

The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn



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In the *berachah* which concludes *maggid*, we say, "He Who redeemed us and redeemed our forefathers." This implies that there are two distinct acts of redemption: the redemption of our forefathers and our personal redemption. But aren't we simply free because our ancestors were already redeemed? What is the nature of our own redemption?

Earlier in the *haggadah* we stated, "If Hashem would not have taken our forefathers out of Egypt, we, our children and our children's children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt." At first glance, this means simply that if Hashem would not have redeemed our ancestors, we would still be slaves. However, from this perspective, to be free today does not require an act of redemption at this time. All that is necessary is the act of redemption in which Hashem took our fathers out of Egypt!

WHAT'S THE MIRACLE, TO BECOME FREE OR TO BE FREE?

If this were to be the meaning of this statement—that if not for Yetzias Mitzrayim, we would still be slaves—a similar statement can be made about any miracle that occurred to our ancestors. For example, Yitzchak's birth was a miracle, and it occurred on Pesach too. Seemingly we ought to say about this as well, "If Yitzchak would not have been born, we, his descendants, would not exist!"

Why, indeed, do we not make such a statement?

The reason is simple: The miracle of Yitzchak's birth only occurred at one moment in time, after which things continued in the normal vein. This can be compared to an object which will continue to remain in its place if nobody moves it. This doesn't mean that it particularly belongs where it is now, but unless it is relocated, that is where it will stay. Similarly, although Yitzchak's birth was indeed miraculous, once he was born he was just like anyone else, and there was no reason for him not to exist.

With Yetzias Mitzrayim, however, apparently it's our state of redemption *itself* that defies logic. The fact that we are free is miraculous, and therefore this status must constantly be perpetuated.

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CONTINUOUS FREEDOM

But why? Do Jews ought to be slaves? Certainly not! In fact, we weren't slaves before Egypt either! Clearly we aren't slaves by default. It would seem that what is unusual is how we *became* free, not that we *are* free. These miracles that led to our freedom only occurred at one moment in time (similar to the miracle of Yitzchak's birth).

BLOOD AND FROGS

We see this contrast in the miracles which occurred in the process of the redemption from Egypt: blood and the frogs. The only thing miraculous about the frogs was the fact that they appeared, but once they arrived, their existence was normal and natural. This is why a special act was necessary to get rid of them.

The blood, by contrast, was a constant miracle. The Nile never really turned into blood, since it remained water to the Jews, as well as for the Egyptians when they were ready to pay for it. At the same time, it was blood. Therefore, a constant miracle was necessary to uphold this contradictory reality.

There appears to be no difference between the miracle of Yitzchak's birth and the redemption from Egypt. Just as Yitzchak's continued existence once born was unremarkable, the same would seem to be the case with our freedom. Becoming free was clearly miraculous, since no slave could escape Egypt, and suddenly 600,000 men left openly. However, once the miracle of redemption occurred, continuing to be free is our natural state of being.

Yet, stating "Who redeemed *us*" suggests that being redeemed is a miraculous phenomenon that continues today. What does this mean?

FREE IN ESSENCE

At the beginning of the *haggadah* we say, "This year we are slaves; next year we will be free." The Maharal asks: How can we celebrate freedom on Pesach if we are conceding that we are currently enslaved?

He explains that the type of slavery we experienced in Egypt is no longer possible. Once we left Egypt, we are no longer Pharaoh's slaves; instead, we are exclusively subjugated to Hashem. An ordinary person is only free when not enslaved; when he is

enslaved, he is completely subjugated. With a Jew, however, no matter how enslaved he may be, he always retains a sense of freedom.

When we were redeemed from Egypt, we didn't merely revert to our pre-Egyptian state, but embraced a new type of freedom never experienced before. Earlier we were free in the sense of not being slaves, but the possibility of being enslaved in the future still existed. It was freedom in a practical sense, not *true* freedom. Since leaving Egypt, however, we can no longer experience true slavery. Whatever happens, a Jew always retains that sense of freedom.

Hashem removed us from Mitzrayim—from our limitations, and we are now His servants and are connected to Him. Therefore, there is no room for any other slavery; even when we are enslaved, it is only external.

A PERPETUAL MIRACLE

When an elephant stands in the eye of a needle, the question isn't so much how it got there but how it remains there. For a small hole to contain a huge animal is an impossible phenomenon. If it were to remain there, it would be due to a miracle occurring at every moment. A normal object remains wherever it is placed, and its presence there is to be expected. The question is not how it *stays* there but merely how it *got* there. By contrast, an elephant in the eye of a needle is inherently baffling.

This is all in reference to limited creations; how much greater is the distance between the creations and their Creator. We live in bodies below, sometimes even sold to slavery, yet no matter how much we are enslaved, we remain subjugated to Hashem—we always sense a connection to something greater that is beyond our existence. This paradox is a perpetual miracle: while existing in our physical bodies, we are simultaneously connected to Hashem to the extent that we cannot be truly enslaved. This connection of a finite body with an infinite G-d is tantamount to an elephant in the eye of the needle.

"WE WOULD STILL BE SLAVES"

When a stone is thrown, it is propelled by the force of the person's arm. Once the momentum dies, the stone falls back down. Here

as well, it isn't only a question of how the stone took flight; its very elevation is against its nature. In order to remain aloft, the person's energy must continue carrying it at every moment.

However, where does this "miracle" come from? It was initiated in the course of a single moment—the moment the stone was thrown.

Similarly, we say "He redeemed *us*," because our state of true freedom

in each generation requires a continuous act of redemption. However, when was this all initiated? At the moment when Hashem took our forefathers out of Egypt.

This, then, is the meaning of what we say in the *haggadah*. "If Hashem would not have taken our forefathers out of Egypt" means, if He would have redeemed us as a one-time event and not as a continuous redemption. If that would have been the case, "we would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt." We would be no different than everybody else; we would not enjoy true freedom, but would merely be free in a practical sense. The potential for slavery would still exist, and perceptually we would still be slaves to Pharaoh.

The reason we are truly free is because the redemption is continuous. This gives us freedom in a physical sense, and all the more so in a spiritual sense. Pesach is "the time of our freedom." It is a time when we can transcend our limitations; we can feel more like "*avdei Hashem*" and, accordingly, less like "*avdei Paraoth*."

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, pp. 175–178



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