

The  
**CHASSIDUS**  
**PERSPECTIVE**  
with Reb Yoel Kahn



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## DESCENT INTO SPIRITUAL SIGHTLESSNESS

Following the account of Yosef's death at the end of last week's Parsha, our Parsha begins with the *possuk*, "These are the names of the Jewish people arriving in Mitzrayim." The *possuk* uses the present tense, "arriving" (as opposed to "who arrived"), connoting a fresh arrival. Seemingly, the Jews had arrived in Mitzrayim many years earlier? The Midrash explains that this is in reference to the fact that a new stage of Egyptian travails—"the burden of Mitzrayim"—began with Yosef's death.

A subsequent *possuk* reports the demise of Yosef's entire generation. This, continues the Midrash, is indicative of yet a further level of deterioration, "the enslavement of Mitzrayim."

The descent of the Jews in Mitzrayim can thus be divided into three stages: The initial descent of Yaakov and his seventy descendants, described in Parshas Vayigash, when freedom still prevailed; the "burden" that began with Yosef's death; and the "enslavement" that ensued with the decease of the rest.

### WHICH GAP IS LARGER?

It would appear reasonable to regard the final phase as the worst, in view of the fact that the Jews only underwent horrible subjugation at that point (peaking with Miriam's birth). Until then, although beginning to feel the "burden" of Mitzrayim, they were not subject to physical oppression.

Yet, the Torah does not highlight this development. Instead, the Torah marks the transition from the initial state to the second with Yosef's death, calling it *a new arrival in Mitzrayim*, while the transition from the second state to the third is not viewed as such. Rather, it is merely viewed as a lower phase within the second descent itself.

This demonstrates that the second gap is of greater significance than the last. Why is this so? If the second transition is considered a new descent, shouldn't the final one surely be considered as such?

The Rebbe solves this question by dwelling on the spiritual distinction between Eretz Yisroel and Mitzrayim. The Torah

describes the difference between them by pointing to their varying sources of water supply: Eretz Yisroel was a place of rainfall, while Mitzrayim relied entirely on the waters of the Nile, its *avoda zara*. What is the significance of this phenomenon?

Rain embodies man's powerlessness and dependence on Hashem's benevolence. The person is at the complete mercy of Heaven as to whether water will be supplied or not. Accordingly, Mitzrayim's conspicuous self-reliance indicated its disconnect from G-dliness.

### EXPERIENCE VS. AWARENESS

Yaakov, however, descended to Mitzrayim and blessed Pharaoh that the Nile's waters rise towards him. He did not intend this as a boon to the local idolatrous regard for the river, G-d forbid. Rather, he wanted to demonstrate that the Nile, too, was impacted by holiness; that this bastion of nature was answerable to Heaven as well.

Therefore, throughout the first phase of the Jewish sojourn in Mitzrayim, despite the absence of rain typical of Eretz Yisroel, the fact that the Nile was under Yaakov's sway meant that things hadn't devolved too badly. The presence of Yaakov ensured that Hashem's presence remained revealed.

This continued as long as Yosef was alive as well, as he served as a spiritual conduit for his father's blessings. This is demonstrated by the fact that Yosef was the one who brought Yaakov to Pharaoh, indicating that Yaakov's subsequent blessing was accomplished through him. When Yosef passed away, however, that revelation

faded, and the Jews underwent a marked spiritual decline.

Yet, that generation still remained aware of his impact. As long as there still lived someone from that generation, that legacy was preserved to a certain degree. The revelation may not have been present anymore, but there were those who knew about it and had lived with it. After they all died out as well, however,

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Yaakov blessed Pharaoh that the Nile's waters rise towards him, demonstrating that the Nile, too, was impacted by holiness.

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a new generation arose which “did not *know* Yosef” altogether.

There were thus three successive stages of a spiritual slump: Experience, awareness, and lack of awareness (*re'iyah, yedi'ah, nad lo yada*). The first shift to a state of no rain and a lack of direct dependence on Hashem was fairly drastic, but it was mitigated by the ability to behold and experience the outcome of the blessing bestowed upon the Nile River. Once Yaakov and Yosef had both passed on, that ability died with them, but an *awareness* of the role of holiness remained. Upon the death of the entire generation, that information vanished and with that the last vestiges of spiritual awareness.

All of this would only appear to reemphasize our question: Why does the second phase receive more attention than the third, which is when all evidence of spiritual awareness was actually lost?

## AWARE BUT NOT THERE

Ultimately, however, there is a major difference between experience and awareness (*re'iyah* and *yedi'ah*). When one beholds an entity or idea, it becomes part of him. By contrast, if he merely knows about it by virtue of logical evidence, it is something abstract that is removed from his existence. This means that both one who possesses proofs and one who lacks them are in fact *equal* in their disconnect from the actual matter. By both individuals, the concept is detached from his reality.

While Yaakov and Yosef had preserved the ability to experience G-dliness, even under Egyptian conditions, the shift to a mere *awareness* with their passing was a dramatic change, deserving of being called a new descent. Yaakov's descent from Eretz Yisroel in Parshas Vayigash indeed spelled the loss of a sense of dependence on Hashem. However, the blessing's effect on the Nile meant that G-dliness, albeit a lower level, was still part of their reality. Once that disappeared as well, as our Parsha indicates,

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the Jews experienced a second descent into Mitzrayim.

This descent was merely subdivided into two categories: a time when an awareness of G-dliness still existed, and a time when it did not. Both, however, were part of the same period, a period when G-dliness was detached from their existence.

## A TALE OF REDEMPTION

The two descents into Mitzrayim are each recounted in a different *sefer*. The first *yerida* occurs in Sefer Breishis, while the second occurs in Sefer Shmos. Breishis is known as “*Sefer Ha'yashar*,” an account of the experiences of the just, referring to the Avos and Yosef. The word *yashar* can also mean “direct,” indicating that the life of the Avos

directly reflected G-dliness, as they experienced it in an all-encompassing measure, unimpacted by the world.

Shmos, on the other hand, describes the decline into a state of exile, a time when G-dliness is not experienced (even if it is recognized). At the same time though, it is also the book of redemption.

Although Shmos tells the story of exile, when we work on experiencing G-dliness even within the limitations of *golus*, it is transformed into a tale of redemption, resulting in revelations that surpass even the pre-exile heights.

For further learning see לקו"ש חלק ו' שמות ג'

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