

The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn

Prepared by
Rabbi Yehudah Leib Altein



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THE BIRTHDAY OF KLAL YISRAEL

This Shabbos stands out in two aspects: First of all, it is Shabbos Hagadol, the day when למכה מצרים בכוריהם, the Egyptians were struck through their firstborns. Second, it is the day that gives ko'ach to all the days of the following week, including Yud-Alef Nissan and concluding with the first day of Pesach (which this year falls out on Shabbos).

In the year 5749, Pesach began on a Thursday, and Shabbos Hagadol was Yud Nissan. At the Shabbos farbrengen the Rebbe pointed out that this Shabbos stands out in two aspects (as stated above), and he proceeded to elaborate upon them.

NES GADOL

What was the *nes gadol*, the great miracle, that took place on Shabbos Hagadol?

The Shulchan Aruch relates the story at length: On the tenth day of Nissan, the Yidden selected sheep for the korban pesach and tied them to their bedposts. The Mitzriyim asked what this was all about, and they were told that Hashem would be bringing a tenth makkah, makkas bechoros. When the firstborns heard this ominous prediction, they went to Par'oh and demanded that he let the Yidden free. Par'oh refused, and a civil war erupted between the firstborn Mitzriyim and Par'oh's men.

When you think about, the Yidden didn't seem to gain anything from this occurrence. The firstborns' initiative proved unsuccessful, and the Yidden were not redeemed any earlier as a result. What's the difference to us if (to quote the Rebbe's words) there was *א מלחמה פון איין גוי מיט א צווייטן גוי*, a war between one goy and another?

Furthermore, why is this event termed a "great miracle"? It seems to have been a natural phenomenon: The firstborns saw that the first nine plagues had taken place as Moshe had predicted, and they therefore believed that this one would occur as well. Understandably, they went to Par'oh to demand the Yidden's release and thus save their lives, and when he refused, a battle ensued. Not only does this not appear to be a *great* miracle, no deviation from the natural order seems to have happened at all!

INFLUENCING THE BECHOREI MITZRAYIM

Bnei Yisrael are entrusted with two types of avodah: the avodah of dealing with the world around us and elevating it to kedushah, and a higher level of avodah, in which we stand above and beyond our surroundings.

Making the world a dirah betachtonim—the first type of avodah mentioned above—includes elevating other humans, the category of *medaber*. How do we accomplish this? By influencing others to recognize and fulfill the commandments they were given by Hashem. As the Rebbe spoke on many occasions, we are even obligated to influence non-Jews to fulfill the sheva mitzvos bnei noach (as long as doing so will not lead to danger).

At that point in history, Hashem had given the Mitzriyim a single command: to stop oppressing the Yidden and let them free. As such, influencing them to fulfill this command was a significant mode of conduct, one that was quite relevant to the Yidden.

This is why this miracle was indeed pertinent to the Bnei Yisrael. Through their actions, they influenced their neighbors to obey the will of Hashem—they caused the firstborn Mitzriyim to demand from Par'oh that he fulfill Hashem's command! What's more, they were able to accomplish this without any active efforts on their part. All they did was tie their sheep to their bedposts and explain

what it was all about, and this caused the firstborns to obey Hashem's command *on their own initiative!*

MIRACULOUS TRANSFORMATION

Why was this event considered a miracle, and a great one at that?

The greatest miracle is *is'hapcha chashocah lenehora*, to transform darkness into light. This is the ultimate dirah betachtonim: to take the firstborn Mitzriyim, who epitomize the *strength* and *might* of Mitzrayim, and influence them to fulfill the will of Hashem!

This was indeed *hepech hateva*, a departure from the natural order of Mitzrayim. The Mitzriyim—their firstborns included—were naturally inclined to *oppress* the Yidden. Yet, these very Mitzriyim, who symbolized Mitzrayim at its strongest point, fought (*on their own initiative*) to have Hashem's command be fulfilled!

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if there was *א מלחמה פון איין גוי מיט א צווייטן גוי*, a war between
one goy and another?

LEAPING BEYOND

However, all this relates to the lower level of a Yid's avodah, his avodah to influence his surroundings and elevate them to kedushah. Then there's a higher type of avodah, the avodah of a Yid to connect to Hashem by learning Torah and performing mitzvos, completely disassociated from the world around him.

This avodah is represented by the korban pesach. Pesach means to leap, symbolizing a "leap" from everything mundane to prepare for Yetzi'as Mitzrayim and receiving the Torah. The focus here was not on dealing with the world and elevating it, but on an avodah of much loftier proportions.

This avodah began primarily the next day—on Yud-Alef Nissan. Although the Yidden chose sheep for the korban pesach on the tenth of Nissan, at that point they had other, world-related tasks at hand as well: some had to break themselves away from avodah zarah, while others had to respond to the questions of their Egyptian neighbors. The avodah of the korban pesach in its purest form—a total disassociation from the world—began the next day, on Yud-Alef Nissan.

The navi Yechezkel compares the departure from Mitzrayim to the birth of a child. Although the Yidden actually left Mitzrayim on the fifteenth of Nissan, their "birth" began earlier, when they prepared the korban pesach and fully divested themselves from the mundane—on Yud-Alef Nissan.

TEN + ONE = ELEVEN

These two types of avodah are symbolized by the two dates of 10 and 11 Nissan.

The number 10 denotes Creation in its most perfect form. We see this with regard to the ten sefiros of seder hishtalshelus, which further manifests itself in every physical entity: Each entity consists of three dimensions—length, width, and depth, each of which comprises three parts, its beginning, center, and end. These nine aspects, together with the space that contains the entity, equal 10.

However lofty the ten sefiros may be, they are associated with Creation, as we say in Posach Eliyahu, "You have brought forth... ten sefiros, with which to *direct the worlds*." This represents the avodah of a Yid to elevate the world and transform it into a dirah

for Hashem. Despite the greatness of this avodah, it is limited to *ten*, to seder hishtalshelus.

To create the number 11, however, an additional 1 must be added—the level of *אנת הוא חד ולא בחושבן*, "You are One and above calculations," a level of Elokus that transcends the ten sefiros. This is the idea of Pesach, to "leap" beyond all constraints and prepare to receive the Torah.

PREPARING FOR YUD-ALEF NISSAN

As we near the geulah, this idea—that the birthday of Klal Yisrael begins on Yud-Alef Nissan—is expressed even more: Yud-Alef Nissan is the birthday of the nossi hador.

Accordingly, this Shabbos teaches us that there are two ways we must prepare for this day. First, we must increase our commitment to the Rebbe's demand that we transform the world through mitvzo'im, tanks, shlichus, and so on (including a substantial effort to influence non-Jews as well). All this is our work to elevate *the world*.

But then there is the level of Yud-Alef, a level that transcends Creation. In simple terms this means that we, as Chassidim who merit to possess a revealed

connection with the Rebbe, must increase in studying (and arranging shiurim to study) the Rebbe's Torah, in both Niglah and Chassidus.

Through this we will create a dirah betachtonim, which results from both types of avodah: tachtonim, to elevate the mundane world to Elokus, and dirah, to create a dwelling place for Hashem's essence.

For further study, see Sefer Hasichos 5749, Vol. 1, pp. 384ff.

The departure from Mitzrayim is compared to the birth of a child. Although the Yidden actually left Mitzrayim on 15 Nissan, their "birth" began earlier, on Yud-Alef Nissan.

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merkazanash.com
info@merkazanash.com
347.471.1770