

Presented by

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## ***1. Love of Your Fellow man is the Determining Factor***

The Torah states at the beginning of the Sefer Shemos, **“Yosef died, and all his brothers and that entire generation. The Children of Yisroel were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong - very, very much so; and the land became filled with them. A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef. He said to his people, “Behold! The people, the Children of Yisroel, are more numerous and stronger than we. Come, let us outsmart it lest it become numerous and it may be that if a war will occur, it too may join our enemies, and wage war against us...”** Rashi cites the argument between Rav and Shmuel as to whether or not the “new king” in Egypt was the same Pharaoh who knew Yosef, but who instituted a new mandate and acted as if he did not know him. Or, in fact, the Pharaoh was indeed a “new king” who did not know Yosef. In any case, this Pharaoh told his people that they must be “wisened” to the Jewish people because they had become numerous and that they may join with its enemies against Egypt.

It is difficult to understand how Pharaoh or the Egyptian people would actually believe this. It was Yosef, the Viceroy, who actually saved Egypt from extinction during the time of the great famine. It was Yosef’s plan and control over the grain that caused Egypt to become the wealthiest nation in the world because everyone turned to Egypt to purchase grain. The Nile would rise in the presence of the Pharaoh only because of the special blessing given to him by Yaakov. After all of the contributions Yaakov and Yosef made to Egypt how is it possible that Pharaoh would make a decree against the Jewish people and suspect that the same people who saved Egypt would join with its enemies against it?

There is a Positive Commandment in the Torah that one must love his fellow as he loves himself. The Chofetz Chaim writes in his work Shmiras HaLoshon (Guarding One’s Tongue), that if one truly loved his fellow man, he would not speak negatively about him. In addition, there is a mitzvah to give someone the benefit of the doubt. If a Jew truly loved another Jew, he would try in every possible way to put him in the most positive light. If one speaks negatively about his fellow Jew or does not give him the benefit of the doubt, it is a clear indication that he does not love him as he loves himself. All difficulties between man and man stem from the failure to observe this Positive Commandment.

Given everything that Yosef and his family had done for Egypt, one would expect that the Egyptians would be beholden and have an exceptional love for the Jewish people. The fact that Pharaoh and the Egyptian people could suspect the Jews would join their enemies is only an indication that they truly lacked the proper love and appreciation for the Jewish people. The Egyptians did not have the capacity to appreciate what the Jews had done for them. We see that this is inherent in the character of the Egyptian.

After Yosef had interpreted the dream of the wine steward while in prison, the man was subsequently released. Yosef had asked that he “remember” him and “mention” him to Pharaoh so that he too would be released from prison. The Torah tells us that the moment the wine steward was released, “he forgot Yosef”. Rashi cites the verse in Tehillim (Psalms) which states, “Fortunate is the man who puts his faith in Hashem and does not turn to the arrogant.” The Midrash explains that “the arrogant” is referring to the Egyptian. The Egyptian does not have the capacity to appreciate the kindness that was done to him and thus cannot be relied upon to reciprocate.

Even if the Pharaoh was truly a “new king” who did not personally know Yosef, there is no way that he could have ignored the historical recording that Yosef and Yaakov had saved Egypt. It is obvious again that he did not have the capacity to appreciate what the Jewish people had done for Egypt. Thus, he was able to enact new and harsh decrees against the Jews and impose upon them an overbearing bondage.

The reason a person chooses to behave as a rasha (evil person) is that he does not appreciate the goodness that is bestowed upon him by Hashem. If one truly appreciated that he was the beneficiary of G-d’s Kindness, he would be completely beholden and would behave differently. If Hashem continuously provides us with life and all other amenities, then how is it possible to have difficulty in carrying out His Will. The answer is obvious - it is only due to a lack of appreciation that causes one to fall short of serving Hashem selflessly.

## ***2. What Guarantees the Survival of the Jewish People***

The Torah tells us that after Yosef and that entire generation passed away, the Jewish people “were fruitful, teemed (*va’yishretzu*), increased and became strong”. The Torah continues to tell us that a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef. The increase of the number of Jews in a short period caused Pharaoh to be concerned that they may align with Egypt’s enemies and drive them from the land. On a literal level, we could see that what fueled Pharaoh’s concern was the increase in the number of Jews in the land. However, we can understand it differently.

The extreme change in the status of the Jewish people only occurred after Yosef and that entire generation passed away. The Torah tells us that seemingly it was only after the Jews began *va’yishretzu* (teeming) that Pharaoh became concerned.

We find that after Yosef was sold into slavery and ultimately was purchased by Potiphar, he quickly ascended to become the head of his master’s household. At that time, the Torah states, “**Now Yosef was handsome of form and handsome of appearance. After these things, his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Yosef and she said, “Lie with me.”** Simply one could say that the reason his mistress took notice of him was because of his beauty and handsome appearance. However, Rashi explains it differently based on the Midrash. The Midrash says that when Yosef

became the head of his master's household he began to focus on his looks by beautifying his eyes and grooming his hair. Chazal tell us that Hashem said that Yosef's behavior at that moment was inappropriate because he was paying attention to his beauty when his father Yaakov was grieving over his loss. Hashem said, "Because you were insensitive to your father's pain, I will set your master's wife upon you." The Torah is telling us that if it were not for the inappropriateness of Yosef's behavior (despite his beauty), his mistress would not have taken any interest in him. It was only because of his spiritual failing that Hashem allowed her to take notice.

In a similar vein, one can now understand Pharaoh's concern with the increase in the Jewish population. Pharaoh had a sense of insecurity because Hashem *allowed* him to perceive the Jewish people in a suspicious manner.

Sforno explains "*va'yishretzu*" to mean that after the generation of Yosef had passed away, the Jewish people began to behave inappropriately – similar to rodents (pejorative term for improper behavior). The Midrash tells us that the bondage of the Jewish people started only after they stopped circumcising themselves. As long as the Jewish people circumcised themselves, they were not subject to slavery. However, when the generation of Yosef passed away, the Jewish people in Egypt no longer wished to value their spirituality, which is represented through the circumcision (sign of the Holy Covenant). It was at this time that they were subjected to bondage.

Under normal circumstances, Pharaoh would not have felt threatened by the sudden increase in the Jewish population. However, because the Jews began to abandon their spirituality, Pharaoh began to take notice. The justification for Pharaoh's behavior was that the spirituality of the Jew had eroded to such a degree that he no longer identified them with their forbearers. Because Pharaoh could no longer recognize the spiritual influence of Yosef and that generation, he was able to justify the bondage.

The Gemara in Tractate Chulin says that the only time an animal attacks a human being is when the animal sees the person as an animal (commonality with itself). However as long as the animal is able to sense the "tzelem Elokeem – the Image of G-d" (the spirituality) of the person, the animal will not attack. It is only when the human being is put on the same level as the animal will he be subject to attack.

Similarly, the non-Jew becomes insecure when he perceives the Jew on his level. If the Jew retains his spirituality, then he does not have commonality with the non-Jew and therefore Hashem will not allow him to be despised. However, if the Jew should abandon his Judaism and attempt to assimilate with the non-Jew (even culturally), he will eventually become despised and rejected by the non-Jew. This is why Pharaoh became concerned with the increase in the Jewish population and thus instituted the bondage to subordinate and control the Jew. This unfortunate reality has repeated itself many times throughout history.

### ***3. One's Basic Purpose***

The Torah tells us that Pharaoh decreed that all the Jewish newborn males should be thrown into the Nile. When Moshe was born, his mother Yocheved hid him until she could no longer conceal her son. In an attempt to save him from the Egyptians, the Torah states, “...**she (Yocheved) took for him (Moshe) a box fashioned of balsa wood *gomeh* and smeared it with clay and pitch; she placed the child into it and placed it among the reeds at the bank of the River.**”

It is interesting to note that the Torah is very specific about the material from which the box was made. Regarding Noach, the Torah tells us specifically that gopher wood was used to build the Ark. Rashi cites Chazal that the reason the Torah tells us this is because it is an allusion to the fact that the world will be destroyed by the sulfuric (*gufris*) water. However, regarding Moshe’s box, what is the significance of identifying the material from which it is made?

There is an opinion cited in the Midrash (which is the opinion of Reb Elazar) who explains that the reason the Torah specifies the wood of the box is to tell us that it is of inferior quality. This teaches us that a tzaddik values his money to a great degree. Yocheved chose to purchase the most inferior quality wood because of the degree to which she valued Hashem’s blessing, i.e. her personal assets. The question is how do we understand this? How is it possible that she was concerned with cost of the wood when it was a question of saving the life of her child?

The answer is that Yocheved was convinced that Moshe would survive the water regardless of the quality of the wood that was used, since he was to be the Redeemer of Israel. Miriam, Moshe’s sister, had shared a prophecy with her father that Yocheved would give birth to the Redeemer. In addition, Chazal tell us that when Moshe was born, the house was illuminated by his presence and he was able to speak although he was only a newborn. It was evident to his parents that he was destined to be The Redeemer.

Yocheved understood that Moshe would have survived even if she had placed him directly into the water because she knew that Hashem would perform the miracle necessary to ensure Moshe’s survival. If this is the case, then why place Moshe in a box at all, regardless of its minimal cost?

Noach did not necessarily need to build an ark to survive the Great Flood because Hashem could have performed a miracle by suspending him and all the other creatures above the waters. Ramban explains, the reason Noach was instructed to build an ark was so that Hashem could bring about the miracle of his survival (and all that had accompanied him) in a concealed manner. If all of existence had survived through a revealed miracle, it would have been difficult to deny G-d’s existence and thus free choice would have been diminished.

Yocheved understood that she had to conceal the miracle of Moshe’s survival. Thus, it was necessary to fashion a box in order to cloak the miracle. Therefore, inferior wood was sufficient and spending more than what was absolutely necessary would have been considered wasteful. The Torah tells us that the basket was made of *gomeh* in order to inform us that Yocheved was aware of the destiny of her child.

From the time of his birth, Moshe understood that he was the Redeemer. The Torah tells us that when Moshe became an adult in the house of Pharaoh, he went out of the palace to see the suffering of his brothers (the Jewish people) and he came upon an Egyptian beating a Jew. Moshe first looked around, then killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. The reason Moshe killed the Egyptian was because he had raped the wife of the Jew who he was beating. How could Moshe kill the Egyptian without taking into consideration the consequences of his actions? If it were found out that he had killed the Egyptian, he would be forced to flee Egypt or even be killed. The answer is – Moshe knew that the Egyptians could not kill him. He knew that Hashem would protect him because he was destined to take the Jewish people out of Egypt.

The fact is, unlike Moshe, most people do not know their mission in life. Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) says in “Koheles” that the day of one’s death is greater than the day of one’s birth. This is because when one dies, his life has shown its purpose (if he has succeeded). However, at the time of birth, one does not know how life will evolve and unfold. Although one’s future is unknown because the course of our lives is dictated by our free choice, we do know that there is a baseline within which every Jew must operate. Regardless of who we are as individuals, we know that we are all obligated in the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvos. The Torah establishes the guidelines for every aspect of our lives and in that respect we know who we are as Moshe understood who he was. Therefore, we too should not compromise in our behavior.

#### ***4. The Far-Reaching Effects of a Good Deed***

The Torah tells us that Yocheved (referred to as Shifrah) and Miriam (referred to as Puah) were the head midwives supervising the delivery of all Jewish children. The Torah states, **“The King of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was Shifrah and the name of the second was Puah - and he said, ‘in your assisting the Hebrew women at childbirth and you see on the birthstool, if it is a son you are to kill him, and if it is a daughter, she shall live.’ But the midwives feared G-d and they did not do as the King of Egypt spoke to them ... G-d did good to the midwives - and the people increased and became very strong. And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made houses for them.”**

The Torah tells us, **“G-d did good to the midwives - and the people increased and became very strong. And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made houses for them.”** Rashbi cites Chazal who explain that the *“batim - houses”* which are referred to in the pasuk are the houses of the *Kehunah* (priesthood) and *Leviyah* (tribe of Levi), which emanated from Yocheved, and the house of Malchus (kingship/royalty), which emanated from Miriam. However, the pasuk also interjects here that the Jewish people increased and became strong. Seemingly, this phrase is a digression from what the Torah is telling us about the good that G-d had done for the midwives. How do we understand this?

The worth of a good deed is based on the far-reaching effects that it has. For example, if one performs a good deed but it has limited impact then its value is also limited. However, in the case of the midwives, since Yocheved and Miriam feared Hashem, He wanted their sacrifice to have the greatest impact and therefore He wanted to maximize the value of their good deed. Because the

midwives did not follow the orders of Pharaoh (which was considered a sacrifice since their lives could have been taken for defying his directive), the children that they saved increased in number and became strong.

The result of the midwives not killing the children thus became unlimited since the increase in the Jewish people was unlimited. Therefore, the reward which they received, namely the “*batim-houses*” of the *Kehunah* (priesthood), *Leviyah* (tribe of Levi), and *Malchus* (kingship), was unending.

Hashem did “good” for the midwives by imbuing their actions with even greater value. Yocheved and Miriam merited such special families because their sacrifice, demonstrated by their fear of G-d, brought about far-reaching effects. In order for the Jewish people to be able to receive the Torah at Sinai, there needed to be 600,000 Jewish males above the age of 20. Without this minimum, the Torah would not have been given at Sinai. It is because of the sacrifice of the midwives that the population increased to the necessary number and the Jewish people were able to receive the Torah - which is the purpose of the redemption from Egypt (to become G-d’s people). It is because of these incalculable and valuable effects that Hashem rewarded the good deeds of Yocheved and Miriam with such special families.

## ***5. Greatness Lies in What is not Obvious***

The Torah states, **“The minister of Midian (Yisro) had seven daughters; they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father’s sheep. The shepherds came and drove them away. Moshe got up and saved them and watered their sheep. They came to Reuel (Yisro) their father. He said, ”How could you come so quickly today?” They replied, ”An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds, and he even drew water for us and watered the sheep.” He said to his daughters, “Then where is he? Why did you leave the man? Summon him and let him eat bread!”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that when Yisro said, “let him eat bread” he meant that Moshe should be considered as a candidate for marriage to one of his daughters. The question is why did Yisro feel that Moshe was worthy to be a prospective husband for one of his daughters? Were there no other available men for marriage in the Midian community?

Yisro, the sheik of Midian, was not a person of ordinary ability. He was an individual with exceptional understanding and ability and was therefore sensitive to many events and issues that most were not. As we see, Yisro heard (as the entire world had) that G-d had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt. Yisro was affected by this information differently than the rest of the world. He was compelled to leave his glory to join the Jewish people in the desert. When Yisro heard what “the Egyptian man” (Moshe) had done for his daughters he immediately appreciated the specialness of Moshe and understood that he was a person of unique character.

Although Moshe went out of his way to assist Yisro’s daughters, he nevertheless did not seek any remuneration or acknowledgement. This level of behavior was something out of the ordinary. Under normal circumstances, the individual who offered this level of assistance would have

returned with the daughters so their family would understand and appreciate what he had done for them. Even though he put his life in jeopardy when fending off the attackers and subsequently watered Yisro's flocks, he walked away without any interest in acknowledgement. Yisro, being a highly astute individual, immediately recognized Moshe's unequalled quality of person. He therefore asked his daughters, "why did you not bring him back?" – he was a qualified husband for one of them.

The Midrash Tanchuma states, "Hashem does not give greatness to a person unless he has been checked and tested in an insignificant area. It is only then that Hashem causes him to ascend to greatness." The Midrash gives the example of two world-renown individuals: Dovid HaMelech (King David) and Moshe Rabbeinu. Dovid as a shepherd would take his flock into the desert to graze, because he was concerned that if they would graze closer to the community they may graze on lands that were not his and thus he would be in violation of stealing. Even if Dovid had not taken his flock into the desert he would have been careful and vigilant not to allow them to graze in a location that was not his. Nevertheless, Dovid conducted himself in a manner that was above reproach. Even if it were remotely possible for the sheep to steal, this was not acceptable to him. Therefore Dovid was chosen to be the king of Israel. The Midrash is teaching us that through one's actions, which seem to be insignificant, one is chosen for greatness by Hashem.

Similarly, Moshe also led the flocks of his father-in-law into the desert to graze out of the same concern. Hashem said to Moshe, "Since you were so faithful in your responsibility to your flock, because you wanted your behavior to be above reproach, you shall lead My flock (the Jewish people)."

Yisro understood from something that seemed to be unnoticed and insignificant to others, that Moshe was a person who was very special and unique. It is through one's behavior that is normally unnoticed that one reveals his true character.

The Gemara in Tractate Shevuos tells us that a judge must value a case that is worth one cent as much as another case worth an enormous amount of money. The judge is not permitted to even switch the order of adjudicating the case of minimal value with the case of greater monetary value. The Gemara tells us that both cases are of equal importance. Thus, the judge must be a person of such caliber that he does not differentiate between the inconsequential amount of money (the penny) and an enormous amount of money.

In order to recognize a special individual, one needs to be special himself. When Reb Yisroel Salanter z'tl was a mere youth of seventeen years, he recognized the greatness of a certain individual in his community who was working in a distillery. By the age of ten, Reb Yisroel Salanter was proficient in the entire Talmud. At the age of seventeen, he was already recognized as a great Torah mind. Reb Yisroel Salanter approached this individual on his way to the distillery and asked him to become his rebbe (teacher). The individual replied, "I am no more than a laborer in a distillery. Why would you think that I am qualified to be your rebbe?" Reb Yisroel replied, "I have noticed the manner in which you conduct yourself during the Morning Service. Every aspect of your conduct during the service adheres meticulously to the various opinions of the Halachic Decisors (poskim). Your behavior is one of a kind and therefore it indicates to me that you are a hidden Torah Sage." This was Reb Yosef Zundel of Salant z'tl, one of the leading Torah Sages of that generation. Reb Yisroel Salanter was able to perceive and recognize what others could not.

Because he himself was special, he was able to identify his rebbe Reb Yosef Zundel of Salant.

We can see that the true greatness of an individual is revealed in the way one conducts himself in areas that are unnoticed by others.

## 6. *The Power Behind Yaakov*

The Torah states, **“Then Yisroel said to Yosef, “Behold! – I am about to die... And as for me, I have given you Shechem – one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow.”** Rashi explains “with my sword and with my bow” to mean “with my chochmah (wisdom) and with my tefillah (prayer).” Yaakov is not referring to a physical sword and bow but rather to wisdom and prayer. The Targum Unkelos explains “with my sword and with my bow” means “b’tzlusee (with my tefillah/prayer) and *u’viusee* (with my bakashah /request)”.

The Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) states that if one knows he will not be able to have proper intent when he says any one of the three obligatory Amidos (Silent Prayers), his tefillah is nevertheless still considered valid. However, if one wishes to recite a *tefillas nedavah* (*optional silent prayer for additional requests from Hashem*), one must feel that he will have the proper concentration from the beginning of the tefillah to the end. Otherwise, it is considered that the person is praying in vain. Reb Meir Simcha explains that based on its own weight, the sword has the ability to cut and pierce; so too, the obligatory tefillah has inherent value, even though the person may be lacking in concentration. However, just as the effectiveness of the bow (which propels the arrow) is the result of the archer’s power, so too, the tefillas nedavah is effective only when one infuses it with the proper concentration. This is what Yaakov meant when he said to Yosef, **“...which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow.”**

Sforno offers yet another interpretation of this pasuk. Based on the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos, he explains “with my sword and with my bow” means “with my chachmah (wisdom) and with my binah (understanding)”. The Gemara says that this pertains to the study of Torah. Chachmah refers to the knowledge of Torah, while binah refers to the delving and application of concepts that come about through the study of Torah.

The Midrash illustrates the difference between chachmah and binah by discussing two types of people, a chacham and a navon, respectively. The chacham is likened to the person who possesses many coins and all he does is repeatedly count his money. The navon, an individual with binah, can be compared to a person who understands the value of those coins and thus invests them in order to greatly multiply their value. The question is what is the relationship of the sword to chachmah and the bow to binah?

Just as the sword has the natural ability to cut because of its weight and sharpness, so too, the wisdom of Torah has innate value. Just as the bow’s ability to propel the arrow is solely based on the power of the archer, so too the only thing that can give one the ability to delve into concepts and apply them to situations (that are not so obvious) is to dedicate oneself to the study of Torah. One is only able to comprehend the Torah to the degree that one applies himself to it. As the Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us, “If one toils in the study of Torah and comes upon its Truth it should be believed (*yagata matzasa taamin*).”

Yaakov was the Patriarch who represents Torah; He devoted his entire life to its study. His dedication was to such a degree that for the fourteen years that he spent at the Yeshivah of Sherr V' Aver, he did not lie down to sleep. Through his dedication, he achieved chachmah and binah. As a result, he merited the portion (Shechem) which he gave over to Yosef. We learn from this that the degree to which one dedicates himself to the study of Torah will determine what he will derive from it.

## ***7. The Inherent Spiritual Capacity of the Jew***

The Torah tells us that Moshe was initially reticent about assuming the role as the Redeemer of the Jewish people when Hashem asked him to do so. The Torah states that Hashem said to Moshe, **“So shall you say to the Children of Yisroel, “Hashem the G-d of your forefathers, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov has dispatched me to you. This is My Name forever, and this is My remembrance from generation to generation.”**

Hashem told Moshe to communicate to the Jewish people **“My Name is forever (*le’olam*)...”** The word *le’olam* is stated in a deleted form, which means that the word is usually spelled with a “vav” before the “lamed”; however, in this instance the “vav” is deleted. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the deleted version of *le’olam* can be read *le’aleim*, which means to conceal. The four-letter Name of G-d -***Yud Kay Vav Kay*** should not be pronounced as it is written, but rather as the Name of Hashem -*Adni* (which alludes to Hashem as “Master – *Adon*”). Thus, by not pronouncing it as it is written, the Name of Hashem is concealed. The difficulty is that Moshe was addressing the Jewish people, who were idol worshipers and very much removed from spirituality. So why was it important to tell them that he is representing the One whose Name should be concealed?

The Name ***Yud Kay Vav Kay*** signifies that Hashem is the Infinite G-d with no beginning and no end. G-d was, is, and will be (past, present, future). Initially when Moshe presented himself to Pharaoh as G-d’s agent, he referred to the Name of Hashem as ***Yud Kay Vav Kay*** and Pharaoh immediately rejected him. The concept of ***Yud Kay Vav Kay*** implied that there is a power that is boundless, exists outside of the realm of nature and is unrestricted by its laws – a Being who is unlimited. Pharaoh could not accept this. When he attempted to find the Name ***Yud Kay Vav Kay*** in his encyclopedia of deities, it was not to be found. All the deities that Pharaoh knew were limited, finite, and bound to physical existence.

Although the Jewish people were idolaters, like the Egyptians, Hashem commanded Moshe to tell them that the Being that is ***Yud Kay Vav Kay*** sent him to be their Redeemer. At the same time Moshe would tell them that the pronunciation of this Name is forbidden. Why is this communication also necessary at this moment?

Under normal circumstances when one wishes to impart a concept and impress a belief upon another, one would think that he would initially communicate it on a level that is within that

individual's grasp. However, in this particular context, Hashem wanted Moshe to communicate His Essence to the Jewish people through the Name *Yud Kay Vav Kay*, although the infinite is something that is incomprehensible. Hashem was telling Moshe that when he communicates His incomprehensible Essence to the Jewish people, he must simultaneously inform them of this aspect of *le'aleim* (concealment). Although it is something that is beyond their grasp, they will indeed have the capacity to accept that Hashem is the omnipotent Being.

We see that Hashem's initial introduction to the Klal Yisroel (Jewish People) had to be in a context of *le'aleim* - concealment. The Jewish people would accept Hashem's existence at this level even though it was not within a human being's capacity to comprehend. Similarly, at Sinai, when Hashem offered Klal Yisroel His Torah, they accepted it within an identical context of *le'aleim*. "Naaseh V' Nishmah – we will do and then we will listen." Klal Yisroel accepted the Torah unequivocally, although at that moment they did not know or understand the extent of its obligation. In contrast, G-d first offered the Torah to the rest of the nations of the world and they asked, "What is written in it?" This meant that they did not have the capacity to accept what is hidden. They did not have the trust and the faith necessary to become the Am Hashem (the Nation of G-d).

The angels were astounded that mere mortals achieved the level that was attained by the Jews. The Jewish people began their ascent because of *le'aleim*. Moshe represented himself as the agent of the Omnipotent Being who is *Yud Kay Vav Kay*. This was accepted in an unquestioned and unequivocal manner, which thereby established us as our Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov) had done, i.e. that we have the capacity to accept what is beyond comprehension because that is the spiritual make-up of the Jew.

Every Jew has inherited a spirituality that can be awakened. Therefore, a Jew can be brought back to Judaism not necessarily through understanding, but through igniting the spark of spirituality that is inherent within him.

## ***8. The Significance of a Name***

The Torah tells us that Bas Pharaoh (the daughter of Pharaoh) gave the name "Moshe" to him. "Moshe" means "to draw out" as explained by Rashi in his commentary, it alludes to the event when he was "drawn out" of the water. The Midrash tells us that Moshe was given seven names (Tov, Tuvia, Tuvi, etc.) by his parents Amram and Yocheved. Amram was the leading Sage of his generation and a man who never sinned in his life. Yocheved, the daughter of Levi, was a woman who was recognized for her "fear of Hashem" and who risked her life for Hashem. The Kesav Sofer z'tl asks – given the greatness of Moshe's parents, why would the Torah refer to Moshe by the name given by the daughter of Pharaoh and not by one of the names given to him by his parents?

The Kesav Sofer answers that the Torah refers to Moshe as the "most humble man who ever walked the face of the earth." This is the all-encompassing characteristic, which epitomizes Moshe's greatness. One could become humble in one of two ways: either through experiencing

difficulties in life (where one is conditioned through circumstance to assume a posture of humility), or through recognizing G-d's omnipotence. The Torah wants to give us an appreciation for Moshe's greatness by referring to him by the name given to him by the princess, the daughter of Pharaoh. Moshe was the adopted grandchild of Pharaoh and was raised in the palace with all of its opulence and affluence. Despite his upbringing as royalty and being recognized as being part of the "upper echelon" of society, he was still the most humble man who ever lived. The name Moshe is a testament to the man, whose humility was one of a kind.

Sforno offers another interpretation of why the Torah refers to Moshe by the name given to him by Bas Pharaoh. He explains, "Bas Pharaoh called him Moshe" which means "to help others" because he has the innate ability to extricate others out of difficult situations. This is why it was deemed by G-d that Moshe be drawn out (saved) from the water and not drowned. According to Sforno's interpretation, Moshe's existence was for the purpose of saving others. This was proven to be the case because Moshe was chosen by Hashem to be the Redeemer of the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us that Shifrah (Yocheved) and Puah (Miriam) were the head Jewish midwives who supervised the delivery of all Jewish children. Yocheved was called Shifrah because her role was to cleanse and beautify the newborn children, while Miriam was called Puah because she was the one who calmed and quieted the newborns. The question is why is it so important for the Torah to identify Yocheved and Miriam by their specific roles as midwives? The Torah is revealing to us that the innate character of Yocheved was to beautify the Jewish children and that of Miriam was to calm them. One would think that when Pharaoh ordered Yocheved and Miriam to kill the newborn males on the birth stool the reason they defied his order was that it was contrary to their nature. However, the Torah reveals to us that although each of them is identified by their inner characteristic – as we discussed - the reason they did not kill the newborn male children was their "fear of Hashem". Yocheved and Miriam's selfless sacrifice in saving the Jewish children was unrelated to their dedication as midwives, but because of their "fear of Hashem."

The Torah tells us that when Hashem told Moshe to go to Pharaoh, he should tell him "Release my firstborn son, Yisroel." The Jewish people are the children of Yaakov. If this is the case then why does Hashem refer to them here as the Children of Yisroel? Sforno explains that "Yisroel" connotes the eternal nature of the Jewish people. The Jewish people have the inherent ability to survive all circumstances, just as Yaakov survived both man (Esav) and angel (archangel of Esav) and thus became identified as "Yisroel." Because we are the Children of Yaakov (Yisroel), we have that same characteristic of Yisroel. Therefore, when Moshe refers to the Jewish people Hashem told him that he must say, "My (Hashem's) firstborn son, Yisroel." They are no longer identified as Hebrews but as the eternal people "B'nai Yisroel."

The name identifies the essence of the individual. The appellation "Yisroel" identifies the essence of the Jew. Regardless of the insurmountable conflicts throughout history, the Jewish people continue as the eternal people. Similarly, the name "Moshe" reveals his essence – the ability to save others from difficulty. The Torah refers to Yocheved and Miriam as Shifrah and Puah to demonstrate that despite the fact that their nature was to be caring for the Jewish children, they saved them only because they "feared Hashem."

Even though as individuals we may be confronted with situations in which we give our

lives in order to sanctify the Name of Hashem, nonetheless, the Jewish people as a whole are eternal because we are the B'nai Yisroel.

## ***9. How Does Torah Study Impact on Our Lives as Jews?***

The Torah says that Hashem told Moshe to inform the Jewish people that G-d was going to free them from their enslavement in Egypt. Using the four expressions of redemption Hashem said to Moshe, **“Say to the Children of Israel: ‘I am Hashem, 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...’”**

Moshe addressed the Klal Yisroel as he was commanded by Hashem,” **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.”** Despite the fact that Moshe had proven to the Jews that he was the Redeemer of Israel and the agent of G-d, the Jews had no capacity to absorb the significance of Moshe’s words because they were overwhelmed with their bondage. Although the *Bnai Yisroel* believed what Moshe had told them, they were incapable of processing and internalizing Moshe’s words.

The Ohr Ha’Chaim Ha’Kadosh explains the term *kotzer ruach* to mean “of limited spirit.” He explains that the Jews in Egypt did not study or adhere to Torah principles. They were pagans and idolaters as the Egyptians were. The Ohr Ha’Chaim suggests that the “limited spirit” means that the Jewish people did not have the capacity to put things into perspective because of the overwhelming bondage. He explains the reason they had such limitations was that they did not study Torah. If they had studied Torah, the Jews would have been able to internalize Moshe’s words, because Torah broadens the heart. This means that Torah gives a person the breadth and depth of understanding as well as the capacity to effectively deal with difficulties and issues.

If one does not study Torah, then his capacity for being able to cope with difficult situations is limited. Since the Jewish people were slaves and not involved in the study or observance of Torah, they had a limited capacity and depth of heart to be receptive to Moshe’s words.

The Gemara in *Tractate Taanis* states that if one sees a Torah sage becoming agitated (when the Torah is being violated), it is the Torah that is “burning within him” that causes this agitation. As the verse states, “My (Hashem) words (Torah) are like fire.” In his commentary, Rashi explains that because of his Torah study, the Torah sage has a broadness of heart – and thus a depth of understanding and sensitivity to the wrong that is being committed. This causes him to react differently than the ordinary person. Therefore, one must give the benefit of the doubt to the Torah Sage if one sees him agitated because he processes reality differently than others.

Because the Talmud Chacham does not have a “limited spirit,” he has the capacity to deal with situations differently than others. There may be situations that seem to be hopeless and bleak yet

the Torah sage may put it in a completely different perspective because of the broadness of heart that he has gained through Torah study. The Torah sage's special perspective is not based solely on an intellectual understanding of reality, but rather, it is something that relates to the essence of who he is.

We conclude the Amidah (Silent Prayer), "May it be Your Will...that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days. Grant us our share in Your Torah, and may we serve You there with reverence as days of old..." Seemingly, the request should have been made that the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple) should be rebuilt so that we can serve Him there. However, we interject (before we conclude with the service) that Hashem should give us our portion in His Torah. Why does the receiving of our portion of Torah precede serving Hashem? The answer is that it is only through the Torah that one can have the broadness and depth of heart to be able to internalize Hashem and thus serve Him properly. His internalization of reality and spirituality is completely different from one who is not engaged in Torah. Therefore, after we have the portion of the Torah as requested, we will be able to serve Hashem as in "days of old."

### *10. Why is it So Difficult to Have Clarity?*

The Torah tells us that Moshe and Aaron approached Pharaoh to request that he release the Jewish people. In order to communicate to Pharaoh that Hashem had sent them as His agents, Moshe and Aaron were told to perform a miracle. The Torah tells us that Aaron took his staff, threw it on the ground, and it was transformed into a serpent. In response to this, the sorcerers of Pharaoh also threw their staffs on the ground and were transformed into serpents. The Torah tells us that after Aaron's staff reverted to its original state it devoured those of the sorcerers.

The Torah states, "**Pharaoh hardened his heart and he did not heed them...**" Seemingly, Pharaoh was not impressed with the miracle performed by Aaron because the Torah tells us "he did not heed them." Pharaoh's sorcerers were able to perform a similar miracle and therefore Aaron proved nothing. If Pharaoh dismissed Aaron's miracle as sorcery, then why was it necessary to harden his heart? Evidently, Pharaoh recognized that there was a difference between Aaron's action and that of his sorcerers, otherwise why was it necessary for him to enter a state of denial by hardening his heart.

We see that Aaron's miracle was fundamentally different from the magic performed by the sorcerers. The sorcerers were only able to create an illusion in which the staff appeared to be a snake. However, after their staffs and Aaron's staff reverted to the original state, Aaron's staff swallowed theirs - which was not an illusion but reality. Thus, Pharaoh could not dismiss Aaron's feat as sorcery. It was clearly a supernatural feat. Therefore, the only way Pharaoh was able to deal with this reality was to harden his heart and not heed them at all.

Witchcraft and sorcery have the ability to create visual illusions, which even take on some of the physical properties of what they are mimicking. However, the essence or the chemical composition does not change. For example, when Aaron struck the Nile with his staff and transformed all the water in Egypt into blood, it not only took on the physical appearance of blood

but also its chemical composition; it was no longer H<sub>2</sub>O. This can be seen clearly from Moshe's forewarning to Pharaoh "the Nile will turn to blood and the fish in the Nile will die." If in fact sorcery could transform something in appearance and in chemical make-up, then why was it necessary for Moshe to say that the fish in the Nile will die? Since we know that fish cannot survive in blood, it is clear from his statement that the survival of the fish – or not - would be the obvious discernment between sorcery and miracle.

The Torah tells us regarding the plague of blood, "**Pharaoh hardened his heart and he did not heed them.**" Evidently, the miracle of blood was also something difficult for Pharaoh to dismiss outright as sorcery. He needed to harden his heart to deny what was obvious.

Pharaoh believed that there was no Omnipotent and All-Encompassing Universal Being. He believed, as other pagans, that the various deities that exist are limited and can only function within the context of nature. The miracle of Aaron's staff devouring those of the sorcerers, and the waters of the Nile being transformed into blood (and killing the fish) were clearly caused by a Power that dictates and determines existence. In order for Pharaoh to deny the existence of G-d – the Omnipotent Being - he needed to harden his heart.

The Mishna tells us that during the First Temple Period there were ten revealed miracles that occurred daily in the Bais HaMikdash (the Holy Temple). These miracles did not happen anywhere else in the world. Although they existed for a period of over 400 years, the vast majority of the Jewish people were idolaters. How do we understand this? How is it possible for someone to witness a revealed miracle that cannot be understood in any other context and still adhere to paganism?

The answer is when something is not continually seen and noticed, it can easily be dismissed. If something is obvious and happens persistently then one cannot escape its reality and simply dismiss it. Therefore, he needs to continually harden his heart against it. The Gemara in Tractate *Chagigah* tells us, "Poverty to the Jewish people is like the beautification of a white stallion with a red kerchief." Meaning, if one is in an impoverished state, he cannot deny his reality and therefore is forced to recognize the Hand of Hashem in his life. Just as the red kerchief brings out the beauty of the stallion, poverty brings out the spirituality of the Jew.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z'tl cites Chazal who explain that Pharaoh was not personally affected by the plague of blood. Reb Meir Simcha explains that the reason Pharaoh was spared this plague was that it was in the context of measure for measure. Pharaoh raised Moshe in his palace, as his adopted grandson and accommodated him with all his physical needs. Therefore, measure for measure, during the plague, Pharaoh was given water to accommodate his needs. Because of this, Pharaoh was able to dismiss the plague of blood with the mere hardening of his heart.

The Torah tells us in the Portion of the *Tochachah* (the Reproaches) that if one dismisses the sufferings brought upon them by Hashem as mere happenstance, they will only intensify and become more severe until they can no longer be ignored. The purpose of the persistent suffering is to bring a person to acknowledge that he has done wrong and must repent. If he chooses to be obstinate, he will be destroyed. We ask Hashem in our daily tefillah (prayer service) that he

should “open our hearts with His Torah.” We request that our hearts be opened, not only for the moment, but also on a continuous basis. We are constantly denying many issues around us because of the cost of recognizing them i.e. our conflicts of interest. The only way one can overcome this natural state of denial is through the study of Torah.

## ***11. There is Nothing Inconsequential in the Eyes of G-d***

Regarding the plague of wild beasts, the Torah states, **“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘...you shall say to him (Pharaoh) So said Hashem: Send out My people...For if you do not send out My people, behold, I shall incite against you... the swarm of wild beasts...And on that day I shall set apart the land of Goshen upon which My people stands, that there shall be no swarm there; so that you will know that I am Hashem (YKVK) in the midst of the land’.”** This means that Pharaoh will understand through the plague of the wild beasts that Hashem (YKVK) is “in the midst of the land.” Seemingly, the significance of the plague should have been for Pharaoh to believe that there is an Omnipotent Being. Therefore, what is the significance of Pharaoh believing that Hashem is “in the midst of the land”?

Initially when Moshe addressed Pharaoh as Hashem commanded him. Moshe told him that he was sent by, **“Hashem (YKVK) the G-d of Yisroel. Send out My people so that they may celebrate for Me in the desert.”** Pharaoh responded, **“Who is Hashem (YKVK) that I should heed His voice...? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Yisroel.”** Moshe and Aaron replied to Pharaoh, **“The G-d (Elokei) of the Hebrews happened upon us. Let us now go...”** It is understandable that after Pharaoh said, “I do not know Hashem (YKVK)” that Moshe responds with being the agent of Elokei (the Power). The question is why did Moshe need to change the manner in which he refers to the Jewish people from Yisroel to the Hebrews (Ivrim)? Moshe and Aaron changed the manner in which they referred to Hashem from YKVK (The Four Letter Name of G-d) to Elokei (the Power) because Pharaoh rejected the concept of YKVK, which connotes that Hashem is an Unlimited and Universal Being. Thus, they referred to G-d as “Elokei,” meaning “a Power,” since this would be acceptable to Pharaoh. However, why did Moshe and Aaron change the manner in which they referred to the Jewish people from “Yisroel” to “Ivrim”?

The appellation of “Yisroel,” which we inherited from our Patriarch Yaakov, identifies the Jewish people as the eternal and unlimited people. Our existence defies the natural order. The Jews throughout history survived the most untenable and insurmountable situations. The fundamental belief of Pharaoh and the Egyptian culture was that everything is bound to the natural order. They could not accept the fact that there is an Omnipotent Being. If the concept of Omnipotence did not exist for the Egyptians, then a nation such as “Yisroel” (which represents the unbound) cannot exist. Thus, when Moshe referred to Hashem as Elokei, he referred to the Jewish people as “Ivrim” because “Yisroel” is only an extension of YKVK.

Even if the Egyptian could accept the concept of YKVK, an Omnipotent Being, the belief that this Universal Being is associated with a limited existence is something that they could not accept. Therefore, Hashem says that through the plague of wild beasts, it will teach the Egyptians, “I am Hashem, although I am the Unlimited Being, I dictate and Am involved in the most limited situations.” This is the meaning of “I am Hashem in the midst of the land.”

The verse, "...so that you will know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land" is teaching us that despite the fact that Hashem (YKVK) is Unlimited, Unbound, and Universal, He is involved and concerned with every aspect of existence – even though it is limited and physical. Hashem is involved in the most miniscule and insignificant aspects of existence. This is the lesson taught by the plague of the wild beasts.

One of the Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith is that there is reward and punishment. All of our actions are considered significant and therefore we are deserving of the positive and liable for the negative. One may think, since Hashem is Unlimited and Omnipotent, that our actions would have no value or significance vis-à-vis existence and that since Existence is Willed by Hashem, it is unrelated to our actions. However, the reality of reward and punishment indicates the contrary. There is no such thing as an insignificant or inconsequential act. Therefore, there is liability or reward for every aspect of our behavior.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe was initially told by Hashem to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle) as it is stated, "Make for Me a Sanctuary, so that I may dwell in your midst" he was taken aback. Moshe could not understand how was it possible that G-d's Presence be contained in such a limited location when the world itself is not sufficient to contain His Presence. Hashem responded to Moshe, "You do yours and I will do Mine." Many aspects of Hashem are unfathomable because He is the Unlimited and Omnipotent Being. However, it is fundamental to our belief and reality that Hashem does concern Himself with our actions although they are limited and finite. This is clearly communicated through the verse "**I am Hashem (YKVK) in the midst of the land.**"

## *12. The Importance of Putting Things in Perspective*

The Torah states, "**Hashem said to Moshe, "Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the hearts of his servants stubborn so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst; and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt and My signs that I placed among them – that you may know that I am Hashem."**" Hashem says to Moshe that one of the reasons He brought the plagues upon Egypt is so the Jewish people should communicate to their children and their grandchildren that Hashem made a "mockery" of Egypt. What is the significance of relating this? Seemingly the significance of the miracles was, "**so that you may know that I am Hashem.**" The Torah is saying that unless one appreciates the consequence of the miracle, that G-d made a "mockery" of Egypt, one is not able to know that G-d is the Omnipotent Power. The question is why?

There is a Negative Commandment in the Torah that a judge is not permitted to be intimidated by anyone when he is adjudicating a case. Regardless of the status of individuals involved (wealthy or powerful), a judge must maintain his objectivity and remain unbiased. If a judge is influenced, intimidated, or affected to the point that he feels restrained to any degree vis-à-vis his function, then he is in violation of this negative commandment.

The Gemara in Tractate *Berachos* tells us that greater is a person who benefits from the toil of his hands than one who fears Hashem. Is it possible to say that a menial laborer is greater than a man who fears G-d? It is obvious that the “laborer who benefits from the toil of his hands” is a person who fears G-d. The Gemara is saying that a man who fears G-d and is supported by his own toil is greater than a person who fears G-d and is sustained by others. The reason for this is that the one who relies on others is bound to be swayed and affected by them. He makes decisions consciously or unconsciously based on how he believes others will react or perceive him and not the way Hashem sees him. Thus the individual who benefits from the toil of his own hands and fears G-d, will be directed by the Will of Hashem alone and be impervious to the opinions of others.

People are impressed and awed by status and power. The Torah tells us that Egypt, the most advanced and powerful civilization in the world was devastated by G-d because it subjugated the Jewish people. Pharaoh, the most significant monarch in existence, was significantly diminished because he did not release the Jewish people from bondage. Although one would think that Pharaoh was a person who was invincible, it was proven that he was a mere mortal. The reason it is important to communicate to our children and grandchildren the “mockery” Hashem made of Pharaoh and his people, is to give them the understanding that although a person is in an exalted and elevated position, he is only there because it is Willed by Hashem. Only when one sees the unimaginable (such as the downfall of Egypt), can he appreciate what the basis is for every person’s predicament. If one understands and is able to internalize this, he will know the meaning of “I am Hashem.” If one believes for a moment that achievement and success is attributed to oneself, then he will be impressed with the one who achieves that success, thus, diminishing Hashem’s role in existence.

The Rambam and the Ramban argue whether the obligation of prayer is a Torah obligation or only a rabbinical dictate. The Rambam is of the opinion that tefillah (daily prayer) is a Torah obligation; as the Talmud explains, tefillah is the “service of the heart.” One would think that tefillah is simply the acknowledgement of Hashem – that He is great, powerful, sustains the living, resurrects the dead, supports the fallen, and heals the sick etc. However, Rambam says that if one only acknowledges Hashem for what He is and does not make subsequent requests of Him, one does not fulfill the Torah obligation of tefillah. The question is why? The answer is that if in fact Hashem is the all-powerful, awesome, and omnipotent Being, then how is it possible that one does not beseech him for his needs. When one beseeches Hashem for his needs it is a confirmation of all the attributes he has been citing in his prayer. If however, one acknowledges Hashem as being everything and does not make requests from Him, then it is an indication that he truly does not believe that Hashem is what he had acknowledged Him to be. The value of his statement is purely “lip service.”

### ***13. What Determines One’s Classification?***

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the reason Hashem caused the plague of darkness was to eliminate the *reshaim* (those who were evil) from the Jewish people. They had no interest in leaving Egypt. They perished during the days of darkness so that the Egyptians would not be aware of their demise because they would say, “not only are we dying, but the Jews are also dying.” Rashi cites another Chazal that says the reason G-d brought the plague of darkness was to enable the Jews to inspect the homes of the Egyptians for their valuables. G-d promised Avraham at the time of the covenant between the parts that after the Jewish people were enslaved and afflicted in a land that was not theirs, they would go out with great riches; locating the valuables of the Egyptians during the days of darkness allowed that promise to come to fruition. Thereafter,

the Egyptians were not able to say that they did not possess valuables such as gold and silver vessels.

In the Portion of Beshalach, Rashi cites Chazal who explain the word “chamushim” to mean that only one fifth of the Jewish people actually left Egypt. (Another Midrash states that only one fiftieth of the Jews left Egypt.) This would mean that four fifths of the Jewish population was classified as *reshaim* (evil) and therefore perished during the plague of darkness. Everyone in Egypt witnessed the revealed miracles of Hashem, who caused the most powerful empire to be reduced to rubble. If this is the case, why would any Jew not want to leave Egypt when the opportunity was at hand, especially after all those years of bondage and suffering. Additionally what is even more astounding is that unlike Pharaoh and the Egyptians, Hashem did not “harder the heart” of the Jewish people. Therefore, they had the ability to internalize the miracles of which they were the beneficiaries.

In the Musaf Service of Rosh Hashanah in the portion of (*Zichronos* (Remembrances)), we cite a verse to remind Hashem of our relationship with Him. Hashem says, “I remember for your sake the kindness of your youth...how you followed Me into an unplanted desert.” This verse seems difficult to understand. Since we had already witnessed the ten revealed miracles – events that were unprecedented in the history of the world, why would Hashem consider it a “kindness” that we followed Him into the desert? Evidently, despite all that had transpired in Egypt it was difficult for the Jews to leave. On the one hand, Jews who did not wish to leave Egypt are referred to as *reshaim*. On the other hand, Hashem will always remember the kindness of the Jews who did leave. This seems to indicate that leaving Egypt and following Him into an “unplanted desert” was a commendable feat. If in fact it was so difficult to leave Egypt, as it is indicated from this verse then why are those who chose to remain in Egypt considered *reshaim*?

The answer is that not being a rasha (evil person) is in fact an accomplishment; however, it does not change the reality that an evil person is evil. Rambam states in *Hilchos Taanias* (*the Laws of Fasting*) that if difficult times come upon the Jewish people, G-d forbid, and one does not pray, he is considered “cruel.” If other Jews are suffering and one does not pray it is evident that he does not feel their pain and this indicates that there is a degree of cruelty in that person. The one who does pray has sensitivity to the suffering of his fellow Jew because he feels their pain. This is an example of how two people relate differently to the identical situation.

Despite the fact that all the Jews witnessed the same revealed miracles in Egypt, there were many who did not wish to leave. These Jews were considered *reshaim* because they did not believe that they were going to survive in the desert. Despite the revealed miracles which were performed for them, they did not have faith in Hashem and thus did not trust that He would provide for them in the desert. The minority of Jews who merited leaving Egypt did have the faith and therefore did not succumb to the insecurities of the others. Because they had faith, they were able to see things clearly. However not succumbing to the doubts and questions that surrounded them and thus following Hashem into the “unplanted desert” was truly an accomplishment. It was only because of that special level of faith and trust that they were able to go into the desert. This is why Hashem will always remember the “kindness” of our youth.

The Jews who died during the plague of darkness were considered *reshaim*, while those who left Egypt and entered into the desert were highly regarded and rewarded by Hashem. We see

that depending on a person's faith and outlook on life, he is classified in one group or the other. When we hear about tragedies that befall our brothers in Israel or any place in the world, do they affect us? Do we feel the pain and suffering of our fellow Jew and thus increase our tefillos (prayers)? If one remains unaffected by these events, then he needs to understand why. If one truly has the sensitivity, he surely would feel the pain. According to this evaluation, one must reflect on his own classification. Is it one of cruelty? Or is it one of compassion and sensitivity?

#### ***14. The Hidden Message in the Sanctification of the New Moon***

The Torah states, **“Hashem said to Moshe and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, “This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year...”** Before the Jewish people left Egypt, they were given the mitzvah of the Sanctification of the New Moon. This was the first mitzvah given to them as a Jewish people.

The mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon enables the Jewish people to determine when the month actually begins - thus determining time. It is through the ruling of the Sanhedrin (the High Court of Israel) that the beginning of the month is established (based on the testimony of two witnesses observing the new moon.) The ramifications of being able to determine time in this manner are far reaching. Through the sanctification of the new moon, the Sanhedrin determines the beginning of the month thus establishing each festival in its time. Although each festival such as Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos, have an innate spiritual value and are commanded by G-d, the days of their observance are established through the Sanhedrin's pronouncement of the beginning of the new month. In fact, the blessing, which we recite during the festivals, concludes: “Hashem has sanctified the Jewish people who in turn sanctify time.” Why was this Mitzvah the first one to be given to us as a Jewish People?

On a practical level, the sanctification of time was necessary at that moment to establish the day of the month on which the Pascal Offering was to be brought. G-d commanded the Jews to bring the Korban Pesach on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan; however, the beginning of Nissan had to be established to determine when the fourteenth would be. However, G-d could have designated the beginning of Nissan Himself, and thus everything would have followed. As the Gemara states, if the witnesses did not testify before the Sanhedrin by a certain date then the month is sanctified by Heaven. If this is the case, why was the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon the first commandment given to the Jewish people

Time is a reality of existence. Man lives within the boundary of time and it dictates his existence. Time is continuously moving forward with or without our involvement. If this is the case then how does a mere mortal affect and determine time? How could the decision of the court determine the beginning of the month and thus establish when Pesach begins? The ramification of this is the sanctification of the month. The same is true with the Day of Judgment (Rosh Hashana) and Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement). The court's decision determines when G-d will judge the world and which day will have the inherent effect to rehabilitate the penitent. How is this possible?

Hashem gave the Jewish people the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon to indicate to them that

they are not mere mortals and their significance is spiritual. Thus, Jews are not necessarily bound by time, but rather they affect time.

At the time of the exodus when the Jews were leaving Egypt, they were ascending from the lowest level of spirituality. They were pagans just like their Egyptian masters. The Jews knew they had a special ancestry, but they believed that there was no difference between themselves and the Egyptians. G-d wanted them to understand that they were not at all like the Egyptians or any other people in the world. He demonstrated this reality to them by giving them the ability to sanctify and affect the reality of time. This gave them an understanding of their essence – which is innately spiritual. Therefore, the first mitzvah that Hashem gave the Jews was the sanctification of the New Moon.

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that G-d needed to show Moshe the exact moment when the moon could be sanctified since Moshe had difficulty making this determination. They tell us that Moshe only had difficulty in three areas: knowing exactly when the new moon could be sanctified, understanding the *machtzis ha'shekel* (the half-shekel coin given by all Jewish males above the age of twenty to be used to purchase communal offerings in the Temple), and the making of the Menorah. These were the only areas in which Moshe had difficulty understanding how to fulfill Hashem's Will. How do we understand this?

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the Menorah signifies the Oral Law, which is unlimited in its depth and breadth. Moshe was commanded to cast it. However, being a finite and limited being, he found it difficult to understand how to cast something that signified the infinite. He had trouble understanding how something that is limited to a physical context could affect something that is infinite. Hashem Himself cast the Menorah. Only the Infinite was able to cast something that affects the infinite.

Every male of the age twenty and above was required to give half a silver coin (*machtzis ha'shekel*). Moshe found it difficult to understand this process even though it seems to be a simple task of collecting the *machtzis ha'shekel*. Since the *machtzis ha'shekel's* purpose was used to purchase offerings, it had relevance to *kaparah* (atonement) and *teshuvah* (repentance), which are spiritual processes and realities. Thus, the *machtzis ha'shekel*, which is something finite, represents something of an unlimited nature. Spirituality is something out of the realm of existence. In fact, Chazal tell us that Hashem created *teshuvah* many generations before the world was created. It is therefore understandable why Moshe had difficulty with *machtzis ha'shekel*. The Midrash tells us that Hashem showed him a coin made of fire to give him some degree of understanding.

We can now explain why Moshe had difficulty understanding the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon. The calendar of the nations of the world is the solar calendar. However, the Jew determines time through the lunar cycle. The moon represents the Jewish people because throughout history there were times that we were hardly noticed and there were times that we were in full view to the world (as the phases of the moon). Therefore, the moon represents something spiritual – which is beyond the human capacity, that is limited and finite. Therefore, Moshe had difficulty determining the exact moment the moon was large enough to be sanctified.

The three areas of Moshe's difficulty involved a physical entity representing the spiritual, which is unlimited. Each Jew must give the *machtzis ha'shekel* (the half coin and not the whole coin). The question is why does one give a half coin if he could give a whole one. The half coin represents a fraction of the whole, just as when we contemplate the Jew, we can never comprehend his totality; we only see a fraction of his value and cannot appreciate or understand his significance even on an individualized basis. The Mishna tells us, "Whoever saves the life of a Jew it is considered as if he had saved the entire world." One Jew alone is the equivalent of the entire world in terms of inherent worth. Therefore, it is something that is not comprehensible. This is the same reason why Hashem gave the Jewish people the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon so that we should understand that although we are physical beings our significance is spiritual and therefore we are able to affect time.

## ***15. Understanding the Value of Circumcision***

The Torah states, "**Pharaoh said to Moshe and Aaron, "Go and serve Hashem, your G-d; which ones are going?" Moshe said, "With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go; with our sons and with our daughters, with our flock and with our cattle shall we go..."**Pharaoh said to him, "**...Look – the evil (*raah*) intent is opposite your faces. Not so; let the men go now...**" The Torah tells us that Pharaoh did not want to allow all the Jews to leave Egypt because "the evil (*raah*) intent is opposite your faces." Rashi cites the Midrash that explains the verse to mean that Pharaoh, through his stargazing ability, saw that there is a star called "Raah" which indicated "bloodshed" – meaning that the Jews would be killed in the desert. Therefore, Pharaoh refused to allow the Jews to leave.

The Midrash continues to explain that because of the *chet ha'agle* (sin of the golden calf) Hashem wanted to destroy the Jewish people. However, Moshe's tefillah (prayer) averted the destruction and the Jews were forgiven. This is what Pharaoh actually had seen in the stars. Hashem said that the "bloodshed" which is being foretold through the stars will not be the destruction of the Jewish people, but will be the circumcision of the Jews at the time of Yehoshua (the successor of Moshe). During the forty years of wandering in the desert, the Jews did not circumcise themselves. This only occurred when the mantle of leadership was passed from Moshe to Yehoshua (his disciple) when they were about to enter into the Land of Canaan. This *blood* was exchanged for the *blood* which represented the destruction of the Jewish people that Pharaoh had seen.

Pharaoh's stargazers told him that they saw in the stars that the demise of the Redeemer of Israel would come about through water. They interpreted this to mean that the Redeemer would die through drowning. As a result, Pharaoh decreed that all the Jewish newborn males should be thrown into the Nile. In that instance, the demise of Moshe through water was correctly interpreted; however, the manner in which it would come about was misunderstood. Their expertise as astrologers was at the most advanced level. Therefore, the only mistake that can be made was the application of the reading.

When Pharaoh saw the star named Raah, which represents "bloodshed"- indicating that the lives of the Jews will be taken, how was it possible that this reading of "bloodshed" should be converted into the blood of circumcision? Bloodshed is associated with the taking of a life. The person who existed no longer exists. However, circumcision entails bleeding because of the removal of the foreskin, but it has no relevance to the demise of a human being. If this is the case, then how was

the bloodshed represented by the star Raah changed to mean “circumcision”?

We can learn something rather profound from this Midrash. The Midrash is telling us that just as when one's life is taken, the person who existed before, no longer exists, similarly, the person who is circumcised is not the same person that existed before the circumcision – that former person no longer exists. This is the profound impact that circumcision has on a person. It is a metamorphosis that transforms the person into a different being. Therefore, the blood of circumcision is compared to the “bloodshed” which causes the person who existed "to exist no longer."

Why is circumcision which is referred to as “the sign of the Holy Covenant” so effective that it transforms the individual to another dimension of person that did not previously exist? The Olalos Ephraim explains that just as there is an outer covering (the foreskin), there is also an inner (spiritual) covering over the heart. When the outer covering is removed (the foreskin), simultaneously the inner covering of the heart is also removed. This inner covering prevents a Jew from having any relevance to the wellsprings of Torah and his spirituality. The wellsprings of Torah are sealed until one is circumcised.

Before the circumcision is performed, the Jew has no relevance to internalizing and experiencing spirituality through the Torah. The Jew is merely a physical being who exists as a Jew. However, after the circumcision, he gains the capacity to internalize the spirituality of the Torah and relate to concepts and realities that were not available to him before circumcision. He becomes a new being whose function and significance becomes his spirituality. His significance within existence takes on another dimension of value. Therefore, circumcision, which entails blood, is the procedure that causes the person to become a different being that has not existed before. Thus, his previous “self” no longer exists. Therefore, what Pharaoh understood to be “bloodshed” is identical to the blood of circumcision.

The Gemara tells us that the Jewish people did not circumcise themselves during the 40-year period that they were in the desert. The reason for this was that during their years of wandering, the northerly wind “*ruach tsefonis*” did not blow. This northerly wind is essential for the clotting factor in the blood that causes wounds to heal. Therefore, it would have been life threatening for the Jews to circumcise themselves during this period because there was a concern that they could bleed to death.

It is interesting to note that in addition to the Jews wandering an additional 39 years in the desert, because of the *chet ha'meraglim* (the sin of the spies/ the slandering of the Land), Hashem caused the northerly wind not to blow. The question is although Hashem decreed that the Jews should wander as a punishment for their lack of faith, why did He withhold the northerly wind. We understand that the only value of withholding this wind was to deny the Jews the opportunity to circumcise themselves.

It was actually a chesed (kindness) of Hashem that He withheld the northerly wind making circumcision not possible. As we explained earlier, the Midrash tells us that the star of Raah forecasted the destruction of the Jewish people because of the golden calf. However, Moshe's tefillah brought about forgiveness. Hashem changed the “bloodshed” of the destruction of the

Jewish people to the blood of circumcision. If Hashem had allowed the northerly wind to blow, there would not have been an interruption in performing the mitzvah of circumcision. In that case, the bloodshed indicated by the star Raah could not have been converted into the blood of circumcision because they would have already been circumcised. Therefore, it was a chesed of Hashem to the Klal Yisroel that He denied them the mitzvah of circumcision during their stay in the desert.

We must say that the sin of the golden calf was a precursor to the sin of the spies. Just as the golden calf only came about because the Jews did not have sufficient faith in G-d, believing the false reports of the spies was also due to their lack of faith in Hashem. Therefore, it was inevitable that after the sin of the golden calf the Jews would fail with the sin of the spies. Because of this, Hashem was able to alter the blood of the destruction to the blood of circumcision.

## ***16. The Importance of Communication***

The Torah tells us that the plague of killing the first-born included those who were taken captive and the non-Jewish slave class of Egypt. The question is why is the captive (who is not an Egyptian) deserving of the tenth plague? Why did Hashem need to kill their first-born also? Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Hashem killed the first born of the captives so that when the first-born of Egypt died it would not be attributed to the pagan deity of the under class punishing the Egyptian oppressors. Furthermore, the first-born of the slave class was killed in the plague because they participated in the enslavement of the Jew as well, rejoicing when they witnessed the Jews being enslaved by others. Thus, they deserved punishment.

When Moshe informed Pharaoh of the time that the plague would come upon Egypt, he said it would happen, “about midnight.” Is it possible that Moshe said “about midnight” rather than “exactly at midnight” because he did not know precisely when midnight was? The Gemara in Tractate Berachos explains that Moshe certainly knew. However, the reason he told Pharaoh that the plague would take place “about midnight” was because he was concerned that the Egyptian astrologers may not be accurate in their calculation of time and would believe that it did not occur “exactly midnight” but rather before or after. If that happened, they would say that Moshe had deceived them. Thus, Moshe said “about midnight” so as not to be accused of deception.

All the plagues up until this point happened exactly as Moshe had said they would. The plague of the first-born was the climax of the ten plagues. As the Torah tells us, at the time of this plague the screams were at a level never before heard in Egypt. This tells us the enormous dimension of the plague. Yet, if Moshe had said that the plague was to come “exactly at midnight” and the Egyptians did not perceive it to occur at exactly that moment, then they would have accused him of lying to them. The real question is – even if the onset of the plague was off by a moment – what difference would this make when they are experiencing a tragedy that had never been experienced in this world. How do we understand this?

The Torah tells us that when the plague happened, the Egyptians saw that multiple

members of the same family died. Because of this they said, “we are all dying.” This means that the plague was actually worse than Moshe had foretold. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the reason more than one member in a household died was because the women committed adultery with multiple men. Those who died in the plague were the first-born of each of those adulterous men. Thus, Egyptians perceived the plague as being more severe than had been predicted by Moshe. They thought that they were all dying, when in fact it was actually only the first-born. We ask if the plague was more severe than had been originally foretold by Moshe, why are we not concerned that he will be accused of being a liar about this as well.

The answer is the Egyptian women who committed adultery with several men knew that many of their children were in actuality the first-born to their fathers. Even though the men themselves may not have known it, the truth was attainable and the reality was verifiable. Therefore, it could be proven that only the first-born were dying. However, only Hashem knows exactly when midnight comes, therefore, if the Egyptian astrologer should mistakenly miscalculate the moment, there was no way to verify it. Since Moshe was forewarning Pharaoh for the explicit purpose of making him understand that Hashem is the Omnipotent Being and All Encompassing G-d, he needed to express himself in a manner that would be accepted and believed.

It is clear that if a person has the ability to deny or deflect something that he does not want to acknowledge, he will use even something that is absurd for that denial. Therefore, it was important for Moshe to remove any distraction from the Egyptians so that they could have full recognition of what was taking place. A person is forced to accept the reality of G-d when there is no escape route. Hashem did not want there to be any escape route for the Egyptians. Therefore, it was an imperative that there should be no issues that could detract from the purpose of this plague, which was that everyone should recognize G-d as the all powerful and omnipotent Being.

## *17. Understanding One's Purpose*

The Torah tells us that when Hashem brought the plague of pestilence upon the Egyptians, only their livestock perished; they were not affected. The livestock belonging to the Jewish people was also unaffected. Hashem tells Moshe to go before Pharaoh and explain to him why the Egyptian people were spared from the pestilence. The Torah states, **“For Now I (Hashem) could have sent My hand and stricken you and your people with the pestilence and you would have been obliterated from the earth. However, for this I have let you endure, in order to show you My strength and so that My Name may be declared throughout the world.”**

Chazal explain that the name “Shakai” (which is one of the unpronounceable Names of Hashem) means that although His Power is unlimited, Hashem has the ability to harness and limit it to the degree that He wishes. Ramban explains in his commentary on the Book of Bereishis, that since the Power of Hashem is unlimited, at the time of Creation when He said, “It should be...,” the energy created should have evolved and continued to manifest itself without end. However, Hashem (Shakai) said, “*Daai* (enough),” thus the energy was restrained. When Hashem limited the effect of the pestilence to only the livestock, He proved to the Egyptians that although His Power is infinite, He has the ability to dictate, direct, and affect what He chooses. This is the meaning of the verse, “in order to show you My strength.”

The Midrash tells us that because of pursuing the Jewish people in their flight from Egypt, the Egyptian army perished in the Sea, there was only one Egyptian survivor - Pharaoh himself. The Torah tells us that Pharaoh was spared so that he should understand and appreciate Hashem's ability, and thus declare His Name throughout the world. Hashem allowed him to live so that there would be someone other than the Jewish people to tell the world what had happened. Pharaoh, the monarch of Egypt, who initially defied G-d, was the one to tell the world. Chazal tell us he lived many years and ultimately became the King of Nineveh. We read in the Book of Yonah that not only did he personally do teshuvah (repented) when he heard the ominous warnings of Yonah, but he also compelled his community to return to Hashem.

When one overcomes a serious or life-threatening situation, the question he must ask himself is – why did Hashem spare me? Is it that He wants me to simply return to the workplace and continue my life as before? It is obvious that he must conclude that Hashem saved him for another purpose. Based on the Torah's explanation of why Pharaoh was saved, we can say that Hashem spares people from tragedies so that they can appreciate His existence. If that is the reason Hashem spared Pharaoh, an evil pagan, it is logical that if Hashem spares us, His people, it is for us to recognize and appreciate His existence, and thus declare His Name.

We do not only come upon this realization through surviving a life-threatening situation. We can see the Hand of Hashem in existence through conception, pregnancy, and the birth process. The Gemara in Tractate Nidah states that from one droplet of colorless semen, a fetus develops into a child, made up of many components of different textures and colors. From one drop of semen, the child develops eyes, organs, blood, sinews, bones and most amazingly, intellect. If one focuses on nature alone, one can see the Hand of Hashem, which is truly miraculous.

We must ask ourselves why Hashem performed the miracle of creating us and continues to Will this ongoing Miracle? The explanation comes from the verse, **“I have let you endure, in order to show you My strength and so that My Name may be declared throughout the world.”** From this, we understand that Hashem performs these miracles so that we should appreciate His continuous involvement in existence and thus declare His Name. The Jew acknowledges this purpose by living a life that conforms to the Torah.

## ***18. Learning the Hard Way***

Prior to the plague of Hail, the Torah states that Moshe said to Pharaoh (in the Name of Hashem), **“You still tread upon My (Hashem's) people, not to send them out. Behold, at this time tomorrow I shall rain a very heavy hail, such as there has never been in Egypt...the hail shall descend upon them and they shall die.”** Hashem is saying to Pharaoh that since he did not release the Jewish people from bondage, it is an indication that he truly does not value them nor understand who they are. Therefore, Pharaoh was “treading” upon the Jewish people, which implies that he did not appreciate their existence. Otherwise, he would not have treated them the

way that he did. The Torah juxtaposes the plague of hail, which devastated Egypt, to the statement, “You still tread upon My people” in order to communicate to Pharaoh that he will only understand who the Jewish people are when he experiences the consequences of “treading upon them.” This is the plague of hail.

For example, if one scratches his hand it is not as severe as scratching his cornea. Because of the nature of the eye, the consequence of injuring it, even slightly, is greater than withstanding the same injury to a hand. Only when one experiences the consequence of injury, can one understand the delicate nature of that particular organ. Hashem wanted Pharaoh to understand that “treading” on His people has grave consequences. The plagues that had come upon Egypt, prior to the plague of hail, had not yet taught Pharaoh the lesson of valuing the Jewish people because he continued to “tread” upon them. Therefore, the plague of hail was necessary.

The way one treats and behaves towards one’s fellow indicates the degree to which he values him. One only insults or damages another person if he does not value that individual’s existence. The Torah juxtaposes the principle that one should love his fellow as himself with the prohibition of speaking *loshon hara* (*evil speech*). This is to teach us that if one loves his fellow as himself, he would not speak negatively about him.

The Torah tells us that when Yaakov fled to the home of Lavan (his uncle), he prayed to Hashem to protect him “*ushmarani*.” The Yalkut tells us that Yaakov asked to be protected from “Forbidden relationships, murder, idolatry, and *loshon hara*.” One can understand Yaakov’s request to be protected from the three cardinal sins, which are so serious; however, why does he simultaneously ask to be protected from *loshon hara* (*speaking negatively about another individual without constructive value*)? It would seem from Yaakov’s request that he is equating *loshon hara* to the three cardinal sins. How do we understand this? The answer is – if one takes another person’s life, it is an indication that he does not value that person’s existence; if one commits adultery, it is an indication that he does not value the exclusivity of the woman’s relationship with her husband because he does not value the husband; if one worships idols, this is an indication that he only cares about himself and not G-d. When a person speaks *loshon hara* it is because he does not have any concern for the consequences of his negative statements vis-à-vis the person of whom he is speaking.

The victimization of an individual does not begin with murder or adultery, but rather with devaluing him. *Loshon hara* is the beginning of the process of minimizing another person’s worth which can ultimately lead to violating the cardinal sins. However, if one holds another in the same esteem as himself, then he would not speak negatively or want to victimize him in any way.

We need to reflect on our own behavior in order to understand and appreciate where we are. For example, if a person needs something to write on and uses a Torah book as a writing slate this is an indication to what degree he lacks respect for the Torah itself. If a person truly valued the Torah, he could not use it in this manner. Another example is the way in which one unravels his tefillin. The straps have the same level of sanctity as the tefillin itself (the boxes and parchment). Thus, one should treat every aspect of the tefillin with respect.

As we see regarding the plague of hail, the Torah is teaching us that one will come to understand how to value something only when he realizes the consequences.

## ***19. Appreciating the Wisdom of a Wise Man***

Before Yosef passed away he made his brothers take an oath that when they leave Egypt they should take his remains with them. The Torah states, “**Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him...**” In fact, Moshe was the only one who sought out the remains of Yosef in order to take them out of Egypt. Shlomo Ha’Melech (King Solomon) in *Mishlei* states, “**A wise heart takes mitzvos.**” The Gemara in Sotah explains that this is referring to Moshe Rabbeinu. The reason Moshe searched for the remains of Yosef while the other Jews were preoccupied with borrowing the gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians was that he had “a wise heart.” Although it was a Mitzvah to borrow the personal effects of the Egyptians as G-d commanded them, Moshe chose to seek out the remains of Yosef because he had a wise heart.

Moshe understood that without locating the remains of Yosef, the Jews would not be able to leave Egypt, regardless of all the miracles that had taken place. If this is the case, then it should have been an obvious priority for every Jew to seek out Yosef’s remains. If so, then why did it take special wisdom to do so? Every Jew, even ones without that special wisdom, should have understood this.

The Mishna in *Pirkei Avos* states, “Who is a wise man - The one who sees the outgrowth of his actions (or other events).” The question is why does the Mishna state that the wise man is the one who “sees” rather than the one who “understands” the outgrowth of his actions or other events? The answer is – understanding is something conceptual. It is something that is abstract and not tangible. However, if one “sees” the consequences and the outgrowths of one’s actions, it is something that is real and concrete. Therefore, one deals with this reality differently because it seems tangible.

The Chacham (one who is wise) is a dimension of person who not only realizes what the future will bring based on the present but one who “knows” what the future will bring. Therefore, he deals with the future as the present. For example, if one sees fire and knows that it burns, he will not act irresponsibly by extending his hand into it; however, if he only conceptually believes that fire will burn, then it is possible based on one’s conflicts, to justify extending his hand into the fire because its destructiveness is not a reality.

Shlomo Ha’Melech depicts Moshe as the “*Chacham lev* – the wise of heart” because he could not rely on anyone but himself to locate the remains of Yosef. The possibility of not locating it was a reality for Moshe because it would mean that the Jews would not be redeemed. However, all the others who did not have this wisdom of the heart only related to that possibility on a conceptual basis. Therefore, their priority was to engage in what was tangible to them – the silver and gold vessels. Their view was that someone would attend to Yosef’s remains. However, Moshe’s perspective was that this could not be left to chance because of the grave possibility that the Jews would not be redeemed. He understood that they were at their lowest point - the 49<sup>th</sup> level of

spiritual contamination. If the Jews remained in Egypt for a moment longer than they were intended to, they would have become spiritually extinct. Thus, there would not be a Jewish people or a Sinai. All existence hinged on the remains of Yosef being located and removed within the proper timeframe.

The Torah tells us that Avraham Our Patriarch trusted his faithful servant Eliezer with all of his material assets. Despite his enormous wealth, he trusted Eliezer implicitly. Eliezer was not only astute as the administrator of his master's estate but he was also spiritualized to the point of having a similar radiance as his master Avraham. When Avraham chose Eliezer as the person to locate a wife for his son Yitzchak (who would be the future Matriarch), he bound him by an oath to take a proper wife from Avraham's family and not from the daughters of Canaan. If Eliezer violated this oath, he would forfeit his share in the world to come.

The question is if Avraham had such a level of faith in his servant that he was entrusted with his fortune, then why when it came to choosing a proper wife for Yitzchak did he make him take an oath? The answer is – although it was unlikely that Eliezer would defy the order of his master, when it came to the spiritual future of the Jewish people, Avraham made him swear. He “saw” the consequence of what would happen should the proper wife for Yitzchak, a matriarch of the Jewish people, not be chosen. Therefore, it was not something he would leave to chance. This is because Avraham had wisdom of the heart.

When Hashem told Avraham that he would father a child at the age of 99 from Sarah, the Torah tells us that he rejoiced. Hashem valued this belief as righteousness for Avraham. However, when Sarah was informed that she was going to have a child she chuckled. She had a momentary flicker of doubt. The question is why was Avraham able to rejoice although he at that age was no longer able to father a child? The answer is because Avraham was a man who had wisdom of the heart; he “saw” Hashem's Word as a reality. Therefore, he rejoiced and Sarah did not.

## ***20. The Attribute of Truth is a Key Element in Prayer***

The Torah tells us that after the Jewish people left Egypt, the Egyptians pursued them to the Sea. The Torah states, **“Pharaoh approached; the Children of Yisroel raised their eyes and behold! – Egypt was journeying after them, and they were frightened; the Children of Yisroel cried out to Hashem.”** It is clearly indicated from this verse that the Jewish people believed that it was within the power of Hashem to save them from the hands of the Egyptians. As it is stated, “and they cried out to Hashem.” However, the next statement expressed by the Jews seems contradictory. In the following verse the Torah states, **“They said to Moshe, “Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the Wilderness?”** On one hand the Jewish people prayed to Hashem (indicating their firm belief), and yet they spoke to Moshe as if they were heretics, blaming him for taking them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. How do we understand this?

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the verse – “they cried out to Hashem” to mean that Jewish people took hold of the “craft” of their forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Just

as the Patriarchs prayed to Hashem at various times of need, so too did the Jewish people pray to Hashem at this perilous moment. If the Jewish people truly believed in tefillah (prayer) as their forefathers did, then why did they immediately complain to Moshe about their imminent destruction? The Ramban explains that the Jewish people prayed; however, when Hashem did not immediately respond to them they came to Moshe with their claim. Rashi uses the term they took hold of the “craft” of their forefathers to indicate that they did not pray with the level of conviction and belief in Hashem as their forefathers had done. They merely mimicked the behavior of the Patriarchs by praying in a time of need.

The Jewish people did not truly understand or appreciate tefillah nor did they have relevance to it at this moment. They had just emerged from being idol worshippers in Egypt. However, they were aware of the blessing that Yitzchak had given to his son Yaakov, “Ha’Kol kol Yaakov – the voice is the voice of Yaakov.” This indicates that the power of tefillah (prayer) belongs to Yaakov and his decedents. Tefillah is the weapon of the Jew; however, there are certain criteria necessary to give it effectiveness.

What are these criteria? They include the characteristic of self-negation combined with the belief and understanding of tefillah which make it effective. The Jewish people prayed because they knew the Patriarchs had done so. However, they did not have the self-negation or the belief that was possessed by the Patriarchs. Therefore, Hashem did not respond to their prayers immediately and this caused them to complain to Moshe.

We say every day in the *Ashrei* (the Psalm that is said three times a day), “Hashem is close to all who call upon Him – to all who call upon Him truthfully (*b’emes*).” On a literal level, one would understand this to mean that when one calls out to Hashem sincerely, He will be close to him. If Hashem is close, then He will respond. On a deeper level, one can understand this verse to mean that Hashem is close to those who possess Emes (truth). If one lives a life of Emes (truth), which is consistent with what is dictated by the Torah then this causes Hashem to be close and to respond. The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us “the signet of Hashem is Emes.” Therefore, if a person possesses this attribute then he has a commonality with Hashem, thus causing Hashem to be close to him. However, if one lacks integrity and is not true to what he understands and believes, then he does not possess the attribute of Emes and Hashem will not be close to him.

The ultimate truth –Emes– is Torah. As it is written in *Mishlei*, “Acquire truth and do not sell it.” The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zarah explains that the acquisition of truth is referring to Torah, which is unadulterated. The Prophet states, “*Teetain Emes L’Yaakov* – Give truth to Yaakov.” Yaakov, our Patriarch, is identified as the “man of truth” because he was the man of Torah. Therefore, one can understand why the weapon of Yaakov was his tefillah- “Ha’Kol kol Yaakov – the voice is the voice of Yaakov.” If one possesses Emes, then his voice truly reflects the voice of Yaakov.

The Gemara tells us in a number of locations that Hashem created the yetzer ha’rah (the evil inclination) and Torah as its antidote. Meaning, one is able to counter and neutralize the evil inclination with Torah study. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that this is true only if one studies Torah “*I’shmah*- with the proper intent (which is study of Torah for its own sake).” If one studies Torah with the proper intent then it defuses the evil inclination and acts as an antidote. However, if a person studies Torah with an ulterior motive, then the person’s involvement in the

mitzvah is lacking integrity. He is studying it for his own sake and not for the Torah itself. Therefore, since he is lacking in Emes, his Torah study is not an effective antidote against the evil inclination just as prayer is not effective if one is lacking in Emes.

We say at the conclusion of the Amidah (silent prayer), “ May it be Your will Hashem...that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days, Grant us a share in Your Torah, and may we serve You there with reverence, as in the days of old...” First, we beseech Hashem to rebuild the Bais HaMikdash and then we ask Him to give us a portion of His Torah, which is the means by which one identifies with Emes. Only when we possess truth are we able to serve Hashem with reverence, as in the days of old. We reinstate the commonality with Hashem through Torah, which is truth.

At the sea, since the tefillah of the Jewish people was lacking in the quality of Emes, Hashem did not respond immediately to their outcries. Their commitment to tefillah was only as a “craft” of their forefathers.

## ***21. When Does One Truly Fear G-d?***

Hashem split the Sea and enabled the Jewish people to cross safely. Afterwards, Hashem closed it on Pharaoh and his army. The Torah states, **“On that day, Hashem saved Yisroel from the hand of Egypt, and Yisroel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Yisroel saw the great Hand of Hashem that inflicted upon Egypt; and the people feared Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and Moshe, His servant.”**

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that when the Sea closed on the Egyptians, the Jewish people were concerned that perhaps they were not destroyed and that they came up on the other side and would continue to pursue them. In order to alleviate their fears and concerns, the Torah states, “Yisroel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore...” This indicated that Hashem had performed a miracle by causing the Sea to cast the remains of the Egyptians onto the seashore. The Torah tells us that only after the Jewish people saw the Egyptian remains on the seashore did they “fear Hashem” and had “faith in Him and Moshe his servant.” It is difficult to understand why the Jewish people only feared Hashem after they saw the destruction of the Egyptians. They had already witnessed revealed miracles such as the ten plagues. They experienced the splitting of the Sea, which was the greatest miracle of them all which even caused the pagan nations of the world to tremble in fear of Hashem. The Midrash tells us that the level of revelation experienced by the maidservant at the Sea was greater than that of Yechezkel the prophet. So why did they fear Hashem only after seeing that their oppressors no longer lived? How do we understand this?

The Torah is teaching us something profound - that as much as one recognizes the omnipotence of Hashem (even at a level that is greater than Yechezkel the prophet), if one fears anyone other than Hashem, then he does not *truly* fear Him. If one fully comprehends and internalizes the reality of who G-d is, then he has no reason to fear anyone. Nothing can happen to him that is not the Will of Hashem. It was only when the Jewish people no longer feared the Egyptians (because they were destroyed in the Sea) that they were able to fear Hashem. We also can understand from the verse, “they had faith in Hashem...” (only subsequent to the destruction of the Egyptians) that one does not have sufficient clarity to have “faith in Hashem” unless all

distractions are removed. As long as the Jewish people were distracted by the existence of the Egyptians, they were blocked from fully internalizing who G-d was. Therefore, they could not have complete faith and reverence for Him.

The reason a person fears anything is because he believes and feels that his life or his predicament is dependent on that which he fears. However, if one has faith that Hashem totally dictates one's existence, then there is no reason to fear anyone other than Him. Thus, if one does fear someone other than Hashem, it is a deficiency in his faith.

In the Portion of Mishpatim, the Torah tells us that every Jew has an obligation to visit the Temple Mount (Bais HaMikdash) three times a year on the festivals and "see the Presence of the Master, Hashem." The Gemara in Tractate *Chagigah* discusses a case of a Canaanite slave who had two masters and was subsequently emancipated by one of them. As a result of this emancipation, half of him is considered a full Jew who has all the obligations of the Torah incumbent upon him. The other half of this individual (the part owned by the master) retains the Canaanite slave status (he is only bound by the mitzvos of a woman).

Since half of him is fully obligated in all the mitzvos, one would think that perhaps such an individual would be obligated to visit the Bais HaMikdash and "see the Presence of the Master, Hashem". However, the Gemara tells us that even though half of him is fully obligated in the mitzvos, he is absolved from visiting the Temple Mount. The reason for this is that this mitzvah entails going to "see the presence of the Master, Hashem," indicating that the individual who has one master is obliged to go, not the one who has two. If one has a master other than Hashem, he cannot fully appreciate and internalize Hashem, who is *the* Master. Therefore, the half-Jew/half-slave is exempt from visiting the Temple Mount.

The degree one reveres and fears Hashem is determined by the concerns and trepidations that one has in his life.

## ***22. To what Standard is One Held?***

The Torah states after the Jewish people crossed the Sea to safety, "**Moshe caused Yisroel to journey from the Sea of Reeds and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur; they went for a three-day period in the Wilderness, but they did not find water. They came to Marah, but they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter...The people complained against Moshe saying, "What shall we drink?" ...There He (Hashem) ....tested them."**

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Hashem "tested" the Jewish people in Marah and He saw how "stiff-necked" they were because when they spoke with Moshe they did not address him in a respectful manner. Rather than complaining to Moshe, the Jewish people should have asked him to pray on their behalf to Hashem for water. The Jews failed the test, which demonstrated that they are a "stiff-necked" people. The question is – why only in Marah was it considered a test and their

failing proved that they were a stiff-necked people? Why was it not considered a test when they were at the shore of the Sea and complained?

When the Jewish people were pursued by the Egyptians to the Sea, they said to Moshe, **“Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the Wilderness?”** Soon after the Sea split and the Jewish people crossed to safety. The Jewish people demonstrated the identical failing which was shown later in Marah vis-à-vis Moshe. Rather than saying to Moshe “why did you take us into the desert to die” the Jews should have said, “pray to G-d so that He should save us.” This is something they did not do. Before Moshe passed away, he recounted all the failings of the Jewish people over the forty-year period from the time of the exodus from Egypt. One of the failings that he mentioned was how the Jews had lacked in faith before the splitting of the Sea and thus complained – “were there not sufficient graves in Egypt...” If this is the case then why was it not considered a failing of a test, which proved that the Jews were a stiff-necked people? How do we understand this?

The Jews initially complained to Moshe by saying, **“Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the Wilderness?”** This was before they had witnessed the splitting of the Sea. Although they had seen the plagues in Egypt, which were clearly identified as the Hand of G-d, nevertheless, they had not yet achieved the level of spirituality that they reached after the Sea was split. The Torah states, “They believed in Hashem and Moshe His servant,” which did not precede the splitting of the Sea. There was no comparison between the level of revelation during the period of the plagues and the revelation of Hashem at the time of the splitting of the Sea. Thus, once the Jewish people reached this advanced level of belief, how could they address Moshe in the inappropriate way that they had done in Marah? As a result of the splitting of the Sea, they understood who Moshe was and instead, should have asked him to pray for them. However, this was not the case. They complained and thus failed the test. This was considered a failure because they already understood that Moshe was the servant of Hashem and therefore they should have behaved differently towards him.

Those who are less learned in Torah are less culpable than those who are learned. This implies that those who have an advanced level of understanding are more culpable. Thus, if one behaves in a manner that is not consistent with his level of understanding, then it is considered a serious failing. Although it was considered a failing and a lack of faith for the Jewish people to complain to Moshe *before* the splitting of the Sea, it was not considered a failure nor did it indicate that they were stiff-necked people. However, *after* the splitting of the Sea, (when they understood who Moshe truly was) the appropriate thing would have been for them to ask him to pray on their behalf. Since they did not, it is considered that they failed the test and demonstrated that they are a stiff-necked people.

The Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered unto your people (Moshe will pass away).’”** Rashi cites Chazal who say that despite the fact that Moshe understood that he was going to pass away after fulfilling the commandment to destroy the Midianites, “he nevertheless performed the Mitzvah with joy and he did not delay.” If Moshe had decided not to act immediately upon the dictate of Hashem, he would have extended his life.

The Midrash tells us that Moshe’s immediate response to the dictate of Hashem without considering its consequences makes him “praiseworthy.” Meaning, even a person as great as Moshe is considered praiseworthy for making this decision despite all of the reasons to delay.

The Midrash continues -Yehoshua Bin Nun, the disciple and successor of Moshe Rabbeinu led the Jewish people into the Land of Israel. Upon entry, Hashem commanded him to conquer the land and divide it among the tribes and then he will pass away. Understanding that his passing was going to be determined by when his mission was completed, Yehoshua chose to delay. His justification was that as long as he was alive the Jews would not succumb to idol worship. Nevertheless, Yehoshua had ten years taken from his life. The Midrash tells us that initially he was meant to live 120 years like his Rebbe, Moshe.

The difficulty is that if Chazal tell us that even for a person as great as Moshe Rabbeinu that his decision (not to delay) was considered praiseworthy, it indicates that if he had chosen to delay it would not have been considered a claim against him. So, why was Yehoshua held accountable for his decision to delay the conquest and division of the Land? How do we understand this?

The answer is that although the decision not to delay the battle with the Midianites was considered "praiseworthy" even for a person as great as Moshe Rabbeinu, despite all the considerations, Moshe's decision to ignore all the considerations establishes precedence. When G-d gives a dictate, one must attend to it immediately without any delay. Therefore, Yehoshua should have followed the precedent that was set by Moshe Rabbeinu. He should not have delayed regardless of how pure his intent may have been. This failing was the cause his early passing.

A person is only held to a standard that is consistent with his own level of understanding. Therefore, if one understands how to behave and does not, it is considered that he has failed.

### ***23. The Evolution of the Spirituality of the Jewish people***

The Torah tells us that one of the four expressions of redemption that Hashem related to Moshe was, "***V'lakachti eschem li l'am – I will take you for Myself to be My people and I will be your G-d (Elokim).***" This expression of redemption is referring to the Sinai experience when the Jewish people became the *Am Hashem* (the Nation of G-d). At Sinai, we find that the Jewish people are referred to as "*mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh* – a kingly priestly holy people." The Jewish people did not immediately ascend to that level, but rather it was a progression.

Initially when Hashem sent Moshe to tell Pharaoh to release the Jewish people from bondage, He said to Moshe "Tell Pharaoh... Release My son, My firstborn (*Beni Bechori*)."  
Hashem identifies the Jewish people as his first-born child, which signifies that it is the most intimate relationship, as between a father and his son. The first-born son is the most special to his father. The relationship of a father and his son is not the same as that of a king and his subjects.

Subsequently, the Torah tells us that Hashem said to Moshe "Tell Pharaoh in My Name

*Shlach Ami* – Send out My people.” This verse identifies the Jewish People as “My People.” Meaning, that at this moment the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people was: King to subject. The nature of this relationship is that the subject is selflessly dedicated to do the will of the master and the master is dedicated to provide for the subject. The relationship between G-d and the Jewish people has a duality; on one hand, the relationship is father (Avinu) to son, but at the same time, the son must recognize that the father is the master (malkeinu). Thus, the son must be dedicated to doing His will. Even before the Exodus, the Jewish people had established themselves as G-d’s people and G-d’s children. However, regarding Sinai, the Jewish people are referred to as “*mamleches kohanim v’goy kadosh* – a kingly priestly holy people.” As a result of the receiving the Torah at Sinai, which is accepting Hashem as their G-d, the Jewish people became sanctified. This established the status of *Kedushas Yisroel* - the sanctity of the Jewish People.

In Egypt, the Jewish people were devoid of mitzvos, as the verse in Yechezkel states, “and you are naked (devoid of spirituality).” As pagans in Egypt, the Jewish people had no relevance to spirituality and were no different from the Egyptians. Then Hashem gave them two mitzvos: the mitzvah of *milah* (circumcision) and the mitzvah of *Korban Pesach* (the Pascal Lamb Offering). Circumcision is the “sign that is engraved in our flesh.” It is the manner in which the Jew identifies with G-d, as the Torah refers to circumcision, “*ohs bris kodesh* – the sign of the Holy Covenant.” The *bris milah* is something that is part of a Jew’s physicality and cannot be removed. Concerning the mitzvah of the *Korban Pesach*, the lamb/goat was an Egyptian deity. Thus, the significance of slaughtering it was the rejection of idolatry.

After the Jewish people were circumcised and they sacrificed the *Korban Pesach*, they reached a point where they developed the capacity for *kedushah*. (Sanctification). Thus, the Commandment that follows is, “*Kodesh Li Kol Bachor* – Sanctify for Me all the first born sons.” At this point Hashem sanctified the *bachor* (first born) of the Jewish people because the *bachor* shares a commonality with Him. Just as Hashem is the *Rishon* the First (and Only), who is the essence of all that is holy, so too is the first born – who shares that characteristic. The sanctity of the *bachor* is innate to who he is. However, the sanctification of the Jewish people as a whole *Kedushas Yisroel*, was not able to take place until Sinai.

*Kedushas Yisroel* was only bestowed upon the Jewish people at Sinai. Although they were considered “G-d’s people” (even before the Exodus – as it is stated “*Shlach Ami*”), at that moment they had no relevance to *kedushah*. This is explicit in the verse, “*V’lakachti eschem li l’am* – I will take you for Myself to be My people and I will be your G-d (Elokim).” It was only when the Jewish people ascended to the level of accepting Hashem as their G-d, “Elokim,” could they be sanctified. This could not have taken place if there were any spiritual impediments.

Hashem identified the Jews as His people before Sinai. However, identification as “a holy and priestly nation” only occurred at Sinai. Why could He not bestow this new status upon the Jewish people before the Exodus? Rashi at the beginning in the Portion of Yisro explains that the greatest miracle of Egypt (even more than all the plagues) was that the Jewish people were able to leave Egypt. The difficulty is, after Egypt was devastated through the plagues, and the Jews were asked to leave – why was the Exodus itself the greatest miracle? The Egyptian people literally drove the Jews out of Egypt in order to stop the death that was brought upon them. Ramchal (in his work *Derech Hashem*) explains that the Jewish people, as a result of their bondage in Egypt, were so infected with spiritual contamination that they had virtually no capacity to internalize and have any sense of spirituality.

When Hashem took the Jews out of Egypt, He purged all of their impurities and gave them a capacity to relate to and be receptive to kedushah. In Egypt, it was impossible for the Jewish people as a whole to attain sanctity (*Kedushas Yisroel*).

## ***24. Being Appreciative***

The Torah states, “The Children of Israel were armed (*chamushim*) when they went up from Egypt.” Rashi cites Chazal who explain the word “*chamushim*” to mean that only one fifth of the Jewish people left Egypt and four fifths perished during the days of darkness. In the Portion of Bo, Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the reason four fifths of the Jewish people perished during the plague of darkness was so that the Egyptians should not witness the demise of the evil ones among the Jewish people (those who did not want to leave Egypt). It was important that the Egyptians should be unaware of the destruction of four fifths of the Jews because they would say that the Jewish people were dying as they were. Hashem wanted the Egyptians to understand that it was only they who were being punished.

The Midrash Tanchuma offers another interpretation as to why the Jews who were evil died during the days of darkness. The Jews who survived the days of darkness praised and offered thanks to Hashem for not allowing the Egyptians to be aware of the demise of the Jews who perished during darkness because the Egyptians would have rejoiced over their death. The question is - why is it important for Chazal to inform us that the Jews who survived the days of darkness gave thanks and praise to Hashem for not allowing the Egyptians to witness the demise of the evil Jews?

It is difficult to understand. If all the Jews in Egypt witnessed the revealed miracles, which clearly identified the Hand of Hashem- how is it possible that the vast majority of the Jewish people did not want to leave Egypt? As it is stated, “*v’chamushim* – only one fifth left Egypt.” It is clear that there was a fundamental difference between these two groups of Jews. One group possessed a characteristic and quality that allowed them to fully appreciate and internalize the events that they had witnessed. However, the other group did not possess this quality.

The most fundamental quality an individual needs in order to be able to recognize and understand situations correctly is “*ha’karas ha’tov*- recognition of the good.” If a person has the ability to recognize that he is the beneficiary of some one else’s kindness then he is able to appreciate and understand his benefactor. However, if the person does not have the capacity to view himself as the beneficiary of someone else’s kindness then he is always suspect of his benefactor’s motive. Thus, he remains untrusting.

Despite the tragedy of the destruction of four fifths of the Jewish people, the one fifth that survived gave thanks and praise to Hashem for not allowing the Egyptians to rejoice in the demise of the evil Jews who did not want to leave Egypt. One would think that those who survived were overwhelmed with their grief and could not think of anything but attending to the burial needs of

those who died. Nevertheless, the Midrash tells us that despite the tragedy that had befallen them, they saw Hashem's kindness and thus offered thanks and praise to Him. Because of this quality of *ha'karas ha'tov*, they were truly able to appreciate Hashem's concern for them. Therefore when they witnessed the miracles and the destruction of Egypt, they were fully trusting that this was only to bring about their redemption. If a person has the quality of *ha'karas ha'tov*, he will then have relevance to spirituality because he is able to process the events of his life in a way where he sees the goodness of Hashem.

The Gemara tells us that Dovid Ha'Melech (King David) promulgated that every Jew should recite at least 100 *brachos* (blessings) every day. Dovid Ha'Melech enacted this in response to ending a plague that had befallen the Jewish people. Initially he did not understand why they were deserving of this punishment. However, he finally realized that it was because the Jews were beneficiaries of Hashem's sustenance and kindness but did not acknowledge this fact. Thus, Dovid Ha'Melech and his Bais Din (Rabbinic Court) enacted that every Jew should say 100 *brachos* every day, which caused the plague to cease. The 100 *brachos* encompassed every aspect of our existence.

For example, the *brachos* we recite each morning articulate our acknowledgement that Hashem allows us to stand erectly, gives us the ability to see, and provides the amenities that are necessary such as clothing the naked etc. It is irrelevant how much wealth a person may have; the fact that he is able to cloth his own nakedness is only because Hashem is his provider. It is not that we thank Hashem for the luxuries of life, but we must acknowledge Him for the bare necessities. People take these things for granted. Everything in life is a manifestation of the kindness of Hashem and we are the beneficiaries of His kindness. Therefore, we must be beholden and thank Hashem for everything we have. If one is able to recognize and appreciate this fact then one is humbled because he understands who he is not.

## ***25. The Value of Anticipation***

After the Sea split and subsequently closed on the Egyptian army thereby destroying them, the Torah states, **"Then Moshe and the Children of Yisroel chose to sing this song to Hashem (the *aaz yashir*)...Miriam the prophetess (*ha'navia*), the sister of Aaron, took her drum in her hand and all the women went forth after her with drums and with dances."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain the reason Miriam is referred to as **"Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron,"** is because when she first prophesized, she was a young girl and the sister of Aaron (before the birth of Moshe). She said to her father, "My mother will give birth to a son and he will be the Redeemer of Yisroel." Why is it important for the Torah to relate that after the splitting of the Sea that Miriam (as a young girl) had prophesized that her parents would bring forth the Redeemer of Yisroel? What relevance does this have to singing the praises of Hashem at this moment?

The Midrash tells us that the level of revelation experienced by the maidservant at the Sea was greater than that of Yechezkel the Prophet. One could say that Miriam sang the praises of Hashem at this time because she too was inspired. However, if this is the case then it has no relevance to her being a prophetess. Evidently, her early prophecy has relevance to this moment.

The Torah tells us in the Portion of *Behaloscha*, that Miriam became a leper because she spoke critically (*Loshon Hara*) of her brother Moshe. As a result of her condition, she had to be sent out of the camp of Israel for seven days until she recovered. The Midrash tells us that until she could rejoin the people and travel again, Miriam merited that the Divine Presence, the Clouds of Glory, and the Jewish people waited for her recovery. This was because G-d rewards people measure for measure. When Moshe's mother Yocheved could conceal him no longer, she put him into a box and placed it into the water among the reeds. The Torah tells us "Miriam stood at a distance and waited to see what would happen to him." The Midrash states that in the merit of her waiting to see what would happen to her brother Moshe, the camp of Israel, the Divine Presence, and the Clouds of Glory did not travel until she recovered from her leprosy.

What was so special about Miriam waiting to see what would happen to Moshe? One would think that any sister would do as much. However, Miriam's concern for her brother was not merely the sisterly concern for a sibling's survival. When she waited in anticipation to see what was going to happen, her concern was whether Moshe would survive the water and thus become the Redeemer of Israel (as she had prophesized), or would he perish - thus eliminating the possibility for redemption. She was deeply distressed at the possibility that there would be no exodus from Egypt and consequently no giving of the Torah at Sinai. If this were to occur, the purpose of existence would not come to fruition!

Hashem saw that not only was Miriam concerned that His Will would not be fulfilled, but it caused her great anguish. He rewarded her measure for measure - just as she waited to see what would happen to Moshe - the 600,000 Jews, the Divine Presence, and the Clouds of Glory waited for her.

It is clear that Miriam anticipated the moment of Redemption all her life. From the time that she had prophesized that her parents would bring forth the Redeemer of Israel, she waited for the redemption when Moshe would take the Jews out of Egypt to become G-d's people at Sinai. Miriam rejoiced after the splitting of the Sea, not because she had reached a new level of understanding because of this great miracle, but because she had prophesized this as a child (as Aaron's sister before the birth of Moshe) and had yearned for this moment. When it finally arrived, she was overwhelmed with joy and burst forth with song. Thus, she led the women to sing the praises of Hashem.

In the Amidah (silent prayer) of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we ask Hashem to instill fear and awe in all mankind. Additionally, we ask Hashem to give honor and glory to Klal Yisroel and reveal Himself and bring Moshiach. We say that as a result of knowing and experiencing Hashem's Presence, the *tzaddikim* (the devoutly righteous), the *yesharim* (the straight - who are at a more advanced level than the righteous), and the *chassidim* (the scrupulously devout - who are even more advanced than the straight) will rejoice at various levels of joy. It would seem that if all mankind is brought to the realization of who G-d is and awed by His Presence, one would think that all mankind would become ecstatic as a result of this realization and revelation. Therefore, why do we single-out only these three levels of spiritually advanced individuals? It is because the *tzaddik*, the *yaasher*, and the *chassid* have dedicated their lives to the sanctification of G-d and await the revelation of His glory. Therefore, when Hashem does reveal Himself, they will be overcome with the various levels of joy. The ordinary person, who does not anticipate and yearn for that moment, will not appreciate it as something extraordinarily special when it takes place.

This is what the Torah is communicating with the verse, “Miriam the prophetess” led the women in songs of praise.

The question one must ask is – when one witnesses a kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G-d’s Name), how does one react? Does one become ecstatic with joy? Or, does one remain relatively unmoved. The answer to that question will indicate what level a person has reached.