

Parshas Va'eira

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1. The Eternity of The Jewish People Rooted in G'd

The Torah tells us in the Portion of Shemos that Hashem instructed Moshe to present himself to Pharaoh and request that the Jews be released from their bondage. The Torah states, **“Afterwards Moshe and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, ‘So said Hashem(YKVK), the G’d of Israel, Send out My people that they may celebrate for Me in the wilderness.’”** Pharaoh replied, **“Who is Hashem (YKVK) that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Israel!”**

The Midrash tells us that when Pharaoh was told that **“Hashem, the G-d of Israel”** wanted the Jews to be released, he immediately consulted his book of deities but did not locate the deity of **“YKVK (the four letter Name of G’d)-Hashem”** listed. Pharaoh thus responded to Moshe, **“I do not know Hashem.”** Moshe then said to Pharaoh, **“The G’d of the Hebrews (Elokei Ha’Ivrim) happened upon us...”**

It is interesting to note the different appellations for G’d used by Moshe and their significance. When Moshe initially presented himself to Pharaoh he used the appellation **“YKVK – Hashem”** in conjunction with the Jewish people being referred to as **“Yisroel-the Children of Israel.”** However after Pharaoh’s response, Moshe changed his presentation as the agent of the **“G’d of the Hebrews Elokei Ha’Ivrim”**. He no longer used the appellation of **“YKVK,”** and the Jewish people were referred to as the **“Hebrews”** and not **“Yisroel.”** How do we understand this?

In the Portion of Va’eira before the plague of Blood, the Torah states, **“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Go to Pharaoh...You shall say to him, Hashem (YKVK), the G’d of the Hebrews (Elokei Ha’Ivrim), has sent me to you, saying: Send out My people...So says Hashem, Through this shall you know that I am Hashem; behold, with the staff that is in my hand I shall strike the waters that are in the River, and they shall change to blood. The fish that are in the water shall die...”** In this context the appellation for G’d is **“Hashem(YKVK)”**; however, regarding His relationship to the Jewish people He is identified as **“Elokei Ha’Ivrim- G’d of the Hebrews.”** What is the significance of these changes of reference to G’d?

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the title for the monarch of Egypt was always **“Pharaoh.”** This appellation contains the Hebrew letters **“ayin, pay, raish”** which spells the word **“aafar – dust/earth.”** The Egyptian people believed that existence was limited to the physical and the powers at hand/ deities were purely to maintain physical existence. They rejected the belief of a spiritual realm, which transcends physical existence. Thus it is befitting that the king of the Egyptian people, who epitomized the essence of his people, is given the title of **“Pharaoh”** which connotes earthiness and physicality.

The appellation **“YKVK-Hashem,”** which denotes **“I was, I am, and I will be,”** identifies G’d as the Infinite and Omnipotent Being. The concept of an infinite G’d who is not bound by nature and who transcends existence was something that was rejected by Pharaoh. This is the meaning of his initial response to Moshe, **“Who is Hashem (YKVK) that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know Hashem (YKVK), nor will I send out Israel!”** There is no such Being or Power that goes beyond

the finite.

When the Torah refers to the Jewish people as “Yisroel” or “B’nei Yisroel” it is using the appellation that was given to Yaakov after he had wrestled with and defeated the angel. He had dominated the physical and spiritual, thus establishing himself as the one who transcends the constraints of physicality. Yaakov was thus given the name “*Yisroel*” which connotes the eternal person, who has relevance to the infinite. Thus, the Torah initially refers to the Jewish people as “*Yisroel*” within the context of “Hashem(YKVK)” to indicate that the Jewish people have relevance to the Being who is YKVK – the Infinite/Eternal Being. The basis for the Jewish people being an eternal people is because of their relationship and connection to Hashem (YKVK). Just as Hashem cannot be quantified; so too the Jewish people cannot be quantified. As G’d had promised Avraham, the Jewish people will be as numerous as “the stars in the heaven” and “the sands on the seashore.” This quantification of the Jewish people is not in a quantitative sense; but rather, in a qualitative sense. This is the reason the actual number of the Jewish people has always been insignificant (regarding our physical existence) vis-à-vis the nations of the world.

After Pharaoh rejected Moshe’s presentation of his credentials as the agent of “YKVK,” he refers to G’d as “Elokei Ha’Ivrim- G’d of the Hebrews” because Pharaoh could not accept the reality of the Infinite. The appellation “Elokei Ha’Ivrim” simple means “the Power/Deity behind the people who came from the other side of the river (*Ivrim*).” In terms of the Jews as a physical people, Moshe refers to their G’d and them as “Elokei Ha’Ivrim” which was a term and identification that Pharaoh would accept and consider.

In the Portion of Va’eira the Torah uses both appellations for G’d before the onset of the plague of Blood- “**Hashem (YKVK), the G’d of the Hebrews (Elokei Ha’Ivrim)**” to indicate that if Pharaoh did not release the Jewish people (no different than other physical nations) he would be punished by Hashem (YKVK) – the Infinite Being who transcends the laws of nature.

Sforno explains that sorcery and witchcraft can only change the appearance of nature. It cannot change its essence. The sorcerers and magicians of Egypt were able to change the appearance and texture of the water to seem that it had assumed the properties of blood. However, its essence remained water. The Torah states that Moshe had said, “...**I shall strike the waters that are in the River, and they shall change to blood. The fish that are in the water shall die...**” to indicate that when Hashem (YKVK) changed the water to blood, its essence was also changed. Sforno explains that the additional verse, “The fish that are in the water shall die...” is to qualify that the change to blood was not merely visual but an actual transformation.

Moshe initially was communicating to Pharaoh that the Jewish people were physical beings only because of their circumstance; however, their essence was spiritual with relevance to the Infinite and Omnipotent Being – YKVH (Hashem). Despite the fact that Pharaoh could not believe in such a Being, he would be compelled to accept this belief through the plague of Blood – because it is only the Creator of the Universe (the Omnipotent One) who could transform water into blood.

2. Appreciating G’d’s Mercy

The Portion of Va'eira begins, "**V'yadaber Elokim - G'd spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I am Hashem..."**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain, the Portion begins with the appellation of "Elokim" because it connotes the Attribute of Justice. At the end of the previous Portion, the straw subsidy that was provided by the Egyptian government (as one of the materials needed to manufacture bricks) was withdrawn from the Jewish people. However the same quota that was demanded of them until time was not reduced- despite the fact that the Jews themselves needed to gather their own straw for the manufacturing of the bricks. Moshe said to Hashem, "**My Lord why have You done bad to this people? Why have You sent me?**" Hashem responded to Moshe "**Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh..."**"

The Midrash tells us that the word "Now" in the verse infers that Moshe would only "now" witness the redemption and exodus from Egypt but will not merit to bring the Jewish people into the Promised Land/ Canaan. Because Moshe had no right to express himself in the manner that he had, he forfeited the right to enter into the Land. Thus, Moshe is addressed by G'd as "Elokim" to indicate he was being judged by the Attribute of Justice. Additionally the term "v'yadaber- spoke" is a more formal manner of speech than "vayomer-said." G'd was communicating to Moshe in a most formal manner.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the verse which concludes with the words "I am Hashem," indicates that Hashem is the G'd of Mercy. Meaning what Moshe had depicted and understood as having done "bad" to the Jewish people, as an expression as His Attribute of Justice, was in fact an expression of His Attribute of Mercy. The Jewish people were meant to be in Egypt for 400 years as G'd had said to Avraham our Patriarch. However, because of the intensity of suffering, the bondage was reduced to 210 years. Thus, the withdrawal of the straw subsidy was in fact an expression of G'd's Mercy because it shortened their stay in Egypt. Moshe should have recognized this as mercy and not questioned G'd as he had done.

The Midrash Tanchuma explains that Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov did not question Hashem although He did not reveal His Name (YKVK) to them. However, Hashem did reveal His Name (YKVK) to Moshe and he did question Him. Thus because of this failing, Moshe would only witness the initial redemption but would not enter into the Promised Land. The Midrash concludes, "Moshe was judged with the Attribute of Justice – as the verse states, "**V'yadaber Elokim - G'd spoke to Moshe..."**" However the Jewish people were judged with the Attribute of Mercy as the verse states, "I am Hashem." Meaning, although Moshe was not worthy of the Attribute of Mercy, nevertheless, the ultimate redemption would only come through the Attribute of Mercy.

One could think that the Jewish people, although they are undeserving, succeed because of their leaders. However, this is not the case. It is true that without a person who did not have the qualifications of Moshe Rabbeinu, the redemption could not have taken place. However, Moshe was only able to evolve into the special person that he was only because he was needed to be the one to take the Jews out of Egypt. Since Jewish people needed to be redeemed they needed a qualified Redeemer. The emphasis is not on the Redeemer – it is on the merit and worthiness of those who are to be redeemed. The Jewish people themselves have merit because of their Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov) and thus Hashem will always provide them with a

qualified Redeemer.

3. The Objective of the Plagues

The Torah states regarding the Plague of Frogs, **“Hashem said to Moshe, Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers...and raise up the frogs over the land of Egypt.’”** The Torah tells us that the frogs had pervaded all of Egypt – the houses, the land, and even entered into the innards of the Egyptian people. The plague reached an intolerable level. Pharaoh summoned Moshe to request of him to remove the plague. Moshe agreed to do so saying, **“It shall be as you requested – so that you will know that there is none like Hashem, our G’d.”** Meaning, the purpose of the Plague of Frogs and its subsequent removal was so that Pharaoh should “know” that there is no Being that is comparable to Hashem.

The Torah reveals the objective for the Plague of Wild Beasts and its subsequent removal. The Torah states, **“...I shall incite against you...the swarm of wild beasts...so that you will know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land...”** Additionally the Torah states regarding the Plague of Hail, **“...For this time I shall send all My plagues against your heart...so that you shall know that there is none like Me in all the world...”** The Torah makes it a point to continuously use the phrase “so that you shall know ...” It does not state, “so that you shall understand that I am G’d...” Evidently there is a difference between “knowing” and “understanding.”

“Understanding” is based on intellectual reasoning and comprehension. One can develop an understanding of something through a process of reasoning. However if it should be demonstrated that one’s understanding or evaluation of something was incorrect, based on false reasoning, then it would cause him to change his understanding of fact. Because “Understanding” is based on evaluation, it is thus subject to conflict of interest. However, the term “knowing” is applied and utilized in a situation that is not based on intellectual evaluation and reasoning; but rather, on fact. For example, one “knows” that if he were to put his hand into fire he would be burned. There is no need for the intellectual process to be utilized to come upon this reality. Thus, it is not subject to conflict of interest.

The Torah uses the term “know” and not “understand” regarding the objective of the plagues, in order to communicate that G’d’s obviousness in each one of these instances was at such a revealed level that it was established as fact. Thus, G’d’s Omnipotence could not be denied. One did not require any level of intellectualism or reasoning to accept this truth.

Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states, “Rebbe says, “If one considers these three things he will never sin. You should know what is above you. There is a seeing eye, a listening ear, and all of your actions are recorded in a ledger...” It is interesting to note that the term used by Rebbe is not “you should understand” but rather “you should know.” Meaning, if one “knows” that there is a seeing eye, a listening ear, and that all of one’s actions are recorded, it is only then that one will not sin. One must live every moment of his life “knowing” that G’d and His involvement in creation is fact. If one internalizes this as a reality, he will not sin. It is only when one believes

this on a conceptual level and not as fact/reality, that one's conflicts of interests could allow him to see it differently. Chazal also tell us, "You should know before whom you stand." Here again, the term "know" is used rather than understand.

The objective of the plagues of Egypt was to reveal and present to the Jewish people and the Egyptians that G'd is a reality and His omnipotence is fact. King David lived every moment of his life "knowing" that there is a G'd. G'd was always before his eyes as it is stated in Tehillim (Psalms), "Hashem is always before my eyes." Anything that is less than "knowing" is subject to one's conflict of interest.

4. G'd- the Infinite

The Torah states, **"Say to the Children of Israel: 'I am Hashem (YKVK), and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall be a G-d to you...'"** G'd said to Moshe to inform the Jewish people that He was going to free them from the enslavement of Egypt. In this verse the four expressions of redemption are mentioned. Meaning, the Jewish people will experience four levels of extrication before they are fully redeemed.

Mahral of Prague z'tl in his work *Gevuras Hashem* explains that the number four signifies being totally opposed. When one is surrounded on all four sides, one has no route of escape. For example, the Four Kings who had taken Lot (Avraham's nephew) as a captive, had done so only as a ruse to entrap Avraham to destroy him. The Four Kings totally opposed Avraham's existence. The exile that was decreed upon the Jewish people by G'd in the Covenant between the Parts was, that the Jews shall be "strangers in a land that was not their own" for a period of 400 years (which is a multiple of four). The Jewish people are destined to experience four exiles until the end of time – Babylon, Persian/Medes, Greek, and Roman. Maharal also explains that there is another connotation of the number four, which is the loss of identity- because one is totally surrounded and subsumed by his situation. For example, a slave exists only for his master and has no value or identity unto himself, as the Jewish people in Egypt.

G'd said to Moshe to communicate to the Jewish people the four expressions of redemption, which will manifest themselves through the four-letter Name of G'd – YKVK. The only way the Jew could be extricated from his state of bondage, which is represented through the number 400, is only through the four expressions of redemption emanating from YKVK.

The Torah tells us that G'd did not reveal His Name of YKVK to the Patriarchs- He only revealed Himself through "Keil Shakai." However Moshe, the Redeemer, was privy to the Name of G'd – YKVK- which connotes G'd as the Infinite Being who transcends all existence. Only through the Name YKVK were the revealed miracles (in Egypt) were able to come about. These miracles were a disruption of the natural order. Just as YKVK is the infinite, which cannot be contained or quantified, so too the revealed miracles that emanate from that source cannot be concealed and thus present themselves in the most obvious manner.

The Torah tells us that Moshe addressed the Jewish people using the four-letter Name of Hashem in conjunction with the four expressions of redemption, as he was commanded to do. The Torah states, **“So Moshe spoke accordingly to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of wind (*kotzer ruach*) and hard work.”** Because the Jewish people were overwhelmed and limited as a result of the intense hard labor, they were not able to relate to the reality of the infinite – YKVK. The Jewish people were only able to internalize the reality of G’d’s unlimited ability (YKVK) was by witnessing and experiencing the revealed miracles that were to take place in Egypt.

The Jewish people who are destined to experience the four exiles until the end of time, will only be extricated from them through revealed miracles, which emanate from YKVK. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that the miracles at the end of time will overshadow the miracles of Egypt. It is only through that level of revelation, that the Jewish people will be extricated eternally from exile.

We quote a verse from Tehillim (Psalms) in our daily prayers, “Some with chariots, and some with horses, but we- in the Name of Hashem (YKVK), our G’d, we call out.” The nations of the world establish the setting for the four exiles. They are the 70 nations of the world who have always opposed the existence of the Jewish people. The significance of the number 70 is the natural order. The natural order came about through the seven days of Creation. The Jewish people arm themselves, as King David states, by calling out with the Name of Hashem (YKVK). Thus they transcend the natural order. The armaments and the might of the nations of the world are irrelevant because their function only has meaning on the natural level. The Jewish people transcend and supersede the constrictions of nature because they call out and identify with the Infinite – YKVK. King David states in Tehillim, “I will smash my enemies with the Name of Hashem...” It is only when one we attach and identify ourselves with YKVK that we can overcome and suppress the opposition of the world.

It is true that the Torah tells us that the Jewish people are required to maintain a standing army; however, as Ramban explains this is only because of the principle- “one does not rely on miracles.” However, the power behind our physicality is the Name of Hashem and not our own physical prowess. Every Jew must understand that our power emanates from G’d - the Infinite Being YKVK and not from ourselves. If this becomes our reality, then we can transcend and subdue the opposition of the world, which is bound by nature.

5. The Solution to Our Problem *(from shemos)*

The Torah states, **“During those days, it happened that the king of Egypt died, and the Children of Israel groaned because of the work and they cried out (*vayizaaku*). Their outcry (*vayaal shavaasam*) because of the work went up to G’d. G’d heard their groaning (*naakasam*), and G’d remembered His covenant with Avraham, Yitzchak, and with Yaakov...”** The Torah uses three different terms for “crying out” – *vayizaaku*, *vayaal shavaasam*, *naakasam*. Seemingly each of these expressions conveys a different meaning.

Sforno explains the term “*vayizaaku*” refers to the crying out of the Jewish people from the physical pain that they endured because of the bondage. The term “*vayaal shavaasam*” was an outcry to Hashem not emanating from teshuvah (repentance) or tefillah (prayer) but rather they cried out to G’d to alleviate their difficulties. The term “*naakasam*”, which G’d had heard and was attentive to, refers to the sincere teshuvah and tefillos (prayers) of the tzaddikim (righteous people) of the generation, who were a small minority of the Jewish people. Their outcry was received by Hashem. G’d heard and responded to this outcry “*naakasam*” and thus remembered the covenant.

The reason the Jewish people went into exile in Egypt was because Hashem had decreed that the offspring of Avraham, our Patriarch should be exiled. As it is stated, “You shall know that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not their own. There, they will be enslaved and afflicted for 400 years. Ultimately they will go out from there with great wealth.” Seemingly Hashem had said to Avraham that after 400 years the Jews would be redeemed, regardless of their circumstance. That was communicated to him in the “covenant between the parts.” The redemption of the Jewish people was seemingly inevitable and not contingent on any precondition. However, as Sforno explains, G’d only remembered the covenant because of the sincere teshuvah and tefillah of the tzaddikim. Seemingly without the teshuvah and tefillos of the handful of tzaddikim, Hashem would have not recalled the covenant that He had made with Avraham. How do we understand this?

The Midrash tells us that the Jewish people merited redemption because of three reasons: they did not change their language, their manner of dress, and they retained their Jewish names—thus fully retaining their Jewish identity. Seemingly, if the Jewish people had been acculturated to the point that they would have shed these trappings of their identity, they would have not merited redemption. How do we understand this despite the guarantee that was given to Avraham our Patriarch?

The verse in Yechezkel (which we recite at the Seder) tells us that before the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt, they were “naked.” Meaning, they were devoid of spirituality because they did not perform any mitzvos. It was because of this that Hashem had provided the Jewish people with two mitzvos – the mitzvah of circumcision and the mitzvah of the Pascal lamb. The verse states, “Through your bloods, you shall live.” The “bloods” mentioned in the verse is referring to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Pascal lamb. Thus, in the merit of circumcision and the Pascal sacrifice the Jewish people merited redemption from Egypt.

Chazal tell us that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of the righteous women. The women had not despaired from redemption and thus encouraged their husbands to procreate, despite the difficulty of the bondage. It was because of these righteous woman that there was a Jewish people.

Why were the Jewish people redeemed from Egypt? Was it because they did not shed their Jewish identity? Was it because of the righteous women? Or was it because of the two mitzvos that were given to them? Or was it because of G’d’s guarantee to Avraham our Patriarch?

It is true that Hashem had promised Avraham that his offspring would ultimately be redeemed from bondage. However, if those offspring were to assimilate and be fully acculturated into the Egyptian society, they would be bereft of any spirituality. Thus, not having any relevance to redemption. The value and purpose of redemption was for the Jewish people to receive the Torah at Sinai. If however the Jewish people had completely lost their capacity for spirituality, then there would be no basis for redemption. However, because they retained their language, dress, and Jewish names it was an indication that they had a capacity and relevance for spirituality. Their identity only addresses the capacity of the Jewish people vis-à-vis spirituality. However were they worthy of redemption? The Jewish people in Egypt were idolaters and devoid of any mitzvos. They needed a spiritual posture. Thus, Hashem gave them the opportunity to perform the mitzvos of circumcision and the bringing of the Pascal offering in order to give them spiritual worthiness.

It was because the tzaddikim of the generation cried out with sincere teshuvah and tefillah that Hashem was attentive to the covenant. At that time, the covenant had no relevance to the remainder of the Jewish people because they were disinterested in spiritual matters. The prayers and teshuvah of the tzaddikim activated the Mercy of Hashem so that the covenant should be considered relevant. The outcries from pain and suffering were not enough to activate the Attribute of Mercy. The Jewish people needed to recognize the gravity of their situation and needed to change.

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that Yitzchak, our Patriarch, enacted the afternoon prayer (mincha). This is derived from the verse which tells us that Yitzchak “went (*la’suach*) into the field.” The Gemara explains that the word “*la’suach*” means “*sicha* – speaking,” which implies tefillah (prayer). Ritvah (earlier commentator) explains in his commentary on Tractate Avodah Zorah, “It is known that tzaddikim pray on behalf of their generation.” Thus, Yitzchak prayed on behalf of his generation.

The Jewish people are currently in a difficult situation. The vast majority of the Jews are unaffiliated and not connected to their Judaism. There is a rampant level of assimilation in our society. Relatively speaking, the handful of Jews who do observe the mitzvos and appreciate the immeasurable importance of Torah have a great responsibility to their fellow. Just as Hashem heard and responded to the sincere teshuvah and tefillah of the minority of the Jewish people in Egypt (the tzaddikim); so too will He respond to our prayers and teshuvah. It is only through our sincere repentance and prayer that the Attribute of Mercy will be activated and Hashem will bring about the ultimate redemption.

6. The Value of Doing a Mitzvah in the Most Perfect Manner (from Shemos)

The Torah tells us that when Moshe returned to Egypt, he had not yet circumcised his youngest son. The Torah states, “**It was on the way, in the lodging, that Hashem encountered him (Moshe) and sought to kill him.**” Rashi cites Chazal, “We had learned that Reb Yosi had

said, "It is not (G'd forbid) that Moshe Rabbeinu had not taken the mitzvah of circumcision seriously, but rather it was because of the danger of traveling that he did not circumcise his son." If Moshe had circumcised his son, before he had left Midian, he would have had to delay his journey for three days. G'd had commanded him to go to Egypt immediately. Thus, before his departure from Midian, Moshe was not able to circumcise his youngest child. If this is so then why did Moshe deserve to be killed when he came to his lodging on the way to Egypt? The Midrash answers- that because Moshe had delayed the circumcision for a moment, by giving priority to his lodging needs (before the circumcision), he deserved to die. It was only because his wife Zipporah attended to the circumcision of their son was he spared.

The Torah tells us that because the astrologers and stargazers of Egypt had seen in the stars that the Redeemer of Israel was to be born, Pharaoh decreed that all male Jewish children should be thrown into the Nile. The only person who was qualified to be the Redeemer of Israel was Moshe. Thus, in an attempt to prevent redemption from taking place, the decree was issued.

It is interesting to note that the redemption and exodus from Egypt was a prerequisite to the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. If the Torah ultimately would have not been given at Sinai, the objective of existence would not have been realized. The sole purpose of creation was for the Jewish people to receive the Torah at Sinai. If the Jewish people would have rejected the Torah at Sinai, the world would have reverted back to a state of pre-existence. Thus, if Moshe was killed, the Jewish people would not have been redeemed. Thus, the Torah would not have been given at Sinai. Consequently the world would have come to an end. Seemingly, for a momentary hesitation regarding circumcision, G'd was willing to kill Moshe and not allow the world to realize its purpose. How do we understand this?

The Midrash Tanchuma states, "The Prophet says, "They betrayed Hashem and bore strange children. The Jewish people did not circumcise their children. It was because of this, that they would be consumed with new decrees. This is to teach us that when Yosef passed away they stopped circumcising themselves. They had said, 'We want to be like the Egyptians.'" When Hashem saw this, the special love He had for them was negated." The consequence of Hashem negating His love for the Jewish people was replaced by the hatred of the Egyptians. As the Torah tells us a new mandate came upon the Jewish people and thus they were subjected to bondage. Why was the ceasing of circumcision a cause for the negation of G'd's love for the Jewish people?

The Midrash tells us that there was a debate between Rebbe Akiva and Tornistropis, the Roman governor of Jerusalem (who was the one who ultimately put Rebbe Akiva to death). Rebbe Akiva had asked Tornistropis, "Whose accomplishment is more perfect – G'd's or man's?" Tornistropis responded, "G'd's accomplishment is more perfect." Rebbe Akiva said, "I must disagree. Man's accomplishment is more perfect. A farmer plants a seed and it grows into a wheat kernel. He then threshes the wheat and mills it into flour, which ultimately is made into bread. What is more perfect the kernel of wheat created by G'd or the bread which is the finished product created by man? – You see, that man's accomplishment is more perfect." Tornistropis responded, "You Jews believe in G'd and His perfection. If a child is born with a foreskin as G'd's creation, then why do you remove it through circumcision? How do you tamper with the perfection of G'd's creation in this manner?" Rebbe Akiva answered, "You do not understand. The world and man were created imperfect so that man should have the opportunity to perfect himself and the world. Thus, the removal of the foreskin is perfecting man."

If one believed that the world is purely physical then the concept of perfecting the world in a spiritual context has no relevance. Removal of the foreskin would be considered mutilation and not an act of perfection. Thus, the act of circumcision is a reflection of one's belief. If one believes that the world is fundamentally spiritual then one must believe in circumcision. The Egyptians believed that the world is limited to the physical. When the Jewish people chose to stop circumcising themselves, and exist as the Egyptian people, they were in effect proclaiming that existence was limited to the physical. Thus, rejecting the fact that the physical is only a means for the spiritual. The Jewish people thus negated and terminated their relationship with G'd. Consequently, the Jews were no longer worthy of G'd's love, because of their estrangement, and thus were subject to the bondage of Egypt.

Moshe was returning to Egypt as the Redeemer of a people who had chosen not to circumcise themselves. As mentioned, circumcision is an expression of one's belief in spirituality. If Moshe was to fulfill his role as the Redeemer, he must fulfill the mitzvah of circumcision in the most perfect way. As a result of his momentary hesitation, and not giving circumcision priority over everything else, G'd wished to kill him. Moshe had to be perfect in the area where the Jewish people had failed.

We understand from all that we have discussed that one needs great merit in order to survive exile as a Jewish people. The Jewish people have been in a state of exile for over 2,000 years because of our failing of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred between Jews). In order to merit the ultimate redemption, we need to correct this failing in the most perfect way. Moshe only came into existence as that special individual, to be the Redeemer. However, because of his momentary hesitation he did not perform the mitzvah of circumcision in the most perfect way and G'd was prepared to allow the world to revert to a state of pre-existence.