

Geulas Yisrael #146

Shabbat in Egypt, Shabbat of October 7th

Our liberation from Mitzrayim wasn't just a political emancipation of an oppressed nation of slaves. Yetziat Mitzrayim introduced Hashem into a dark pagan world which was lost in theological confusion. For two thousand years humanity assumed that gods were planets, animals, or other forces of nature. They bowed to metal statues and slaughtered humans to stony effigies in delusional worship of self-appointed gods who didn't answer, and of course, never existed.

Avraham launched a revolution of consciousness proclaiming a one G-d responsible for all reality and Who lies beyond human imagination. His revolution gained considerable regional traction as cultures which lived in his immediate radius began to appreciate Avraham's moral G-d, who had created everything.

The broader world, beyond Avraham's immediate vicinity though, hadn't yet discovered Hashem. When Moshe first demanded our freedom, Pharoh incredulously asked: "Who is this G-d that you speak and whose demands I should heed?" Pharoh simply hadn't heard of Hashem.

Our delivery from Egypt introduced Hashem to the ancient world. Egypt was the cradle of civilization and the messages of Yetziat Mitzrayim spread beyond Egypt to other empires and cultures. It took the world many centuries to fully adopt monotheism, but Yetizat Mitzrayim was the start of humanity's long march to monotheism.

Makkot Were Lessons, Not Just Punishments

Makkot weren't just "back-breakers" to reduce Egyptian intransigence and to punish them for their crimes. Several makkot delivered important theological messages and introduced basic themes of monotheism.

Prior to educating the Egyptians about monotheism, pagan symbols of worship had to be dismantled. The first two makkot assaulted the Nile-river, the source of Egyptian economic power, which had become a cultural and religious symbol. The plague of *dam* converted this vibrant and vital waterway into a stinking cesspool of blood and death. Once the flowing river became a stagnant pond it produced

frogs and crocodiles rather than edible fish. The Nile-river, once an object of reverence, had been converted into a reeking sewer of death.

Additionally, Egyptians deified their cattle as symbols of fertility and as vital instruments in their all-powerful agricultural sector. The pandemic of *dever* exterminated all the cattle, reducing Egypt to a slaughter ground of dead and rotting carcasses. An additional religious symbol had now been humiliated.

Additionally, Egyptians worshipped the sun as the source of life and as a powerful symbol of daily renewal. During the week of *choshech* the sun was ransacked, and an entire country was shrouded in darkness. One by one they all fell. One by one, Egyptian deities were debunked and debased.

Hashem Isn't Physical

In addition to clearing the stage of Egyptian deities, several makkot introduced basic tenets of monotheism. The *dever* pandemic lessoned Egypt that Hashem wasn't physical and had no physical reference point. The pandemic of *dever* was introduced as attack by the "hand of God":

הנה יד ה' הויה במקנך אשר בשדה

and presumably Egyptians imagined a large divine hand descending from heaven and hauling away their cattle. Yet, *dever* was completely invisible, teaching the Egyptians that Hashem isn't physical and cannot be visualized in human terms.

Divine Hand Within Nature

The plague of *arov* displayed the hidden hand of Hashem within Nature. Unlike other makkot, *arov* didn't include any miracles or conversion of any material into a different substance. The jungle naturally teems with wild predators. To protect us Hashem imposed a delicate boundary between the jungle and the city. After the flood Hashem redesigned the natural order placing the "fear of Man" upon the beasts, preventing them from trampling human cities. The safety and stability of human civilization, so easily taken for granted, is a product of divinely crafted balance. During *arov* Hashem simply suspended this balance, removing an

invisible boundary. Arov uncovered Hashem's hidden hand in Nature, illustrating that:

כי אני ה' בקרב הארץ

Hashem operates *within the aretz and within nature*. Simply lifting a divinely installed but invisible barrier between the jungle and the city led to violence and chaos.

Everything Comes from One

Barad discredited the popular and powerful notion of dualism. To the ancients, the world seemed divided into different "warring" elements: night and day, life and death, good and evil, water and fire. How could these opposing forces all stem from One being? Unable to imagine divine unity, they assumed the existence of multiple gods, each of which was responsible for a different force of Nature. To disavow this approach Hashem delivered a hailstorm of *barad* demonstrating that One God was responsible for both fire *and* water and, by extension for all the dichotomy and diversity of our world.

The makkot weren't only punitive but delivered basic lessons of monotheism, introducing Hashem to a world which denied, or was unaware of His presence.

The Role of Shabbat

During Yetziat Mitzrayim, the day of Shabbat was a different manner of showcasing Hashem's presence.

One of the major turning points of geulah occurred on Shabbat, the same day that Hashem halted His original creation. The first korban Pesach was sacrificed on a Wednesday, a day before we departed Egypt. Four days beforehand, goats and sheep were purchased and prepared for sacrifice. This "heretical" act of disrespect to an Egyptian deity would, normally, be punishable by death. On this Shabbat though, we defied Egyptian law and were protected by Hashem's hashgacha. This act of insubordination signaled the start of our redemption, providing us with the courage and confidence to follow Hashem into an empty desert.

It also signaled that our redemption served a larger purpose of our representing Hashem in this world. The overlap on that Shabbat between the start of our liberation and the day Hashem rested from creation underscored the fact that we were redeemed to teach the world that Hashem was its Creator. Annually, we commemorate this turning point of geulah, and our national awakening on Shabbat Hagadol, immediately prior to Pesach.

Shabbat Hakatan

Before that epic Shabbat Hagadol, there was an earlier shabbat of national awakening. At some stage according to the Midrash, prior to fleeing to Midyan, Moshe petitioned Pharaoh to grant us a day of respite. Pharaoh acceded, reckoning that a day off would only increase the productivity of his slave labor force. Moshe selected the seventh day as our day of rest. The coincidence between our own day of rest and Hashem's resting confirmed that we were Hashem's chosen people tasked with teaching the world about creation. By resting specifically on the seventh day we were to testify about divine creation.

Repeatedly, during Yetziat Mitzrayim, events on Shabbat highlighted our mission of teaching humanity about Hashem. First, we received a vacation day on Shabbat. A few days prior to redemption we bravely defied Egyptian culture on Shabbat. Seven weeks later, on Shavuot which was also Shabbat, we received the word of Hashem. If major national milestones occurred on Shabbat, evidently, we had a broader message to deliver. Events on shabbat are more resonant than events which occur on a weekday. Milestones which occur on Shabbat are deeply resonant and tragedies which occur on Shabbat are deeply symbolic.

October 7th

On Shabbat, October 7th a vicious attack was launched against our people and our land. Many of us are processing this pogrom through historical lenses. Having returned to the land of Israel, we thought that these horrific scenes were relics of our tortured past in galut. We thought we had overcome this struggle, but, evidently, the historical battle over our legitimate claims to Jewish homeland and destiny continues.

There is an additional layer to this battle. The attack of October 7th defiled Hashem's presence in this world. Any attack against the people of Hashem is an implicit attack against Hashem. But this is a direct assault on Hashem's presence.

These murderers and rapists speak in the name of God, but they speak of a god who does not exist. God does not desire blood and death and He certainly doesn't endorse the desecration of human dignity or tzelem elokim. These homicidal murders have vandalized the face of God in this world. Denying the ways of God is tantamount to denying God himself. Though they appear to be religious they are nothing more than atheists who have blurred Hashem's presence in our world. They chose our Shabbat as the day of their attack, and they assaulted Shabbat and its testimony of Hashem's creation.

During the upcoming month of geulah, undoubtedly, we will view our own struggle through the lenses of past redemptions. It is crucial to frame this struggle not just as historical but also as theological. We are battling for our security, for our people and for our homeland. But we are also battling on behalf of Hashem's presence in our world. Shabbat was vandalized, and its underlying messages were defaced. We are battling to repair that damage and to fully restore Hashem's presence to a dark world. On October 7th, Shabbat was the battleground for Hashem's presence. We will I"h restore Shabbat's glory and achieve:

מנוחת אהבה ונדבה, מנוחת אמת ואמונה, מנוחת שלום ושלוה והשקט ובטח, מנוחה שלימה
שאתה רוצה בה... ועל מנוחתם יקדישו את שמך