). Since they were already at such a high level, they were able to understand from these Ten Commandments all the other 613 Commandments. Similarly the written words of the Ten Commandments were able to hold, in a contracted form, all of the Torah. Throughout the 40 years in the desert thereafter, the Jews were then to hear the unfolding of the Torah that they had already heard at Sinai in detail.

Ten Commandments (The Decalogue)

The literal translation of Aseres HaDibros is the Ten Sayings, in which at least 14 commandments are contained. Although spoken to the Jewish people, there is a universal element about the Ten Commandments, and it has formed the basis of Western moral codes ever since. It was therefore proclaimed in all seventy languages and in desert territory belonging to no specific people.

Initially, when the non-Jews heard the commandments, they rejected them as sectarian, suspecting that the Sinaitic voice was an angel or a spiritual force belonging to the Jewish people and meant to please a local G-d. But when they heard the fifth through the tenth commandments, which are universalistic values, they recognized all the commands as true and just. Even Eisav, whose blessing is to live by sword, recognizes that killing is wrong.

As individual Mitzvos, the Ten Commandments are not holier or more important than any other commandment in the Torah. To avoid this mistake, the Ten Commandments were not included in the morning prayers. However, the Ten Commandments are really ten broad categories, containing the essence of the Torah and under which all the 613 Mitzvos can be subsumed. Therefore, they contain the essence of the whole Torah and serve as an introduction to the Torah. They complete the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people.

Therefore, when the Jews heard these commandments it was as if they had heard the entire Torah. Since they were already at such a high level, they were able to understand from these Ten Commandments all the other 613 Commandments.

These commandments were then written on two tablets of stone. The לוחות are one of the things that were created בן השמשות on the 6th day, representing a completion of all of creation. Even though these tablets were square, we usually represent them as heart shaped. This is because they were not there just to hold the words of the Ten Commandments but rather to reflect our entire relationship with the Torah – that it should go deep into our hearts.

The first five commandments start with man's thoughts and move to his actions, whereas the second five move in the opposite direction, from man's actions to his thoughts. "This expresses the important idea: All religion and so-called 'honoring G-d in spirit' is worthless if the thought, the idea of G-d [does not express itself in actions]. ... And on the other hand all social virtue is worthless and crumbles at the first test, as long as it only aims at ... outward correctness, ... but refuses inner loyalty [to G-d]."

The Ten Commandments were given on two separate, square tablets. The first five represent laws between man and G-d whereas the second five represent laws between man and his fellow man. Both are essential to achieve spiritual completion. The first five commandments reflect the covenant from G-d's side, whereas the second five reflect the covenant from man's side.

The first two commandments deal with the acceptance of G-d's Yoke, and are therefore spoken by G-d Himself. Hence these, and only these, are written in the first person addressing the second person – אנכי, אשר הוצאתיך, על פני – etc.

The first command uses the Name יה to ensure that we understand that the same G-d who took us out of Egypt is intimately involved with our lives, not only at a national level, but also with each and every life. So too, all the commandments are in the singular. The First Commandment is not a commandment at all, according to some. It is rather the underlying premise of belief in G-d on which all the rest of the Torah is predicated.

The first two commandments appear to be in the reverse order. G-d first tells the Jews to believe in Him and only then tells them to get rid of their idolatry. Should He not have told them to first deal with their idolatry, to get rid of all the negativity before turning to serve G-d in purity? However, if that had been the order, some would have been too daunted by the challenge of doing Teshuvah. So G-d allowed us to focus first on positive Mitzvos, on establishing a relationship with Him, and only then to get rid of our negativity.

The Fifth Commandment, to honor one's parents, appears in the first set of tablets, because if we remember our debt of gratitude for all the kindness they have done for us we will also come to honor G-d for all that He does for us.

Using a Beis Din

G-d wanted to have a dwelling place in the world down here. All the Parshios of Shemos deal with this. First, the Jews became the Chosen nation, ready to carry G-d's holiness; then the Exodus revealed His glory. Subsequently, G-d brought down His Torah at Maamad Har Sinai. The Parsha of Mishpatim is a continuation of this – they too reflect G-d's purpose of bringing His presence into the world.

As the only nation committed to keeping the Torah, the Jews are essential to the fulfillment of the purpose of the world. Without them, the world, devoid of meaning, would self-destruct. Because the Jews are an essential and not just an optional component of the world, they have a particular resonance with Divine Law, or Mishpat. For Divine Law reflects nothing other than the moral and spiritual principles that are themselves essential. Unlike acts of kindness, where the gap between our actions and G-d's ultimate kindness will always stick out, the Mishpat that we implement is none other than the earthly manifestation of the Divine Will.

Our Parsha begins with the words:

ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם

These are the laws which you should place in front of them, (i.e. the Jewish judges.)

This comes to prohibit a Jew from taking another Jew to the secular justice system instead of the Beis Din, even if the state and Jewish laws parallel each other on this issue. The deeper reason for this is that when a Torah judge sits in judgment, the Holy One, blessed be He, leaves the higher-most heavens and causes His Shechinah to rest at the judge's side. As Dovid HaMelech said in Tehilim:

אלהים נצב בעדת א-ל בקרב אלהים ישפוט (תהלים פב א)

G-d stands in the congregation of G-d; He judges among the judges.

So, when someone chooses to abandon this, he is, in reality, choosing to leave not only the Dayanim but also G-d who stands at their side. This is tantamount to a Desecration of His Name.

The judges are called by the name אלהים, which is really a name used for G-d. This alludes to G-d's presence that is with them, protecting them from error and guiding them in their judgment. They are dispensing G-d's Will; one who follows them is following the will of G-d. There can be no greater privilege than that!

Since this judge has produced something which is considered a part of the Torah and the Torah is the blueprint for the world, he has effectively partaken in an act of creation and thereby becomes a partner with G-d in the creation. The difference between this and the justice in the civil system is therefore not just one of what kind of law is being dispensed. The difference is whether what is being dispensed is the Holy Will of G-d or the logic of earthly man. Hence, even if the civil court has the same law one should not use them.

Consider the case of Eidim Zomemim: the law is that when the witnesses have given their testimony and the judgment was carried out before the witnesses were perjured, then the witnesses suffer no consequences. This is because G-d is with the judges in all their judgments, and if He allowed the sentence to be implemented it must be that the person truly deserved his punishment.

Not only are the judges Divinely assisted, but the justice they dispense with is also Divine in its origin. The Torah comes to stress both judges and justice in the same verse – ואלה המשפטים – justice; אשר תשים לפניהם – judges. In fact, issues of the judicial system preceded Sinai with Yisro giving his advice to Moshe. And now, immediately after Sinai, we again have a Parsha of justice – a further extension of Sinai – ואלה – and these. In fact, Dovid HeMelech compares the holiness of the Mishpatim with the holiness of the Ten Commandments by saying:

מגיד דבריו ליעקוב חוקיו ומשפטיו לישראל

דבריו, says the Midrash, refers to the Ten Commandments, while חוקיו ומשפטיו refers to the Mishpatim. At the end of Parshas Mishpatim, the Torah returns to the events of Maamad Har Sinai. This places Mishpatim in the middle of two sections dealing with the giving of the Torah. This is because Mishpatim is really a continuation of the Ten Commandments.

The original courts comprised of judges who had Semicha (ordination). Moshe Rabbeinu gave Semicha to Yehoshua and the 70 Elders, who in turn ordained the next generation. Semichah could be granted only by a Sage who could trace the origin of his own Semichah back in an unbroken chain, from disciple to teacher, to Moshe Rabbeinu himself. After the Jews entered the land, the process could only take place in Israel.

However, the Romans disrupted this process by declaring a death sentence on anyone granting Semichah as well as for all the residents of the city where the Semichah was given.

To overcome this, R' Yehudah ben Bava went and placed himself between two great cities and between two Shabbos boundaries so that, if he were caught, no inhabited place would be destroyed. There he granted Semichah to five elders: R' Meir, R' Yehudah, R' Shimon, R' Yosei, and R' Elazar ben Shamua. R' Yehuda was caught and killed, but the newly appointed rabbis managed to escape. However, the Roman occupation was long and hard, and Semichah eventually came to an end. Just before it did, Hillel II and his Beis Din calculated all the future new moons and consecrated, in advance, all future months in accordance with these calculations

The Semicha we have today is a declaration by a contemporary Sage that someone is fitting to be a rabbi, but it is not the real Semicha. In addition, the last Rabbis who had Semicha appointed all future Talmidei Chachamim as their delegated appointees (Shlichim) with legal powers to enact certain things. However, things which were unusual, or were not of a monetary payment for a loan or the direct damages caused, were not included in this appointment.

According to some opinions, since there is no longer Semicha, the commandment of setting up courts of law is no longer a Torah one. However, there is certainly a Rabbinic decree to this effect. There should be at least one Beis Din in every major city.

Torah Civil Law – The Limits of Man’s Genius

Mishpatim deals with the kinds of things which every civil code has to deal with – damages, damage or missing borrowed goods and custodianship, theft and armed robbery. In a Parsha which has a whopping 53 Mitzvos, there are laws relating to the duties of husbands to wives, recourse in cases of seduction, and protection of the underprivileged (slaves, converts, widows and orphans). There are laws governing our relationship with the anti-monotheist and with foreign elements of the population.

The Torah begins our Parsha with the words **וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים**, and these are the laws, etc. The ‘*and*’ comes to tell us that these laws are as much a part of the Sinai revelation as the Ten Commandments. For Judaism, both are equally as holy. There is no separation of the world into the religious and the profane. A person is as profoundly spiritual when he observes the laws of damages as he is when he keeps the Shabbos. And a person who violates the laws of lending is committing an act as contrary to the substance and spirit of Judaism as if he would eat non-kosher food. G-d mandated the one just as He mandated the other.

Similarly, Pirkei Avos begins with the words *Moshe Received the Torah from Sinai*. Since Avos deals with character development, we might have thought that these things are just the product of man’s mind, a type of advanced humanism. To counter this, Avos tells us that these things are equally from the holy revelation of Sinai.

Yet, this is not to say that the Torah did not encourage man to use his mind. On the contrary, we learn that something which is perfectly logical, with no alternative logical argument to oppose it, is considered to have the status of **תורה** law: **למה לי קרא סברא הוא**. If one is expert in the practical knowledge of a Halacha but is unaware of its logical basis, he cannot say that he lacks part of it; he lacks it completely, because the essence is in the Sevara.

But here lies a great danger: that man will attempt to play G-d, to feel that his brilliance is just as capable of producing such a civil code. Indeed, the common law tradition of the Western legal codes, beginning with Roman law, show great depth and sophistication. It is great testimony to man that he can understand things to this degree – and it is just for this reason that he must know that his very ability to understand is but a G-d-given gift. Once this is clear, once man accepts the limitations of his own reason, he will truly merit to understand much of the reasoning behind the Torah. This is the secret of **נעשה ונשמע** .

And so **וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים** – *and these*: these laws are but a continuation of the Sinai revelation, just as G-d-given and holy as the rest. Even were you to find exactly the same laws in a secular court of law, you may not use it – for the Torah law is rooted in holiness while the laws of the land are rooted in the arrogance of man.

For the Torah, logic has its place. But logic is superceded by the received wisdom or by prophecy. Prophecy (the wisdom of the Torah) is above logic, for logic, subject to human limitation, can always be wrong. Two thousand years of philosophical speculation is testimony to how wrong man’s mind can be. Do we not see a long history of great philosophers, all arguing with each other, each using his best logic? This applies to the interpretation of verses as well. We interpret a verse according to the received wisdom even where the verse also lends itself to other interpretations and even where these other interpretations seem to be more logical or to make more sense to us.

The moment man remembers all of this, and becomes humble, he is ready for true greatness. Now, the Torah can recognize the logic of man and grant anything

which is pure and unchallenged human logic as the status of Torah Law. And even where the Torah has told us what to do, where there are arguments both in favor and against deciding a certain way, it is the mind of the Sage which must be the final arbiter. However, this logic can only be considered correct if it combines all the other attributes of mind and חז"ל of מדות. For without that, we cannot be sure that a person's biases will not distort his logic. Human logic must then be laboriously harmonized with Torah-logic. For Torah logic is heavenly logic, and speaks with its own melody. All of this is in the message of the first verse of Parshas Mishpatim.

At the end of our Parsha we learn that the Sanhedrin should be located next to the altar, i.e. on the Temple grounds. This is to emphasize that both laws and the altar come from the same source: Follow these laws and you will have much more than a civil code – these laws will become an integral part of your holiness as surely as offering a sacrifice on the holy altar.

Eved Ivri & The Disadvantaged

It is a significant expression of Judaism's concerns for all men that the first issue which Mishpatim deals with is Eved Ivri. In fact, this law is but an embellishment of the first of the Ten Commandments which says that G-d brought us out of Egypt to be His servants and not the servants of servants. The Parsha therefore comes to limit the rights of one Jew to control another and to teach that the lowliest of people is an equal child of G-d in front of the law.

An understanding of the status of other potentially oppressed people will give us an insight into the general sensitivity Judaism has towards all of its citizens. Take the convert: Although he is now 100% Jewish and is included in the Mitzvos of *וואהבת לרעך כמוך* and of *לא תונו*, nevertheless, the Torah repeated these prohibitions with specific reference to a Ger. For, there may yet be attitudinal biases on our part! Having come from such lowly beginnings ourselves – *כי גרים הייתם* – there is certainly no room for condescension on our parts.

This special sensitivity to the Ger is intended as a generalization for all who find themselves strangers, such as those who move to a new city.

The Ger Toshav is in an even more precarious position than the convert. Yet, not only were these Noachide-observant non-Jews allowed to settle in Israel, but we have had to ensure that each one made a living in his area of professional competence. These non-Jews were given a high degree of autonomy, allowed to create their own cities and provide for their own Noachide legal system. Every Ger Toshav was to benefit from free medical treatment and have full access to his charitable needs. This is remarkable! Every recorded nation that has discriminated against another has maximized the discrimination when on its home territory. We, the Jewish nation, in contrast, actually increase our obligations when we are in control!

The source of many of the laws relating to non-Jews living in Israel is a non-Jewish slave who flees from his master to Israel. Here is an illegal alien, breaking the law of another country by fleeing, and yet the Torah requires that we settle him, as a free man, in one of our central cities, where he can make a living and feel secure. There are similar sensitivities concerning the Jew who was sent to the Ir Miklat. Such a person is an erroneous but careless murderer. Through the Goel HaDam, he has a death sentence hanging on him. Yet, he is provided with a living consistent with his qualifications, and gets to be exiled into the most noble of cities, those of the Levites.

So, it is not surprising that, when we look at the laws of Eved Ivri, we see something so vast in its demands and so radical in its outlook that no comparable code has ever come close to it.

Judaism bans slavery per say, and there can be no purchasing of a Hebrew slave from another person. In fact, such a person is always called first and foremost a Jew. His Avdus is but a temporary external expression of his need to correct a certain weakness, rooted in his indigence, but in no way affects his essential identity. The master purchases the right to his labor and not the right to his body.

This is why an Eved Ivri goes free in a Shmittah year. If, for a time, he has fallen fowl to the six extreme points of fragmentation, he ultimately shows that his spiritual essence is in harmony with the central, spiritual unifying point of the seven.

The Eved Ivri, having stolen, is now placed with a family, the most nurturing of environments. As with Ir Miklat, the emphasis is on rehabilitation. Judaism knows nothing of imprisonment for the sake of punishment – it simply doesn't work to place criminals together for extended periods of time. Eved Ivri and Ir Miklat provide

models of being placed in an environment designed to maximize the transgressor's exposure to the best models society has to offer, the Levites and the family structure, in order to maximize the chance that the person will re-enter society fully reformed. There is but one other case of imprisonment in Judaism - the case of a pre-trial arrest to ensure that an accused murderer does not escape before being brought to trial, and that, too, has nothing to do with punishment.

The Eved's entire family, wife and children have to be looked after by the Adon. There are clearly many instances where the Eved Ivri has a large family and where we can imagine that the cost to the Adon is going to be much greater than the financial benefit produced by the Eved. But, the Torah takes care that neither he, nor his family, is left in a state of permanent distress as a result of his crime.

The needs of the Eved precede those of the master. Sefer HaChinuch goes so far as to say that the whole purpose of this Mitzvah is to teach the master to be merciful to those who are in his care rather than to reform the Eved! *A man who has acquired a slave has acquired a master for himself*, is the comment of the Sages.

At the end of this period, a maximum of six years, the Eved has to face the real world again. He had been with a normal family long enough to have been fully rehabilitated. What happens if he is not ready? What happens if he is in danger of repeating the whole vicious cycle all over again? The law allows the Eved to request, in front of a court of law, to remain in his current situation until the next Yovel, a maximum of 49 years. The Beis Din has to try and dissuade him, and he has to subject himself to the demeaning act of having his ear pierced: You who heard G-d say at Sinai, be only a servant to Me and not to your fellow man; you have chosen servitude to man instead of to G-d!

All this is nothing but inspiring. More difficult is the fact that the Torah allows a father to 'sell' his under-age daughter until she is 12 years old. It should be clear that a father is allowed not allowed to "sell" his daughter's body, for we have already explained that such a concept does not exist by the Hebrew slave. Rather, he is allowed to commit the labor of his daughter. Still, the Torah makes it clear that it disapproves of such an action. Furthermore, she has to be sold into a situation where the master is supposed to marry her at the end of his tenure. Failing that, he has to marry her off to his son, and it is considered an act of betrayal if neither one marries her. The money exchanged between father and future husband already acts for what now just needs to be consummated, thereby securing the future of a girl whose prospects would otherwise be quite dim, a scenario of desperation so often repeated in Jewish history that it is only our smugness that creates some discomfort of a solution both radical and effective. While the Torah does not force the master to do this, for such a relationship would have a poor prognosis, a master who reneges on this is not only not doing his duty, but is required to help the girl financially by assigning an unrealistically low financial value to her remaining years. He is certainly not supposed to wait the full six year of tenure no matter how well things are working out.

We have seen the amazing rehabilitation process which Eved Ivri involves. In truth, it is extremely difficult to achieve a situation of Eved Ivri, as the crime has to be theft and the amount stolen has to be exactly the same as the market value for acquiring the Eved. In addition, an Eved Ivri has to be entirely indigent. Perhaps, after all we have said, the question should be on why the Torah didn't make this more easily available to far more people.

To Heal and Save Life

Judaism has an extraordinary commitment to maintain human life and health. The human body is the vehicle through which all our spirituality is to be expressed. In fact, the shape of the body, although filled out by the physical, is actually a reflection of our spirituality. For example, the seat of our intellect is on top, our emotions are below that, and the seat of our most sensual urges are below that in turn.

Since the body is a part of our efforts for acquiring closeness to G-d, it is also a part of the reward in the World to Come. In fact, without the body, the Neshama would be very different as well – a complete taker of HaShem's goodness with all the shame that that implies. However, after being placed in the body, it can now become an active force for good, a partner with G-d in bringing the world to completion.

After the sin of the first man, the Neshama was no longer powerful enough to purify the body as much as the body needed. This, in turn, prevented the Neshama from fully expressing itself. Death was now necessitated to purify the body, until *תחיית המתים* when the two will be recombined. However, until death a person can continue to grow in this world in ways that are not possible otherwise. Only in this world can a person engage in revolutionary growth, changing through his own choices, his commitment or even his whole direction. Life in this world is therefore a precious commodity, and saving a life overrides all other commandments (except for the big three transgressions).

Herein lies the deeper understanding of the Jewish approach to saving a life. Technically, we learn this obligation either from the verse *לא תעמוד על דם רעך* – *Do not stand (idly by) over (the spilling of) the blood of your neighbor*, or as an extension of the obligation of returning a lost object - *השבת אבדה* – i.e. one should return his body when it is in danger of being lost.

In most of the United States, there is no obligation to help someone in danger. Those few states that have a "Good Samaritan" law, which would require bystanders to provide help to victims of crimes and accidents, do not enforce it.

Jewish law does not allow one to sacrifice his life to save the life of another. Thus Rabbi Akiva tells us that if two people are traveling in the desert and only one of them has sufficient water to survive, he should drink the water and see his friend die rather than divide it and have both die. For "your life comes first". However, there is some debate if there is an obligation to save lives when it will endanger the bystander, such as when a donor would give up a kidney to a dying patient. Some say that although it is not obligatory to take such a risk, one may choose to do so. If sharks are attacking one's neighbor, he cannot throw himself to the sharks so that they will be distracted and attack him instead if it is certain that he will lose his life thereby. Ultimately, we do not know whose life is more valuable. Human logic suggests that one's selfless act in saving another's life is preferable to a selfish act of self-preservation at his cost. But the Torah tells us that this is not so.

In fact, one may not extend the life of his friend in the short term if in the medium term this will mean his own death. For example, if one is walking with his friend in the desert with a bottle of water in his hands, he may not share the water with his friend if there is no reasonable chance that he can make it to the next oasis. However, if there is only a small chance that one would lose his life, he is obligated to attempt to save his friend. The commentators have no clear consensus as to what happens when a whole group of Jews is in danger.

Certainly, the bystander is required to spend money, perhaps all of his money, in his attempt to save a life. For, these authorities say, only your life comes first; your money does not.

So far does the requirement to save a life go that there is a special Mitzvah to kill someone (even one's own father) who is endangering someone else's life if this is the only way of stopping him. This is the law of a Rodef, or a pursuer.

A baby who is yet to be born and who endangers the mother's life is considered a pursuer and may be killed to save the mother's life. This is because a baby in the womb, although considered alive, is not considered as having the same value as the mother's life. However, the moment the baby has been partially born, even if only a part of a hand has been stuck out of the womb, then mother and baby are considered equal lives threatening each other. We then allow G-d to decide the issue.

In general, the תורה gives greater value to something spiritual than to something physical. So, for example, if one had two lost objects to return, one belonging to his rabbi and the other belonging to his father, he is required to first return the lost object to his rabbi, because his father facilitated his entry into this world whereas his rabbi facilitates his entry into the World to Come. Conversely, one who causes sin is worse than one who physically murders, for a murderer murders in this world but one who causes sin is depriving (murdering) the person from the World to Come.

If one ought to save someone's physical life, some authorities hold, certainly one ought to save his/her spiritual life. (So too with charity: Someone who is spiritually impoverished demands our spiritual charity (צדקה רוחנית) - an extension of the מצוה to give צדקה.) Some authorities, however, hold that we cannot learn from Mitzvos which were directed at a Jew's physical well-being and apply this to their spiritual well-being.

So far does this idea of spiritual life-saving go that there are actually instances where one could break the Shabbos to save a fellow-Jew's Yiddishkeit. This applies to one who is already Mitzvah-observant (שומר Mitzvos) and has been forcibly removed to an environment which endangers his/her מצוה observance.

Therefore, the Mitzvos of saving a life and of returning a lost object require one to help someone who is alienated from Judaism or who is engaging in unethical or spiritually damaging acts to get back on track.

The second extension of saving a life is the Mitzvah to heal. The Torah also gives specific permission to a physician to heal (רפא ירפא), and not be considered that he is interfering with Divine Providence. With this, a doctor can attempt to heal even when this may endanger the life of the patient or actually unwittingly cause someone's death.

A doctor is to man as a farmer is to a field. Just as G-d required that the farmer must fertilize, prune and weed to maintain his fields, so He created man with a need to be taken care of. Doctors are then G-d's instruments for helping the world. A Torah Jew would be grateful for the messenger, but he would also never forget the source of the messenger's power and mandate. While Judaism certainly does not require that everyone learn medicine in order to save lives, those who have learned medicine, or even first aid, do have a responsibility to use that wisdom whenever they can, even against a patient's will.

Damages

The Torah prohibits us from damaging someone else's property and requires us to pay for the damages we do. In addition, the Torah demands that we pay for damages done by our property, such as our animals. At a simple level, the logic of the Torah is that we have a responsibility to ensure that our possessions don't harm anyone else. If they do, we must pay. At a deeper level, however, the logic is that our possessions are an extension of ourselves. The fact that they caused damage somehow reflects on our spiritual well-being. When we operate at a high enough level our spirituality infuses our possessions as well, and they will cause no damage. We pay as an atonement for the root cause – our own weakness.

The fact that someone owns something is an indication that this is a part of his Avodah-package, the tools that he was given to serve G-d. In a sense, this is no different from his body, which is also a tool through which his soul can express itself in this world. So, when one's possessions cause damage, it really is as if he himself caused such damage.

In the Shema, we say that we should love G-d with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our possessions (בכל מאדך). Rav Tzadok understands this to mean that we have to put our love for G-d into our possessions. Such possessions will not cause damage. The animals of Rav Chanina bar Dosa and Rav Pinchus ben Yair would not eat any forbidden foods. They imbibed this value instinctively from their masters.

At Sinai, the Jews reached such a high level that their bodies were like angels. At this level, there was no possibility of their possessions causing damage to others. Therefore, the original Sinai experience did not include the laws of damages. However, the Parsha of Mishpatim comes immediately after Maamad Har Sinai. When the Jews are no longer angels, they need the laws of damages. In fact, these laws were indeed told to us at Sinai – *and these are your laws*. The Sinai laws, translated into a lower level, produce the laws of damages. At a spiritual level of Sinai, however, they appear in a different form, since damage at that level is not possible.

It is this which is behind the statement of the Sages that someone who wants to become a Chasid should fulfill the words (laws) of damages. Two other opinions are brought there – he should fulfill the words of (Pirkei) Avos or the words of Brachos. These three represent a complete rounding of holiness. Laws of damages relate to perfection in one's interpersonal relationships, Avos relate to character development (בין אדם לעצמו), while Brachos reflect our relationship with G-d (בין אדם למקום).

Of course, what is being talked about here is not payment for damage done but rather the care which one takes not to be the cause of damage to his friend's property in any way. Clearly, someone who develops this sensitivity, that even his property should not be a source of damages, will be careful not to allow his own body, or the words that come from his mouth, to be a source of damage.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא קמא דף ל/א
תנו רבנן חסידים הראשונים היו מצניעים קוצותיהם וזכוכיותיהם בתוך שדותיהן ומעמיקים להן
גי טפחים כדי שלא יעכב המחרשה רב ששת שדי להו בנורא רבא שדי להו בדגלת

Our Rabbis taught: The pious men of former generations used to hide their thorns and broken glasses in the midst of their fields at a depth of three handbreadths

below the surface so that [even] the plough might not be hindered by them. R' Sheshes used to throw them into the fire. Rava threw them into the Tigris.

The Mishkan & The Beis HaMikdash

The fact that Sefer Shemos ends with the Mishkan means that this, and not the giving of the Torah, was in fact was the culminating event of the Sefer. The reason for this is because the Sinai experience was a one-time event. The Mishkan took the Shechinah experience of Maamad Har Sinai and provided a way in which it could rest in the midst of the Jewish people on an ongoing basis.

Sefer Bereishis dealt with the creation of the world; Sefer Shemos deals with the purpose of that creation. This purpose is fully reflected with the building of the Mishkan, which now becomes the completion of the creation. The Mishkan is the model which man makes for himself to teach himself how to maintain holiness in all his actions. The Chinuch tells us of his great principle that our actions affect and condition our internal, spiritual reality. Therefore, he says, G-d commanded us to make a place that would be perfectly pure and holy, where, both by going there and doing the things we do, we could, in turn, purify our own thoughts.

When a man would come to this purest of environments and experience a deep connection to G-d, his actions there would have the maximum impact on conditioning his character and purifying his soul. And not only the spiritual parts of man – his material being and even his physical possessions become holy through connecting all of himself to G-d.

But there is more than that. The Mishkan represents a model of what man could become. A person who would see that the exact components of the Mishkan came together to bring the שכינה down would understand how he must construct himself to bring the שכינה into himself. Hence the words of the verse are: And they should make for Me a Mishkan, and I will dwell in them.

The Mishkan was a model of man. Man in turn is a mini-world – an Olam Katan paralleling the larger world outside of ourselves, the Olam HaGadol. This is also why Betzalel, who built the Mishkan, was someone who knew how to combine the letters in the same way as they had been used to create the world. For, by building the Mishkan, בצלאל was recreating the world.

Every manner of creative expression went into the Mishkan. In fact, the 39 Melachos of Shabbos are learned from the Mishkan. The Mishkan was then a human-built structure, reflecting the full force of man's creative potential, which led to the Shechinah coming down. By recreating this mini-world man realizes his own power to be a partner to G-d in this world, inspiring him to greater spiritual heights.

G-d's Presence in One Place

Immediately after Sinai, when G-d's presence is revealed to all of Klal Yisroel, G-d seems to confine His Presence to the Mishkan. As the Midrash Tanchuma puts it, G-d now says, "Tznius is a wonderful thing – this will be My glory, that I should speak only from within" and G-d henceforth only speaks with Moshe Rabbeinu from inside the Mishkan (between the כרובים on top of the ארון).

The Abarbanel asks why G-d commanded us to build a structure, the Mishkan, for Him. G-d is not a corporeal (physical) being whose presence can be confined to one place. The Ramban answers by saying that since the Jewish people were now holy, they deserved a structure in their midst dedicated to revealing G-d's Name and showing that His Shechinah dwelt amongst them. This in fact was the purpose of Maamad Har Sinai, the culmination of the Bris which G-d made with His people. The one-time event of G-d's open revelation at Sinai now becomes an ongoing, albeit more hidden revelation, of the Mishkan. G-d now speaks to Moshe Rabbeinu from this Mishkan just as He spoke to him on Sinai.

The Mishkan comes to show us that G-d is always present in our midst. We would now be aware of His presence in a very clear way. The Mishkan becomes the vehicle through which G-d can deepen His relationship with the Jewish people and bestow His goodness upon them.

This does not contradict the idea that כבודו מלא עולם – His presence fills every part of the world, a fact we declare in the Kedusha of the Shmoneh Esreh. For, there are places where G-d's presence is stronger and others where it is weaker. Thus Moshe Rabbeinu has to go out of the Egyptian city to receive his Nevuah. Given the greater Tumah in the cities, G-d's presence in the cities was too diluted (hidden) for Nevua to take place. So too, we might say that the Mishkan was a place where G-d's presence was more concentrated or revealed.

We can understand this a little deeper by dwelling on another contradiction we touch on in the Kedusha. In the Kedusha on Shabbos we declare מלא כל הארץ כבודו, that His holiness fills the whole world. However, we then go on to say, אי-ה מקום כבודו, where is the place of His glory, implying that it is restricted to a certain place, a place which is not accessible to us. G-d is both eminent and transcendental. In the Shema we declare "*Hear O Israel, G-d is our Lord*" – accessible to us at all times, "*G-d is One*" – an unfathomable unity.

We might say that although G-d's Presence begins in the Heavens, the purpose of creation was for it to appear down on earth. This is reflected in the three Kedushas we say during the morning dovening. The first is in ברכת יוצר, the first of the ברכות שמע, and is said by the Malachim in the Heavens above. The second is the Kedusha of the Shmoneh Esreh – here the Kedusha has already entered the world – it is man who is saying this. The third Kedusha is what is known as Kedusha DeSidra, said in וּבֹא לְצִיּוֹן. We are now ready to bring all that holiness into the world with our unique human ability to put Kedusha into the material world and elevate it, something the angels cannot do. For it is down here that G-d longs to dwell, for this was His reason in creating the world to begin with.

The Mishkan was a parallel mini-world to the larger world G-d had created. It was for this reason that the Mishkan, even though it was ready by the 25th of Kislev, was not put together until the 1st of Nisan. This was to ensure its completion on the same date as the completion of the creation of the world, in the spring month, when life begins anew.

So this Mishkan, which brought the Shechina down into its midst, now fulfilled the purpose of the world. The Mishkan in turn provided a model of how to bring קדושה into our own lives. According to this, the Mishkan was intended to increase the קדושה beyond its walls and not to confine it. The holiness of the Mishkan is what caused the Shechina to dwell on the Jewish people and to provide them with the means to complete their redemption. For being free is ultimately about overcoming all limitations to be the perfect vehicle to carry and radiate G-d's holiness.

The Mishkan & The Beis HaMikdash Today

The Torah spends more time on describing the Mishkan than any other Mitzvah. Yet, the Mishkan was used in the desert and in Israel until the Temple was built. The Mitzvah of **וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ** then translates into the building the Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

In fact, some commentators hold that the Mishkan was only a result of the Sin of the Golden Calf whereas the Temple was always intended.

There is a positive commandment, applicable to this day, which devolves on the Jewish people as a whole to rebuild this Temple. Practically, if we were able to build it with the agreement of the Arabs and the world powers, we would do so. In fact, such attempts have been made before. However, some opinions state that we can only rebuild the temple when Moshiach comes, when a Navi comes to tell us to do so, or at least when the majority of the Jewish nation is living in Israel.

Nevertheless, the Temple Mount retains its original Kedusha. This mountain was always a place ready to receive the Shechina. Adam HaRishon, Kayin and Hevel, and Noach when he left the Ark all sensed this and brought their sacrifices there.

This was where Avraham bound Yitzchak. One of the gates of the Temple, in fact, was called “the Gate of the Sacrifice,” for this was where Avraham led Yitzchak onto the mountain. When the Jews finally returned to this mountain, they found the ashes of the ram that Avraham sacrificed instead of Yitzchak. This then became the place of the altar. The corner stone of the Temple was laid by Yaakov Avinu when he had his dream of the ladder.

The Temple Mount was, in fact, the source of spiritual and even physical nourishment to the whole world. Even the nations of the world recognized this, and some wanted to take this mountain as their own holy place. The reason for its holiness is because the Temple Mount is an exact parallel of a higher, spiritual Beis HaMikdash in the heavens. It is for this reason that the universe, when it was created, began from the Even Shesiah, the rock on which the Ketores on Yom Kippur was later to be placed, and spread outwards.

Besides this intrinsic Kedusha of the Temple Mount, there is another Kedusha which it gained as a result of the active act of sanctification at the time of the building of the Temple. This holiness is so great that one who approaches the Temple Mount in an impure state suffered **כרת**, a spiritual cutting off from the nation. Even those who believe that this aspect of holiness got lost with the destruction of the Temple would still prohibit entry to the Temple Mount today.

When Herod rebuilt the Second Temple, he extended the Temple Mount to the west and to the south. This part of the Temple Mount was never sanctified, and therefore, one could theoretically walk on these parts. However, since we do not know where the exact location of this or other parts of the Temple are, we refrain from going onto the Temple Mount entirely.

This leaves us with praying at the Western Wall. The Midrash tells us that after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Shechina left the Temple and came to rest on the Western Wall. The area in front of the Western Wall, and possibly the entire Western Wall plaza, has the holiness of a Synagogue.

Since the Temple Mount retains its original Kedusha, we do not need the Temple to be rebuilt in order to bring sacrifices. However, this is not feasible practically, for, amongst other problems, we cannot get rid of our impurity nor do we know the exact place of the altar.

Still, the deeper spirit of the Beis HaMikdash is with us even when we don't have the physical structure. Studying the passages in the Torah which deal with the Korbanos is tantamount to bringing the actual sacrifices. The same thing can be said about the actual building of the Beis HaMikdash. This applies even when we are in exile far from the Land of Israel. For the study of these passages brings down the sparks of Kedusha which are contained within these words.

G-d created the world that we might become holy. It would be a perversion of that purpose if we turned the Temple into an end in and of itself. We long for the rebuilding of the Temple and we pray for it three times a day, but only so that it will contribute to our own spiritual clarity. We are the final goal of all of this. We start out being a whole world, an עולם קטן which parallels the עולם הגדול, the world outside of ourselves. Just as that world has many levels of spirituality divided initially into four worlds or universes, so too our soul translates into each one of these levels. When these souls are connected to our body, we are able to connect all these worlds. We are able to bring the spirituality of those higher worlds down into the actions we do down here and thereby connect this material world with the greatest heights of spirituality.

The Mishkan came to aid us in doing this. It facilitated the bringing of the holiness down and mapped all these higher worlds for us. Ultimately, we have to learn the map and allow G-d to dwell within us. If we have the aid of seeing the actual structure, we are indeed blessed. If not, we should study it in the Torah and become the walking Mishkans which the Torah commands us to be - ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי - בתוכם. Indeed, a Mitzvah for every age!

Bigdei Kehuna

The Bigdei Kehunah of the Cohen Gadol are לכבוד ולתפארת, i.e they are meant to have a regal look. They allowed the Cohanim to engage in the type of separation from the nation, in preparation for their holy task, without looking arrogant.

The garments radiated holiness. For example, the Choshen was a vehicle for a kind of prophecy – its letters lit up and spelled out G-d's answers to man.

Each of the Bigdei Kehuna came to atone for a different sin: The Meil atoned for Loshon Hora, the Choshen Mishpat atoned for an incorrect judgment, the Efod for idolatry, etc.

The Mishkan came to provide a small world that was like the world of Adam HaRishon before the Cheit. The Cohanim, when they served in this Mishkan, were at the level of Adam HaRishon. The Bigdei Kehuna were like the skin of Adam HaRishon.

In general, clothing communicates a message to the person himself, as well as to others, that there is more to the person. Clothing restores the balance of the soul and the body which was disturbed by the Cheit of Adam HaRishon. Therefore, the word for clothing (לבוש) means not ashamed - לא בוש. Adam HaRishon did not need clothes because his animal soul was in complete harmony with his inner essence and was therefore its outer garment. Only when this harmony was disturbed did Adam HaRishon find himself naked. He then needed a new set of outer garments to reflect his inner spirituality.

Clothing, then, is a powerful force, to be used positively or negatively. This is why the Hebrew word for a coat (מעיל) is related to מעילה – the abuse of holiness (הקדש). Similarly, the Hebrew word for garment (בגד) is related to בגידה, treachery and deception. Because when clothing is used to make false associations (a קשר) of inner and outer realities, it leads to untruth (שקר – same letters). Clothing misleads when it becomes the focus, an end in and of itself, instead of to serve some deeper reality. Thus the wife of Potiphar was left holding Yosef's empty garment because all she saw was Yosef's external beauty.

On the other hand, where clothing is used correctly it is a vehicle of sanctification. The clothing of Aharon were not only an expression of his position but were the actual means through which he was sanctified to become the Cohen Gadol. As the verse says: *And you shall speak to all who are wise hearted ... that they may make Aharon's garments to consecrate/sanctify him.* Hence, the garments affected him in a very real way. Were Aharon to come into the Kodesh without them, he would die. It was the Begadim that turned the Cohanim into Cohanim.

The deeper the spirituality the more hidden it will be in this world, and the greater the role of the clothing. The role of the Cohanim is to connect the Jews with the hidden spirituality in this world. For this, their clothing was like a guide, an initial impression which would lead the people in the right direction.

This is also why the garments of the Cohanim had to be white. White objects reflect all the light of the spectrum and do not absorb anything within themselves. The function of a Cohen is to be a Shaliach, a messenger for Klal Yisroel. He is serving that other person totally and receiving nothing for himself. He is the white that totally reflects.

Every aspect of these garments contains the deepest mysteries. The Cohen Gadol was to wear 8 garments, four white and four gold. The four white garments are

a reflection of the four-lettered Name of G-d (י-ק-ו-ק) which is referred to by the word לתפארת. The four golden garments are a reflection of the four-lettered Name of G-d (א-ד-נ-י) which is described by the word לכבוד, the latter preceding the former in ascending order of holiness.

Ultimately, the clothes of the Cohanim were garments over their souls, clothes of attitude, of character traits and good qualities.

These garments, when worn by the Cohen, would cause him to tune into the other garments of his soul, his thoughts, speech and actions, at the time that he was serving in the Temple. The level at which he did this would determine the degree of Kaparah he would provide for the Jewish people. The clothing themselves absorbed all these ingredients, as they were made with the highest possible level of thought and action.

כי תשא

The Golden Calf

The Jewish nation had just stood at Sinai and received the Torah. It seems incomprehensible that this holy people, who had just spoken with G-d, should descend suddenly to such abysmal depths.

The immediate catalyst for their sin was Moshe's delay in coming down the mountain. A man goes up a mountain. He takes no food or water. He cannot survive for 5 days, let alone 40. Sure enough, he does not return.

The Jews had understood that an intermediary between them and G-d was a critical element of their Avodas HaSh-m, "the erroneous idea that Man can make, may make, must make a 'Moses' for himself". This group saw that the safest bet to guarantee their future was not with a person but with a model, a structure they would make to bring down pure holiness. This holiness would represent a Koach Avoda rather than a Koach HaTorah. The Kuzari points out that the basic idea of having the Ananei HaKavod, the Aron, or other intermediaries to turn to in order to reach G-d was not so radical, in fact. It was, he says, קרובה לעבודת האמת. This structure is not to be another god, but another Moshe Rabbeinu. According to Rav Hirsch, it was Aharon who chose the form of a calf "to keep the error within the bounds of this semi-defection; ... for ... cattle represented no directing force but a serving one. And in choosing a calf and not an ox, Aaron expressed even this force in its weakest aspect."

Aharon was facing a confused people, with a whole host of opinions as to what to do. The most violent amongst them, about 3,000 of the total, saw that the safest bet to guarantee the future was not a person but a model, a structure which they would make to bring down pure holiness. Their idea was not so far from the truth really – there was but a millimeter's difference between the Mishkan and the Eigel.

The difference was this: In the building of the Mishkan, the Torah stresses again and again that Betzalel and his helpers built it exactly according to specification. As close as the עגל came to the idea of the משכן, it was a product of man's creativity alone. The Jewish people had what they saw as a legitimate problem. But then, instead of turning to G-d or even to their great leaders, they took things entirely into their own hands. The need to express oneself in a unique way at all costs – even at the cost of truth – is part of the disaster communicated by the Cheit HaEigel.

However, if I no longer recognize my place in the grand unity of things then I can no longer recognize the unity of all creation. Ultimately, then, I cannot recognize the unity of the Jewish people either.

Moshe now loses his prophecy, as he only had it for the sake of the Jewish people to begin with. The Jewish people themselves are almost destroyed, if not for one of the most urgent and dramatic appeals in the history of the world. Once Moshe descends, resistance evaporates. He destroys the calf and the people scatter. Luchos Shniyos, visible on both sides, teach the people that they can read the law to Moshe as well as he can read it to them. So that even if "this man Moshe" disappears, the people do not require a Moshe; the Torah presents itself at all time directly from G-d to every individual.

Moshe himself, sensing a unique opportunity, asks G-d to show him His full Glory. This request is, in fact, impossible, but he gets to see G-d's back, the highest level of G-d-experience possible by man on this earth. Ironically, it was just the great

sin of the Jewish people which led to the new heights of Moshe's relationship with G-d.

מַעֲמַד הַר סִינַי had finally returned the Jewish people to the level of Adam HaRishon before the Cheit. But חַטָּא הַעֲגַל undid all of this good. On the other hand, we were still better off than after the original חַטָּא. For we now had the Torah, which we have never lost. We are left with the legacy of the חַטָּא but we are reassured that, ultimately, our attempts to resolve this will be successful. We will return to pre-Cheit holiness and bring in the Moshiach.

ויקהל

The Creative-Discipline Interface: The People Behind the Building of the Mishkan

To build the Mishkan, the Jews had to express a high level of sophisticated craftsmanship. Where did an ex-slave people, with their rough hands, learn such highly specialized acts of goldsmithery, technical embroidery, etc.?

Moshe called upon *all who raised their hearts* (כל אשר נשאו לבו) to do the work. It was the passionate committing of their hearts to do the seeming impossible which opened them to the Divine inspiration that led to their newfound wisdom and craftsmanship.

The leader of this was Betzalel, Chur's grandson. It was Chur who had jumped in to give his life trying to stave off the Eigel. Both were descendents of Nachson ben Aminadav, who had jumped into the Red Sea before it split. Sometimes, we have to jump in to a situation of self-sacrifice without too much pondering. And indeed, Jews have been doing impossible things ever since - building Jewish communities and institutions under conditions that seemed sheer insanity.

The leader of all of this was Betzalel. Betzalel knew how to combine the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in the same way as they had been used by G-d in the creation of the world. Betzalel used this same knowledge to build the Mishkan. For, by building the Mishkan, Betzalel was, in fact, recreating the world. Betzalel came from Yehudah, the tribe that led the Jews in the desert. He was joined by Ohaliav of the tribe of Dan, who marched right at the back. This was to ensure that the whole Jewish people would all be partners in this act of creativity.

G-d fills Betzalel and Ohaliav with *חכמת לב*. *לב* has a Gemtriah of 32, which represents all the pathways of knowledge. In fact, the 39 Melachos of Shabbos are learned from the Mishkan. The Mishkan was then a humanly built structure, reflecting the full force of man's creative potential, which led to the Shechinah coming down. By recreating this mini-world man realizes his own power to be a partner to G-d in this world.

The Torah seems to stress the creativity involved in the building of the Mishkan, but it also stresses again and again that Betzalel and his helpers built the Mishkan exactly according to specification. This was one of the big differences between the *עגל הזהב* and the *משכן*. As close as the *עגל* came to the idea of the *משכן*, it was a product of man's creativity alone.

The problem with creativity is when it becomes an isolated value, the only value. Creativity as an end stresses individual autonomy to be oneself as if it doesn't matter whether the product is a monster or an angel. At some level, we all want to be free to express our creativity. At the same time, everything worthwhile in life requires discipline and restrictions.

The great pianist has to follow the rules and discipline of his art. There are scales and rules of pedaling, counterpoint and harmony. A novice at the keyboard trying to express himself will just make noise. It will take years of hard practice, day in and day out, before he will become a master. But having mastered the discipline to express himself creatively he will be able to use his discipline to soar to greater and greater heights. Follow your creative instincts alone and you will be left with a useless Golden Calf. Follow the tough logic of obeying G-d's detailed rules of how one really becomes something and one will produce a beautiful Mishkan.

Betzalel had Chochmah, abstract intellectual understanding, Binah, the emotional integration of the wisdom and Daas, the translation of that wisdom into action. It represents a complete unity between the person and the knowledge - a total connecting with that knowledge.

Betzalel's name, '*in the shadow of G-d*', reflected his essence. He lived the idea of letter combinations and all its implications. Betzalel was as close to a walking Mishkan that could be found in that great generation. Betzalel's wisdom was so integrated that he was able translate his Kabbalistic heights into instructing his fellow Jews just how to go about the building.

This great man knew that he did not have the craftsmanship to build the Mishkan. At that point, when Betzalel was stuck – when the limits of his own human qualities could not get the job done – Betzalel went beyond himself, and succeeded. He succeeded because he had no choice. The job had to be done.

Betzalel's creativity arose from the fact that the Mishkan had to go up – he was not trying to be creative. He was following the logic of necessity. This is really what Jewish creativity is all about.

There is another point here. Betzalel and Ohaliav led the holiest group of craftsmen ever assembled. They expressed the full force of their creativity while following G-d's instructions to the letter. And they did it as a team. Hence, the lie was given to the myth that to be creative you somehow have to break the boundaries of spiritual and halachik guidelines, that somehow you have to stick out as an individual to know that you are fulfilling your potential.

Betzalel's team met to play at the most beautiful symphony ever – the building of the Mishkan. If these were the orchestra then G-d is the Composer, Moshe the music director and Betzalel the conductor. Even the unique soloists in the team followed the conductor, as the Mishkan would have otherwise reflected noise rather than a symphony.

Participating in that symphony were those who supported the Mishkan materially. Here lay the roots of that great tradition of Jewish philanthropy. 3 types of Terumos were asked for. The donations for the Korbanos and the Adanim were fixed obligations while that for the Mishkan, with which our Parsha deals exclusively, was voluntary and unspecified, for people are always much readier to give money for a building (the Mishkan), than they are for running costs (the Korbanos) or for things which are less romantic and dramatic (the Adanim). The women, who resisted so fiercely any participation in the Eigel, now showed that their earlier refusal to give their jewelry to idolatry was not rooted in possessiveness or materialism but in true motives of loyalty to G-d. For now, when it came to the Mishkan, they gladly and generously parted with their best rings and necklaces. But the Meforshim go deeper with this idea.

The Malbim distinguishes between a Nediv Lev and a Nediv Ruach. The Lev is the organ which motivates to action while Ruach are the thoughts and imaginations a person may have about the issue. There are those, the Nedivei Lev, who may not have some a mature concept of giving, but are nevertheless generous because it doesn't hassle them to give – they may even enjoy giving Tzedaka. These are the Gvirim who give to people they like without always even knowing what it is they are giving to. Others, Nedivei Ruach, are more focused donors: they need to understand the project they are giving to more deeply before committing.

Both kinds of people got involved in the Mishkan. Their Trumah led to a deepening of their intellectual-spiritual sensitivities. It was a *תרומת ד'*. The Mitzvos of HaSh-m are designed in such a way that physical actions lead to new spiritual heights.

But to achieve these new lofty heights, the condition is that it be done as a purely voluntary act, an act which represents total desire and commitment on our part.

פקודי

The Real Roots of Jewish Pride and Unity

The Mishkan reflected the realities of Jewish unity. If the contribution of one Jew was missing to the amount of one stitch of the curtain, the Shechina would not come down. Each gave his Shekel HaKodesh; the rich gave the same as the poor, as each soul is vital to the spiritual well-being of the whole nation.

At Sinai, the Jews reconstituted the unity of the soul of Adam HaRishon which, as a result of Adam's Cheit, had been divided amongst all the people that came after him. The Jews received one Torah, each letter reflected by one of the souls of the 600,000 people that stood at Sinai (יש שישים רבוא אותיות לתורה - ישראל stands for). כאיש אחד ובלב אחד. At Sinai, the Jewish people understood the symphony of the creation and how each piece of the seemingly disparate universe came together, all proclaiming that there is nothing ultimately other than the unity of G-d.

All of this came tumbling down with the Cheit HaEigel. The unity of the nation was shattered and the people, instead of looking for the Oneness of G-d, sought many gods – אלה אלוהיך ישראל –.

The Mishkan came to restore the unit of Jewish people. The Mishkan reflected the combined Komah of the entire Jewish nation. Hence, even though some Jews brought materials and others helped with various aspects of the building, the Torah talks of all of Bnei Yisroel as having done what G-d had commanded. לט לב: ותכל כל. Each person made a contribution to the building of the Mishkan as a part of the collective body of the Jewish people. Together, they created a model of one large Neshama. They once again came to understand how all the fragmented parts of the world, with the Jews at the center, came together to produce holiness.

This, says the Ohr HaChaim, is the meaning of ואהבת לרעך כמוך. Love your neighbor *like yourself*, because he really is a part of you, a part of your Shleimus. Take the Mitzvos: Some can be done only by a Cohen, a Levi or a Yisrael – but we need them all for our fulfillment. We achieve completion through each other. We are all one whole, and my friend's Mitzvos fulfill me as well.

The opposite is also true. A Tzadik cannot simply get up in the morning and say, "I am doing everything I am supposed to be doing. What does the Rasha have to do with me?" Somebody who gets up in the morning, dovens, studies Torah and does Mitzvos can still be in big trouble. The Rasha is a part of his (now missing) Shleimus. Furthermore, if he could have done something to help the Rasha grow in the right direction and he did not, the Tzadik will be punished for the actions of the Rash as much as for his own actions. כל ישראל ערבין זה לזה.

The Jewish people is compared to a sheep. If a sheep gets hit on its head or one of its limbs, its whole body feels the pain. So too, if one of the Jewish nation is spiritually not whole, the whole nation feels it. The Midrash also brings the Mashal of a man who drilled a hole in a ship full of people, claiming that he was only drilling under himself.

Arvus is not a command so much as it reflects the reality of the Jewish people. At a deeper spiritual level, we all do share each others' spiritual reality. Each Jew is like a guarantor who is required to repay the debt of his friend. If my fellow Jew does not fulfill a Mitzvah it is then as if I did not do that Mitzvah.

How does one achieve this Jewish unity? How does one feel the pain of our fellow Jew as we do our own? How do we come to understand that we are all part of one big soul? Our Parsha reveals the secret to us:

לט (מב) ככל אשר צוה ה' את משה כן עשו בני ישראל את כל העבדה :

The Jewish people built this Mishkan, this model of Jewish unity, with one goal in mind: to serve the Master of the Universe. We can reach out and help our neighbor, but we are still us and there are still they. Only by us all going up to the highest point, a point where we are really all one, can we live this reality.

PURIM

Overview

Purim was a greater miracle than the Exodus from Egypt. In the former we were saved from מות to חיים while in the latter we only went out from שעבוד to חירות. Yet, we mention יציאת מצרים at every turn and not נס פורים. The reason for this is because the נס of פורים was בהסתר פנים while the נס of יציאת מצרים was a very open miracle. Purim is the miracle of every day, the Megillah of life where G-d is not explicitly mentioned but whose world bears His imprint at every turn. The lesson we have to learn is אסתר מן התורה מנין – from where do we learn that even at a time of such Hester, G-d continues His miraculous Hashgacha.

Purim is greater than Shavuot, for on Shavuot we received the Torah מראה, to such a degree that the entire acceptance was in doubt, whereas on Purim we received the Torah מאהבה – קימו וקיבלו –

The Sages chose the most mysterious of ways for us to celebrate this holy day:

- 1) We celebrate by drinking, which is normally forbidden.
- 2) Different parts of the nation celebrate on different days.
- 3) There is no Hallel.
- 4) The very name Purim, lots, is strange.
- 5) Megillas Esther, the Megilla of hiddenness, is named after the Galus rather than the Geula (Esther after Hester Panim).
- 6) Furthermore, Chazal ask אהמך מן התורה מנין? How could Haman, the embodiment of evil, have his earliest source in the Torah?
- 7) At a more basic level, why is Purim not mentioned in the Torah if it is greater than Pesach and Shavuot?
- 8) Since Purim is a Rabbinic Festival, why did the Sages not follow the principle of כעין דאורייתא תקנו?

Esther, Mordechai and Haman are all hinted at in the Torah. This means that G-d wanted the Torah to contain a Kedusha of Purim but He did not want it to be דאורייתא. If Purim would have been explicit in the Torah it would have been completely revealed, since the Torah has already been brought into the world. G-d, however, wanted man to reveal the holiness of Purim. Since it would be man who would cause the initial Hester Panim, it was therefore fitting that he should activate the Tikun. For here, the whole purpose was to see the קדושה in the נסתר. As such, it had to be DeRabanan, since a DeOraisa would have had to be revealed from the outset.

Purim showed that the natural world can be as effective as miraculous. And natural processes seem messy indeed – a Jewish girl intermarried to a gentile king against her will and bearing a child for him. Her position seems not to help her nation at all, for anti-Semitism is rampant and the Jewish leadership (Mordechai) seems to only make it worse. On the surface, history seems to show no movement toward the Almighty's final goal. Yet, below the surface other things are happening. At the very moment that Esther is living with a non-Jew she loathes she receives a burst of רוח הקודש. And then even this she gives up, thinking that she is giving up her Olam Haba itself to save the Jewish people.

We are finally saved, but we remain steeped in Galus. We don't even appear to get back to where we started, for the Beis HaMikdash whose rebuilding Coresh (Cyrus) had encouraged was not renewed by Achashverosh even after the destruction of Haman. Achashverosh, the Sages assured us, was a bigger anti-Semite than Haman. He cancelled the Temple rebuilding long before Haman came onto the scene. He suffered greatly from this, yet he never wavered in his decision until his dying day. What got into him to save the Jews remains a mystery. Daryavesh, his heir, born by Esther, was halachikally a Jew, and this post-Purim mess was undoable. Daryavesh, in fact, became a Persian King and not a Jewish Sage! We hear nothing of the Judaism his mother must have surely tried to teach him, though he does give the go-ahead for and provides active assistance in the rebuilding of the Temple.

So the Purim story never resolves itself. Even after the Geulah we remained in Galus. In truth, it was meant to be that way, for Purim is the Chag of Galus, the Chag that shows us how to connect to spirituality when we are in Galus. Purim is the Chag that is to sustain us in the Galus as long as there has still not been a Geulah Shleima.

Galus is a civilization force that serves to separate us from our spiritual roots by hiding those roots and showing us an attractive alternative. Thus, the Jews attended Achashverosh's party not out of necessity alone but because they felt they had made it as a recognized group in the empire. Jews who were learning Torah and keeping Mitzvos nevertheless became proud members of the empire. Esther had to correct this sin by being thrust into a situation of the deepest connection with the empire, marriage to the emperor himself, and still showing that she was detached.

Intellect alone is not enough to achieve this separatism, for the Galus creeps up into our bones without us realizing it. Purim is a time when we get to our essential Jewish identity, unfiltered by cerebral or other processes (עד דלא ידע). There is nothing that sharpens the mind more than when one thinks that it is all about to end, as appeared to be happening to the Jewish People at that time. Nothing really matters then other than the essence of existence, its meaning and purpose.

At that time, our identity was in danger of being engulfed by the Galus. How does Purim sustain us? It is the Chag which, at the point of the deepest Galus, when Eisav looks most similar to us (עד דלא ידע), gives us the tools to discriminate between them and us.

The external similarities between זרע עשו and זרע יעקב (twins) require us to go very deep to sort out the differences. Of course, this similarity exists even without Purim. And it requires us to discriminate on a daily basis. But Purim is the day when we got down to the essential difference. It is just here that we need to go deeper. At this point it takes a special Esther (Hester)-like Koach to bring the light down.

This is why Esther not only sent clothes to Mordechai but requested that Mordechai remove his sackcloth and not just put the clothes over the sackcloth. She thereby sent a message that what was required now was to reach to that spirituality which is normally hidden and covered in layers of clothing.

Mordechai, however, disagreed on the timing. First, Klal Yisroel had to do Teshuvah. Mordechai seems to have a point, for we later see that ותלבש אסתר מלכות – Esther dressed in Malchus.

In the end, Purim became a Chag and the Megillah became a part of Nach. But even then, the Megillah was written without the explicit mention of G-d's Name throughout, there is no Hallel as we would say on open Nisim, and the festival is called Purim – the festival of lots, a seeming abandonment to the uncontrollable vicissitude of chance and history. Really, Purim becomes the festival of discovering G-d in all of this. We get a glimpse that the real הנהגה of HaShem is not the surface

הנהגה. Rather, there is another cog of history, below the surface, driving the surface cog, called הנהגת היחוד. הנהגת היחוד is that which ties up all the loose ends of history, weaving them into a final fabric that unites all. הנהגת היחוד is that which takes the very plans and actions of a Haman and uses them to create a ונהפוך הוא, to be a part of the גילוי of HaSh-m in this world.

Dreams and Reality

Haman was a descendent of Amalek, the grandson of Eisav. Eisav dresses and looks like Yaakov, is beloved by Yitzchak and honors his father more than Yaakov. But, at the time when real distinctions count, Yitzchak's blessings that were to determine the future of all mankind, Yaakov's and Eisav's true natures are revealed through the blessings. This tension, of an Eisav who presents himself as the force of civilization but who was something entirely different deep down, was to become even more pronounced in Eisav's descendent, Haman. Indeed, it is just where profound differences between things and people exist that the surface similarities are an aid to preventing us from focusing on what would then be this or that superficial distinction.

Haman's protagonist was Mordechai, a descendent of Binyamin, who, together with Yosef, the other child of Rochel, was destined to attack and defeat Amalek. Yosef does so through his descendent Yehoshua and Binyamin does so incompletely through his descendent Shaul. In his lifetime, Yosef had desperately attempted to complete his partnership with Binyamin, going to great lengths to get him to Egypt and then showing him special favor. Mordechai defeats Haman, and Yosef will return and Mashiach Ben Yosef will complete the job.

Purim is the Galus story of Hester Panim par excellence. The Jews attended the king's feast. In their eyes, kosher food prepared at the highest levels of cuisine at a royal banquet meant that they had made it as a recognized and important minority. The king further complimented them by adorning himself with their national garments, those of the Cohen Gadol. You can be the frummet of Jews, they said, without compromise, and still fully engage your surrounding culture. You can be the blessing of Mordechai and Haman all in one.

But this circle just would not be squared. How shocking to the people that after all of this Haman was to come along and claim: *There is a nation scattered and separated amongst your people who refuse to obey the edicts of the king!*

After all his gestures to the Jews, the king resonated fully with Haman's Jewish problem - ויהי בימי אחשורוש. After the king marries a Jewess, finds out that another Jew, Mordechai, saved his life, kills Haman, etc. he still does not cancel the genocide orders on the Jews. "The law is the law," he claims. הוא אחשורוש - he is the same evil person - consistently from beginning to end.

It was quite easy for the Jews to recognize the evil once it was upon them. The question was whether they could see the Hamans of the world when they were showing their glorious overlay of culture, whether they could understand the real motives behind Achashveirosh's kosher cuisine. The Jews had to deepen their spiritual sensitivity to the point where, even though Mordechai and Haman look exactly the same on the surface, they would go deeper to understand the difference. This is exactly what we do on Purim. We drink on Purim until the cursed Haman and the blessed Mordechai are all a blur on the surface. We then dig deeper into ourselves to tell the difference. This is the power of Purim: to see the deeper patterns and realities which really comprise this world.

It is in the very nature of the הסתר פנים of הנהגת היחוד that things are not what they seem to be. Pure logic, כח החכמה, is not going to help here, as logic will perforce explain only the surface structures. What is needed is a leap of the imagination, the כח המדמה, to team up with כח החכמה. Indeed, man is אדם, he who uses his דמיון to relate to that which cannot be seen or experienced through our senses (אדמה לעליון - אדמה from אדם). To get close to HaSh-m we have to dream; we have to have a vision of things beyond ourselves. Therein lies the great danger, for a dream is potentially

spurious stuff or it may only be little truth, and on that speck of אמת we might build a whole structure of falsehood.

Who can better teach us those dangers than Yosef and his dreams? Yosef pursued his dreams to seeming success. It all seemed to happen according to his vision. He did come to rule, his brothers and father do bow down to him, and his approach to serving G-d does seem to come about.

And yet his brothers call him a בעל החלומות. In some respect they were right, for Yosef only ruled in very this-worldly terms and the real מלכות was ultimately entrusted to the descendants of Yehuda.

Yosef seemed to get it right, however. He became a Tzadik, and, in the midst of the most impure and filthy of countries, he brought up two children to become two of the holy tribes.

The similarity between the Yosef story, his struggle to use imagination correctly, and the Purim עבודה is obvious. But the connection goes deeper than similarity. The ספר היצירה tells us that Yosef belongs to the month of Adar (just as Yehuda belongs to the month of Nissan). Adar is the incomplete Geulah of Purim just as Nissan, which follows, is the complete Geulah of Pesach. Purim demands that there be something which follows. Purim is a process and hence intrinsically incomplete.

Haman is hinted at in the Torah as reflecting Adam HaRishon's sin of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, המן העץ אכלת. This sin caused two primary things – it mixed up good and evil and it introduced death into the world. Haman, too, wished to mix up good and evil by representing himself to G-d as an alternative to the Chosen People. He also wished to extend the death-idea by taking the core of Adam HaRishon's Neshama, the Jewish people, and destroying them.

Haman's evil was therefore very profound and very deep. He was a כח פנימי רע. His Koach was לקרר את האדם – אשר קרר בדרך. He did this by making the decree very slowly so the Jews would not be motivated to do Teshuvah. They adjusted to the rumors and lived on. Therefore, Mordechai refused Esther's approach to things, demanding a more radical solution. Esther's inclination was to do everything in a quiet and hidden way in order to reach up to great heights, for spirituality is something which is intrinsically hidden. Mordechai, however, was insistent that this was not the way to deal with Amalek. For Amalek comes to cool things down, and therefore the way to fight him is specifically with great emotion and arousal.

Haman was an expert in Loshon Hora (ליכא דידע לישנא כהמן) - he knew how to prosecute the Jews in front of G-d Himself. Haman understood that G-d had promised never to destroy the Jewish nation\ but felt that he had a unique way of getting around this problem. He claimed that their sins had reached up to permeate that total spiritual reality (כל קומת האדם), i.e. all five levels of their Neshama.

שישנים מן המצוות – ישנו עם אחד – who have surrendered their conscious faculties so thoroughly that the upper levels of the soul, the Chaya and the Yechida, had been separated from the Jews and no longer related to them in any way.

Haman tried to drive a wedge between G-d and the Jewish people in order to show how incomplete they were and how lacking ultimate Dveikus to G-d, how ומפורד ומפורד – spread out and separated from ultimate unity, they were.

ודתי המלך אינם עושים – *and they do not do the laws of the King* – i.e. even down here, at the most basic levels of the Nefesh, they are blemished so that there is now no part of their human frame left unsullied, no redeeming factor that G-d might leave them as the chosen people. In fact, they don't even observe the prerequisites of Derech Eretz that preceded the Torah (ודתיהם שונות). Since there was no part of the Jew where the promise could begin, no corner of his being where some remnant of

Kedusha remained, G-d could not save the Jews, Haman reasoned. That being the case, it would be possible to bring in a replacement and the promise would fall on the replacement. That replacement would become the heirs and inheritors of the Jewish nation, the new Chosen People.

But, the Sages already predicted that non-Jews would translate the Torah into their language and claim that they were now the new Chosen People. This is particularly true of the nations of Eisav, of whom Amelek is the purest expression. Amalek is likened to a pig who puts his one kosher sign, his feet, forward, while hiding his impurity, the fact that he doesn't chew the cud. Haman is the most distilled form of Amalek, in turn, and reflects the deepest opposition ever to rise up against the Jews. He truly fantasized that, as Yaakov's alter-ego, he was an alternative choice to be G-d's Chosen People. Hence he states למי יחפוץ המלך לעשות יקר וגוי, and we know that whenever the name מלך (without the word אחשורוש following it) is mentioned in the Megillah, it refers to G-d.

However, when Haman thought of chosen-ness he thought of privileges, honor and glory. He filtered the concept through his own impurity. The Jewish people, on the other hand, understand chosen-ness to be a responsibility – the greater the chosen-ness the more they are humbled by the privilege. For, the greater the person, the more he understands and grasps the true reality that it is G-d who has bestowed everything and that he is really nothing. This is in stark contrast to the Hamans of this world who deceive themselves into thinking that their gains are purely as a result of their own effort and that whatever the Jews have gained they can duplicate by sheer exertion. They can choose to be the Chosen People. As a part of his efforts, Haman therefore offers G-d to pay to replace the Jewish People (בכל מאדך). As such, he fails the basic test of unconditional love – to love without any expectation of something in return. The Jews know the secret of loving G-d for the sheer pleasure of being attached to Him and G-d responds in return. G-d also recognizes that their “sleeping from the Mitzvos” is but a reflection of their current immersion in the world and not an expression of their deepest selves.

The real victory of Purim is the access it gives us to a deeper level of spirituality, the ability to reflect (כימים אשר נחו בהם היהודים) on all the patterns that happened here – how a meal nine years earlier led to Haman's decree, how Esther became queen, how the king's sleep was disturbed just before Haman entered the palace, how Haman's lots gave eleven months for all this to happen, and countless other details, all coming together in G-d's collage of history. Here is a microcosm of the greater sweep of world history, to end with the Messianic redemption.

Purim was always meant to be, but by its very nature it could not be revealed in the Torah. It had to reflect HaSh-m's hidden Hand, to be discovered again and again in all the seemingly unconnected everyday events of the natural world. As a result of Purim, we understand that no event is local. Every little detail, even the actions of the wicked, will be used to produce G-d's final intention. An insignificant meal here, a heroic act of not bowing there, a forgotten historical footnote in the king's annals: all will join to sing HaSh-m's praises. Purim, then, remains an incomplete Chag, for it will only be completed with the tying of all of history together. Therefore, it is all about process, the unfolding of history, minute by minute.

A holy day indeed!