
❧ PESACH I ❧

Slavery and the Pesach Miracles

Pesach celebrates a seminal event in Jewish history – the freeing of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt 3,300 years ago. This two-part series on Pesach will explore the key themes of the festival: slavery, miracles, freedom, Jewish nationhood, Divine Providence, and the lessons we can learn from them. In this first class on Pesach, we will discuss the necessity for the 210-year servitude in Egypt and why the Jews were freed from Egypt amidst a series of ten miracles, culminating in the splitting of the Reed Sea. This class also presents archeological evidence supporting the events of the Exodus. The second class on Pesach will focus on Jewish nationhood, freedom, Divine Providence, and the inspiration we can gain from the festival.

This class will address the following questions:

- ❧ What events caused the enslavement in Egypt?
- ❧ What purpose did the slavery serve?
- ❧ Why did God redeem the Jews through a yearlong series of miracles and not just one?
- ❧ Is there any archeological evidence to support the events of the Exodus?
- ❧ What lessons from the slavery in Egypt 3,330 years ago apply to my life in the 21st century?

Class Outline

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Section II. Pesach Miracles and Their Lessons

Part A. The Miracles of the Exodus

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SECTION I. SLAVERY IN EGYPT

There are two types of slavery: slavery of the body, and slavery of the soul and intellect. As the following story illustrates, real slavery is the confinement of the soul:

Rabbi Aryeh Levine (1885-1969) was known for his compassion and concern for every Jew. His kind words and easy smile engaged all who saw him. In the 1940's when Jews were imprisoned by the British authorities who ruled Palestine, Reb Aryeh was one of the rare individuals who had permission to visit them. The prisoners loved and revered him.

One Chol HaMoed Pesach, Reb Aryeh visited the prisoners. "How was your Seder?" he asked, genuinely interested in their welfare.

One of the prisoners smiled and quipped, "Everything was fine, we were able to fulfill all the Halachic requirements of the Seder except one. When we came to: 'Pour out Your anger on the nations that do not want to know You,' they wouldn't let us open the door!" (Customarily Jews open the front door of their home prior to reciting this part of the Haggadah as an affirmation of trust in God's protection on the first night of Pesach.)

Reb Aryeh returned the inmate's smile and said, "You are mistaken. You do have the key to freedom – the key to your heart, which can give you spiritual freedom." He continued, "We are prisoners in our own bodies, but we can be freed of the bondage to our materialistic desires. By opening our hearts and allowing ourselves to gain control, we become truly free." (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, Reflections of the Maggid, pp. 268-269.)

The Egyptian slavery was both physical and spiritual. In this section we will attempt to understand the events of the Egyptian slavery and their significance to us today.

PART A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND VERIFICATION OF THE EGYPTIAN SLAVERY

The Children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt for 210 years (Rashi, Shemot/Exodus 12:40). But what events of Divine Providence led them there in the first place? The next source provides the historical background:

1. **Rabbi Akiva Aaronson, The Foundation of Judaism, pp. 36-39 (adapted) – A historical review: the sale of Yosef; the beginning of the slavery in Egypt; the killing of Jewish babies; Moshe is appointed to free the Jews; Pharaoh refuses and the Ten Plagues ensue; the Jews leave Egypt and walk through the Reed Sea after a 210-year slavery.**

Yaakov (Jacob) and his twelve sons were living in the Land of Israel. The second youngest brother, Yosef (Joseph), was sold by his brothers to be an Egyptian slave. After Yosef interpreted Pharaoh's dream correctly, and provided food stores for the seven years of famine, he was appointed second-in-command over the Egyptian Empire.

Since the famine affected the entire region, Yaakov and his household were forced to travel to Egypt to find food and settle there. With that, the period of exile in Egypt had begun. A new Pharaoh came to power, and viewing Yaakov's growing family as a threat, he enslaved them, subjugated them to forced labor, and ordered the drowning of all new-born Jewish males in the Nile River.

At this time Moshe (Moses) was born. His mother made a reed basket for him and placed him on the Nile. He was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter and was raised in the palace of Pharaoh. After he was forced to flee Egypt because he defended his enslaved brethren, God appeared to him in a prophecy, and commanded him to return to Egypt to free the Jewish people from slavery. Pharaoh refused the request for Jewish freedom and instead intensified the Jews' servitude.

Through Moshe, God brought about the Ten Plagues in Egypt, which revealed His existence and control over all Creation. The final plague was the killing of the first-born Egyptians. The Jews – now numbering approximately 2.5 million walked out to freedom on the morning of the 15th of Nisan in the year 2448, just over 3,300 years ago, after 210 years of slavery. God miraculously split the Reed Sea for the Jews, saving them from the pursuing Egyptians, who were drowned. Six weeks later, the Jews reached Mount Sinai, where God gave the Ten Commandments and Moshe received the Written and Oral Torah.

Secular sources confirm the events of the Egyptian exile:

2. **Rabbi Lawrence Keleman, *Permission to Receive*, pp. 98-100 – The very fact that the Jewish people recorded their unflattering history of slavery and oppression is further evidence that it actually happened.**

The historian J. W. Jack echoes the sentiments of many scholars in his statement that “it is far from likely that any nation would have placed in the forefront of its records an experience of hardship and slavery in a foreign country, unless this had been a real and vital part of its national life.” Indeed, putting aside the question of Jewish origins for a moment, it is difficult to name any people who has cherished a *fictional* enslavement as part of its religious or political mythology. (The Pharaohs did not even record *real* events that reflected poorly on their military prowess or international profile.)

Today, archeological research is slowly but surely discovering the events of the Exodus in the depths of the earth. Thanks to papyri, artifacts, and remains, events are coming to life for archeologists and historians.

3. ***Ibid.*, pp. 101-105 – Secular historians and archeologists provide external archeological evidence for the Egyptian enslavement and the Ten Plagues.**

Dr. Kenneth Kitchen is the translator of the Louvre Leather Roll (or LLR), an Egyptian notepad dated to the period of the Israelite enslavement ... The LLR relates how “gangs of workmen were led by two foremen appointed from their own people,” just as the Hebrew slaves reported directly to Hebrew supervisors who in turn had Egyptian bosses (Shemot 5:14). The LLR indicates that each worker had to manufacture a quota of bricks per day (2,000), a concept expressed in Shemot 5:6-19. Finally, the LLR states that slaves could petition time off to observe religious festivals, making Moshe’s request in Shemot 5:3 seem reasonable ...

Historian William Allbright renders this summary of the enslavement evidence: “We must content ourselves here with the assurance that there is no longer any room for the still dominant attitude of hypercriticism toward the early historical traditions of Israel.” John Bright concurs, “The tradition of Israelite bondage in Egypt is unimpeachable”...

Dr. Donald Redford, Professor of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Toronto, tells us of ... a “snippet of a preserved diary ... [which] records the events leading up to the fall of Avaris,” Avaris being the Egyptian capital city close to Biblical Goshen [see Shemot 8:18]. The diary’s author complained that “darkness covered the western heavens ... and for a period of days no light shone.” Redford confesses that “the striking resemblance between this catastrophic storm and some of the traditional plagues [i.e. the plague of darkness] seems more than fortuitous.”

In the Egyptian collection of the Museum of Leyden, Holland, there is an early Egyptian papyrus that was translated into English by the Egyptologist Alan Gardiner and given the title *Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage*. The papyrus describes a condition of desolation and destruction and, in Gardiner’s opinion, this is an account of the destruction that befell the Early Egyptian Kingdom. Examples are summarized below:

4. Yehoshua Etzion, *The Lost Tanach* – Archeological discoveries provide external verification of the Ten Plagues.

Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage, c. 1,300 BCE,
Museum of Leyden, Holland.

Plagues throughout the land, blood everywhere
... (p. 2, lines 5-6).

The river is blood, men thirst for water ... (p. 2,
line 10).

All the beasts cry in their hearts, the cattle low (p.
5, line 5).

Verily, everything is ruined that yesterday was yet
seen; the land is left as after the flax harvest (p. 5,
line 12).

The prisons were destroyed [and slaves let free];
there was a great outcry in Egypt ... (p. 12, line
12).

Sefer Shemot

וַיָּרָם בַּמַּטֵּה... וַיִּהְיֶה כָּל-הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר-בַּיָּאֵר לְדָם.

Moshe held the staff aloft ... and all the
water that was in the River turned to blood
(Shemot 7:20).

וְלֹא יָכְלוּ מִצְרַיִם לְשָׁתוֹת מַיִם מִן הַיָּאֵר

Egypt could not drink water from the River
(ibid. 7:21).

הַיָּד ה' הוֹיָה בְּמִקְנֶךָ אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה ... דְּבַר כְּבֹד מְאֹד.

The hand of God is on your livestock that are
in the field ... a very severe epidemic (ibid.
9:3).

וַיִּטֵּה יָדְךָ עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאַרְבֶּה ... וְלֹא נֹתַר כָּל יֵרֶק
בְּעֵץ וּבְעֶשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

Stretch out your hand over the Land of
Egypt for the locust swarm ... No greenery
remained on the trees or the grass of the field
in the entire land of Egypt (ibid. 10:12-15).

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה וַיְהוּהָה הַבָּהָה כָּל בְּכוֹר ... וַתְּהִי צְעָקָה
גְּדֹלָה בְּמִצְרַיִם ... וַיֹּאמֶר קוֹמוּ צֵאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי...

It was at midnight that God smote every
firstborn ... and there was a great outcry in
Egypt ... [Pharaoh] said “Rise up, go out
from among my people!” (ibid. 12:29-31).

PART B. THE REASONS FOR THE SLAVERY IN EGYPT

In the previous section we discussed *what* caused the Egyptian exile: a famine in the Land of Israel brought about by Divine Providence. But this requires more explanation – *why* were the Jews sent into exile in the first place? What purpose did the 210-year exile serve?

In this part we will discuss three reasons:

1. To strengthen the Jews' trust in God (sources 1 to 4)
2. To develop a close relationship with God (sources 5 to 7)
3. To show the Jews the consequences of an over-zealous pursuit of materialism (source 8)

To understand the first reason, we will examine the following incident in the life of Avraham (Abraham):

1. **Bereishit (Genesis) 15:7-8; Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Nedarim; Rashi ibid. – One of the reasons for the enslavement in Egypt was because Avraham doubted God's credibility in fulfilling His promise.**

Bereishit 15:7-8

He said to him [Avraham]: "I am God Who brought you out of Ur Kasdim to give you this land to inherit it."

He said, "My Lord, how will I know that I will inherit it?"

Nedarim 32a

Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer, "Why was Avraham punished by having his descendants enslaved for 210 years in Egypt?"

Shmuel answered, "Because Avraham doubted God's [credibility in fulfilling His promise – Rashi]. This is reflected in the verse: 'How will I know that I will inherit the Land?'" (Bereishit 15:8)

בראשית טו:ז, ה

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם הֲאֵשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּרִכְשִׁים לְהֵתֵן לְךָ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בַּמָּה אֲדַע כִּי אִירְשֶׁנָּה.

נדרים לב.

אמר רבי אבהו אמר רבי אלעזר: מפני מה נענש אברהם אבינו ונשתעבדו בניו למצרים מאתים ועשר שנים? ... שמואל אמר: מפני שהפריז על מדותיו של הקב"ה, שנאמר: במה אדע כי אירשנה [בראשית טו].

רע"י

שהפריז על מדותיו - שהגדיל לישאל על מדותיו של הקב"ה שאמר במה אדע.

2. **Maharal, Gevuros Hashem, Ch. 9, p. 55 – Avraham lacked perfect faith in God; the purpose of the Egyptian exile was to correct this deficiency in his descendants.**

God placed Avraham's descendants in exile because he was lacking in his belief and trust in Him. God therefore placed his descendants in exile, in order that they would correct this mistake and *fully* trust in Him. They would also see the power of God's deeds for those whom He loves, as well as the awesome power He showed to the Egyptians through the plagues ...

השם יתברך הביא את זרע אברהם בגלות, מפני שלא היה אברהם מתחזק כל כך באמונה, לכך הביא השם יתברך זרעו בגלות כדי שיקנו האמונה, וידעו כח מעשיו שהוא עושה לאוהביו וגבורותיו אשר עושה לאויביו, כמו שעשה למצרים מן מכות הגדולות והנוראות, הטובה שעשה לאוהביו...

The Patriarchs and Matriarchs were to be the foundation of the Jewish people; therefore it was crucial that even the most miniscule personal flaws be rectified, since even a small defect in the foundation can compromise the integrity of the entire structure (Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 190). In the next source, we see an analogy describing how the nation was purified of these negative traits.

3. **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 4:20, Rashi ibid., Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, HaK'sav V'HaKabbalah – The harsh tribulations of the Egyptian exile, which was compared to an "iron furnace," served to purify the nation of any flaws left over from the Patriarchal era.**

But God has taken you and withdrawn you from the iron crucible, from Egypt, to be a nation of heritage for Him, as this very day.

דברים פרק ד פסוק כ

וְאַתְּכֶם לָקַח יְהוָה וַיּוֹצֵא אֶתְכֶם מִכּוּר הַבַּרְזֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לּוֹ לְעַם נַחֲלָה בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

Rashi:
 “The iron crucible” – this is a vessel for purifying gold.

HaK'sav V'HaKabbalah:
 [Egypt is compared to an iron crucible] because God's true purpose behind the Egyptian slavery was to purify the Jewish people [of their baser characteristics], just as gold is purified in a crucible. He wanted to remove the base metals so that only pure gold would remain. To this end, many of those Jews who were unworthy died in the plague of darkness, and only those who remained were chosen to receive the Torah.

רש"י שם

(כ) מכור - הוא כלי שמוקקים בו את הזהב:

הכתב והקבלה שם

(כ) מכור הברזל. כור הוא כלי שמוקקין בו את הזהב (רש"י). כי זה היה התכלית האמתית המכוון ממנו יתברך לשעבדם במצרים, לצרפם כזהב בכור שיתפרדו הסיגים וישאר זהב טהור לבד, חלאת הפושעים מתו בימי החשך, ורק הנשארים נבחרו לקבלת התורה...

In the next source we see that during the purification process four-fifths of the Jewish people did not leave Egypt.

4. **Shemot 13:18, Rashi ibid. – Four-fifths of the Jewish people died in the plague of darkness.**

The Children of Israel were armed when they went up from Egypt.

Rashi:
 [*Chamushim* (armed) can be understood as being derived from *chamishah* (five). Taken in this sense, the verse means that] only one out of five Israelites departed from Egypt, and the other four-fifths died in Egypt during the three days of darkness [as Rashi comments on Shemot 10:22].

... וְחָמוּשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.

רש"י

... חמושים אחד מחמשה יצאו, וארבעה חלקים מתו בשלשת ימי אפילה:

For those who *did* leave Egypt, the miraculous redemption awakened their faith in God, thus correcting Avraham's imperfect faith (Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, *Sifsei Chaim*, Vol. II, pp. 282-4).

Apart from rectifying Avraham's lack of trust in God, the fledging nation had to undergo experiences that would build their relationship with God, as the next three sources show:

5. **Sfas Emes, Shemot, Parshat Va'eira, 5634 – The purpose of the Egyptian exile was to demonstrate our total dependence on God.**

The purpose of the Exodus from Egypt was that we should know that God brought us out from there ... For when a person forgets this and grows proud, saying, “My strength and abilities created all this success for me” (Devarim 8:17) he must be brought to a state of helplessness to show him that everything is from God.

הרצון בגאולת מצרים הוא שידע כי השי"ת הוציאנו משם... לפי שכשאדם שוכח ומתגאה לומר כחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי וכו' אז צריכין להביאו במיצר ושיראה כי הכל מוהשי"ת,

6. **Ibid. Parshat Bo, 5649 – The exile showed that God alters world history so that the destiny of the Jewish people can be fulfilled.**

The entire exile was to show clearly that God changes the world for the sake of Israel.

אך כל הגלות היתה לברר שהקב"ה משנה עולמו
בשביל בני ישראל...

7. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. I, p. 158 – The slavery brought about a yearning for God and spirituality. The experience of darkness and evil served as a motivator for the Jewish people to strive for meaning and spirituality.**

Every time that there is a need to give a righteous person the possibility of rising to a very high level, he is thrown into the worst environment so that he should learn that evil is futile, and thus strive to reach the highest limits ...

Similarly, when Israel needed to prepare to accept the Torah, God did not send them to the Heavenly Yeshivah from where Moshe took the Torah, but the opposite: He sent them into bondage in Egypt, to be slaves to people who had sunk to the forty-ninth level of impurity [the most depraved and Godless level of physical existence].

This slavery brought them to a state where "they cried out to God [to return to Him]" (Shemot 2:23). This return to God [*teshuvah*], which began in the polar extreme [of physical enslavement and frustration], was the cause of their astonishing ascent to the spiritual level of receiving the Torah [which is compared with the forty-ninth level of spiritual purity].

בכל פעם שהיה צורך לתת לצדיק אפשרות להתעלות
למדרגה עליונה מאד, נורק אל סביבות השפלים
היותר גרועים למען, ילמד מהם את פחיתות הרע
ויתאמץ עד מרום קיצו...

גם ישראל כשהוצרכו להכנה אל קבלת התורה, לא
שלח אותם הקב"ה לישיבה של מעלה אשר משם
לקח משה רבינו ע"ה את התורה, אלא אדרבא לתוך
שיעבוד מצרים להיות עבדים של בעלי מ"ט שערי
טומאה,

ושיעבוד זה הביאם לידי "ויזעקו אל ה'" אז תשובה
זו שהתחילה מן ההיפך היא שגרמה להם לעלות עד
מדריגת קבלת התורה.

Another reason for the slavery was that the Jewish people had an excessively strong desire for money, as shown by the next source:

8. **Tosefot Shalem, Shemot, Va'eira, p. 22 – The physical labor was voluntary at first, but as a consequence of their over-zealous pursuit of materialism the Jews were enslaved.**

At the outset, the Jews were offered payment for every brick that they made, but because of their desire for money they did more than necessary. After this, the Egyptians forced them to continue making bricks [at the same rate as when they were being paid].

בתחילה הבטיח שכר על כל לבנה, ומפני חימוד ממון
באו לעשות יותר מדאי, ואחר כך כפה אותם לעשות.

An additional lesson is derived from the enslavement. Some commentaries explain that the hardships in Egypt were a training ground for our future. They taught us how to be compassionate and considerate of workers and the downtrodden because we were slaves. The Torah conveys this idea very clearly: "Do not

oppress a stranger. You know the feelings of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” [Shemot 23:9, see also Vayikra/Leviticus 19:34] (Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 190).

PART C. PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL SLAVERY

In the previous section we discussed the historical background and reasons for the Egyptian slavery. Based on this, one might think that slavery is a thing of the past. However, Egypt and the Promised Land are not just pieces of geography, but states of mind. In other words, spiritual slavery is just as real as physical slavery.

1. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. II, pp. 17-18 – Spiritual slavery to our lower, self-destructive aspects (the yetzer hara) is the root cause for our physical slavery.**

Everything has an inner aspect to it ... The exile in Egypt appears to a normal person as if it was a physical slavery. But a spiritually-oriented person sees that it was a slavery of the soul, and that this was the real cause for physical slavery. In short, we were slaves to the *yetzer hara* ...

The Torah calls Egypt *Mitzrayim*, from the root *meitzar*, which means “constriction” and “distress.” It also signifies “boundary.”

The title of Egyptian kings – *Pharaoh* in Hebrew – is also significant. Its root meaning is “to lay open or untie,” implying that the goal of Egyptian impurity was to break down the defenses of one’s personality and lay it wide open to the inroads of the *yetzer hara*.

הנה כל ענין וכל דבר יש לו תוכן פנימי... ענין הגלות נראה לאדם החיצוני בעיקר כגלות הגוף, אבל האדם הרוחני הפנימי רואה שהגלות הגופנית היא רק המסובב, ואת הסיבה האמיתית רואה בגלות הנפש, פירוש היותה תחת ממשלת היצר הרע...

השם 'מצרים' נגזר מהשורש 'מצר' ומבנו: דחוק (כמו "מן המצר קראתי כו"), וגם: גבול...

מלכה של מצרים – פרעה ... ופירשיי [שמות לב:כה] ז"ל "פרוע – מגולה" ... הרי שבחינת הנהגת הטומאה שבמצרים היא פתיחת הגבול ליצר שיוכל ליכנס ולהתפשט כאוות רצונו.

Spiritual slavery to the *yetzer hara* did not only occur in Egypt, but still occurs today:

2. **Rabbi Stephen Baars, The Haggadah Experience, aish.com – Slavery is alive and well in the 21st century – it just looks different to how it did in Egypt.**

Slavery takes many forms; not all shackles are made of iron. Once slavery becomes a way of life, the slave may even become unaware of his own servitude. Passover ... assists each Jew in unearthing his own “slavery.”

Making poor choices and becoming dependent on desires is another form of slavery. A heroin addict or even a smoker is often a slave to his body’s desires. Materialism, too, may be addictive. Many forces pull on a person’s body and cloud the desires of the soul. If a person loses sight of what is truly meaningful, he no longer experiences true freedom. “Desire” enslaves as much as any drug.

We like to think of Western society as free because people have the “freedom” to find their own fulfillment. In practice, however, few find their meaningful path of purposeful living. This indicates that slavery, in one form or another is alive and well in the 21st century.

Not only is the individual subjugated to the wiles of the *yetzer hara*, but also the whole generation may be subject to a collective slavery, as the next source describes:

3. **Rabbi Nosson Scherman, The Family Haggadah, Introduction – Every generation has its own unique form of slavery, and every generation must find new spiritual means to free itself.**

Every era has its Egypt, its own brand of slavery and temptation that inhibits the development of the individual and the group. And therefore every year the *Seder* reminds us that “this night is different from all other nights”: different from other nights of the year, but also different from every Seder Night that has preceded it in history, for every era has its own Egypt.

The enslavement of a generation may take the guise of political or economic enslavement. Or it may take the form of cultural and ideological enslavement. Realizing that “every era has its own Egypt” makes it easier to understand the obligation to see oneself and one’s generation as having personally left Egypt:

4. **Maharal, Gevuros Hashem, Ch. 61, p. 273 – Every generation and every individual must see himself as having personally left Egypt.**

The Pesach Haggadah states, “In each and every generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he personally left Egypt.” In other words, every person must see himself as having left Egypt ... This is hinted to by the verse, “And you must tell your child on that day, saying ‘It is because of what God did for *me* when I left Egypt’” (Shemot 13:8). The verse does not say, “what God did for us,” but rather “for *me*,” as if you, too, left Egypt.

“בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו [כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים]”, “פי שכל אדם חייב שיראה עצמו כאלו יצא ממצרים ... ולכך מייתי קרא [והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר] בעבור זה עשה לי [בצאתי ממצרים]” [שמות יג:ח] ולא כתיב “לנו” כאלו הוא היה היוצא...

On a deeper level, every Jewish person alive today is a part of the entity called the Jewish people. And since the entire Jewish people left Egypt together, one can say that we were all there together, and that we all personally left Egypt (Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Jerusalem, written correspondence).

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ☞ From a historical point of view, the Egyptian exile began when a Divinely ordained famine forced Yaakov and his family to descend to Egypt. Archeological research confirms the details of the Torah’s narratives of the 210-year bondage in Egypt.
- ☞ The purpose of the slavery and exile was multifold. The exile cleansed the Jewish people of national character flaws and established their trust in God. It also demonstrated that God alters history for the sake of the Jewish people. These lessons can motivate us to strive for meaning and spirituality in our lives. Being slaves has developed our national consciousness to have compassion for others in order to fulfill God’s mission. Finally, the slavery was also a consequence of over-involvement with materialism.
- ☞ Although the slavery in Egypt is a historical fact of physical and spiritual bondage, the message of Pesach teaches us that slavery is alive and well in every generation. Slavery does not just mean being ordered around by a guard with a whip; even life led in political freedom can contain elements of slavery. Being unable to fulfill one’s potential because one is subject to the self-destructiveness of the yetzer hara is a form of slavery. The compulsion to endlessly chase money, status, or physical satisfaction as ends in themselves are all forms of slavery.
- ☞ The spiritual opportunity of Pesach is to be able to identify what form of “Egypt” one is subject to, and to begin the process of setting oneself free.

SECTION II. PESACH MIRACLES AND THEIR LESSONS

Even under the most degrading 210-year slavery, the Jewish people maintained their identity and basic moral values (Mechilta, Shemot 12:6). Out of the refining furnace of Egypt, this small desert family had grown to a populous nation (Shemot 1:7), and they emerged refined and ready to become the torchbearers of God and the recipients of His Torah (Devarim 4:20).

The celebration of these events is what the holiday of Pesach is all about. The first day of Pesach (15th of Nissan) corresponds to the day on which the Jews walked out of Egypt into the Sinai Desert. The last day of Pesach (21st of Nissan) corresponds to the day on which the Jewish people walked through the Reed Sea.

1. **Vayikra 23:6-8 – On the first and last days of Pesach *melachah* (work) is prohibited and we sanctify the day with prayer and Kiddush, and enjoy the festival by eating special meals.**

And on the fifteenth day of this month [Nissan] is the Festival of Matzot to God. For seven days you must eat matzot. On the first day you shall have a holy festival; you may do no work. And you shall bring a sacrifice for God for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy festival; you may do no work.

ובחמשה עשר יום לחדש הזה חג המצות לה'; שבועת ימים מצות תאכלו: ביום הראשון מקרא קדש יהיה לכם; כל מלאכת עבודה לא תעשו: והקרבתם אשה לה' שבועת ימים; ביום השביעי מקרא קדש כל מלאכת עבודה לא תעשו.

The intermediate days between the first and last days of Pesach are also part of the festival, but with fewer restrictions. These days, known as *Chol HaMoed*, “the weekdays of the festival,” are a time to study Torah (Mishnah Berurah 530:2), to relax with family, visit friends, and have a joyful vacation infused with the spirit of Pesach (Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 193).

PART A. THE MIRACLES OF THE EXODUS

The freedom of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery was preceded by the Ten Plagues. The purpose of the plagues was not merely to break down the cruel and immoral Egyptian empire. Had God so desired, He could have destroyed all of Egypt with one devastating plague. Rather, His purpose was to demonstrate methodically to the Egyptians and to the Israelites that He is the Almighty Master of the Universe.

1. **Maharal, Gevuros Hashem, Ch. 57, p. 254 – The plagues were in ascending order of severity, but had Pharaoh agreed to free the Israelites the plagues would have ceased.**

Each plague would increase in severity, such that a harsh plague would not be followed by a lighter one. Therefore, the plagues ascended in severity from lowest to highest.

תמיד המכה שהיא מלמעלה יותר קשה, ואין להביא מכה קשה ואח"כ שאינה קשה כל כך, ולפיכך היו עולים מלמטה למעלה.

2. **Shemot 7:17, Malbim ibid. – The first set of three plagues demonstrated the existence of God – in response to Pharaoh's denial of God.**

[God told Moshe to say to Pharaoh:] “So says God, ‘Through this shall you know that I am God. Behold, with the staff that is in my hand I shall strike the waters that are in the River, and they shall change to blood.’”

כה אמר ה' בזאת תדע כי אני ה' הנה אנכי מכה במטה אשר בנדי על המים אשר ביאר ונהפכו לדם.

Malbim:

The first set of three plagues [blood, frogs, and lice] was to demonstrate the reality and existence of God [alluded to in the verse: "Know that I am God"]. This was due to the fact that Pharaoh denied God's existence when he said, "Who is God, that I should listen to His voice?" (Shemot 5:2)

מלבי"ם

הסדר הראשון בא לברר מציות ה' שפרעה כחש בו ויאמר לא הוא כמ"ש מי ה' אשר אשמע בקולו...

3. **Ibid. 8:18, with Malbim – The second set of plagues demonstrated God's Providence and control of all the world's details – in response to Pharaoh's claim that even if God exists He has no authority over the world.**

And on that day I shall set apart the land of Goshen upon which My people stands, that there shall be no swarm [of wild animals] there. So that you shall know that I am God in the midst of the land.

Malbim:

The second set of three plagues [wild animals, epidemic, and boils] demonstrated God's Providence. Pharaoh did not believe that the Supreme God supervises each person and event individually – "in the midst of the land." This demonstration of God's Providence is alluded to in the verse, "So that you shall know that I am God in the midst of the land."

והפליתי ביום ההוא את ארץ גשן אשר עמי עמד עליה לבלתי היות שם ערב למען תדע כי אני ה' בקרב הארץ.

מלבי"ם

ובאשר סדר הזה השני של עד"ש בא לברר פנת ההשגחה, שפרעה לא האמין שה' העליון משגיח "בקרב הארץ" בהשגחה פרטית, וכמ"ש למען תדע כי אני ה' בקרב הארץ.

4. **Ibid. 9:14, with Malbim – The third set of plagues demonstrated that God's power is absolute and unparalleled – in response to Pharaoh's claim that even if God has powers, other gods have equal powers.**

For this time I will send all My plagues against your heart, and upon your servants, and your people, so that you will know that there is none like Me in the entire world.

Malbim:

Moshe was being instructed to tell Pharaoh that the purpose of the third set of plagues [hail, locusts, and darkness] was to demonstrate that God has absolute and unparalleled power and ability. Even though God's existence and Providence were already demonstrated, Pharaoh still thought that there existed other gods and powers, who might sometimes overpower God ... This point is alluded to in the verse, "So that you will know that there is none like Me in all the world."

כי בפעם הזאת אני שלח את כל מגפתי אל לבך ובעבדך ובעמך בעבור תדע כי אין קמוני בכל הארץ.

מלבי"ם

הודיע לו שזה הסדר השלישי של המכות שיביא עליו, תכליתו הוא לברר לו פנה השלישית שה' לו היכולת המוחלט מאין כמוהו, שהגם שכבר ברר מציות ה' ושה' משגיח בקרב הארץ, היה פרעה חושב שנמצאו עוד אלוהים זולתו השולטים בארץ ושלפעמים ינחצו אותו ... כדי לברר הפנה הזאת "בעבור תדע כי אין קמוני בכל הארץ".

The following table supplies further details about each plague and shows the deeper reasons as to why they occurred in this order:

5. **Rabbi Yosef Deutsch, Let My Nation Go (adapted), pp. 190-1 – The significance of the sequence of the Ten Plagues.**

Plague	Attribute of God	Physical Location	God's Power over	Warning to Pharaoh
1. Blood (דם)	Of the first nine plagues, the first set of three demonstrated <i>the existence of God</i> – in response to Pharaoh's denial of God (Shemot 7:17, Malbim)	The first set of plagues came <i>from below</i> , from the water and the earth, and being a lesser form of plague, they were performed by Aharon (Shemot 7:17, 7:28, 8:12; Tosafos on the Haggadah)	Water	Warning
2. Frogs (צפרדע)			Aquatic creatures	Warning
3. Lice (כנב)			Dust of the earth	No warning. (The three plagues about which Pharaoh was not warned caused pain and inconvenience, but no threat to life – Ramban/ Nachmanides 8:15).
4. Wild Animals (ערב)	The second set demonstrated <i>God's Providence and control of all the world's details</i> – in response to Pharaoh's claim that even if God exists He has no authority over the world (Shemot 8:18, Malbim).	The second set of plagues came <i>from above the ground and from the air</i> , and being a higher form of plague they were performed by Moshe (Shemot 8:17, 9:3, 9:9; Tosafos on the Haggadah)	Land animals	Warning
5. Epidemic (דבר)			Life of land animals	Warning
6. Boils (שחין)			Humans	No warning
7. Hail (ברד)	The third set demonstrated that <i>God's power is absolute and unparalleled</i> – in response to Pharaoh's claim that even if God has powers, other gods have equal powers (Shemot 9:14, Malbim).	The last four came <i>from the sky</i> , being the highest form of plague, they were performed by God Himself (Shemot 9:18, 10:4, 10:21, 12:12; Tosafos on the Haggadah)	Nature	Warning
8. Locusts (ארבה)			Flying creatures	Warning
9. Darkness (חשך)			Day and night	No warning
10. Death of the firstborn (מכת בכורות)	The tenth plague signifies God's direct control over life and death (Chaye Olam Vol. I, 15).		Life and death	Warning

6. **Shemot 8:17; Rabbi Yosef Salant, Sefer Be'er Yosef, ibid. – The plague of wild animals is called “swarm” since the miracle was that animals of different species – both from very cold climates and very hot ones – all coexisted in a single “swarm.” Furthermore, an individualized climate accompanied each animal so that it could survive.**

For if you do not send out My people, behold, I shall incite against you ... *the swarm* [of wild animals]. The houses of Egypt will be filled with the swarm, *and even the ground upon which they are*.

Be'er Yosef

Q 1. Why was the plague of wild animals referred to as “swarm” (*arov*) referring to the mixture of animals that came in this plague? Especially since the name “swarm” does not refer to the essence of the plague, the way the names “blood, frogs and lice” do ...

Q 2. Also, what is the meaning of the phrase “And even the ground upon which they are”? ...

A 1. This plague consisted of different species of animals from all over the world. Of course, some of these animals can only live and survive in a very cold climate. Others, however, like snakes, can only live in a hot climate. Nevertheless, during this plague all the species were able to co-exist. This demonstrated conclusively that it was a miracle and not just a natural phenomenon [as would sometimes occur]. To allude to this miraculous co-existing of different species together, the plague was called “swarm” ...

A 2. When God caused the appearance of all the different species of animals, he caused each animal to be accompanied by the specific weather and ground conditions suited to it ...

Therefore, when the verse states “[a severe swarm of wild animals came] ... and the land was being destroyed because of the swarm” [Shemot 8:20], it is referring to the suddenly changing weather and temperatures that accompanied each animal, from cold to hot, and hot to cold. This caused the “destruction of the land,” since drastic changes in climate conditions, from one extreme to the other, cause the spread of disease and physical damage to the soil and ground.

שמות ה:יז

כי אם אינך משלח את עמי הנני משליח בך ... את הערב ומלאו בתי מצרים את הערב וגם האדמה אשר הם עליה.

באר יוסף

צריך טעם למה נקראת מכה זו של משלחת החיות דוקא על שם הערבובייה של חיות? שהשם “ערוב” אינו מבטא את עיקר המכה, כמו דם, צפרדע, כינים וכו' ...

וגם מהי כוונת משי"כ “וגם האדמה אשר הם עליה”? ...

כיון שכאן היו חיות ורמשים מכל המינים שונים שבעולם, כמבואר במדרש, וידוע הוא שישנם מיני חיות שאינם יכולים לחיות ולהתקיים אלא באקלים קר מאוד. ולעומת זה ישנם חיות ומיני נחשים שאינם מתקיימים אלא בארצות החום ... ובכל זאת היו כולם מתקיימים כאן ביחד, והיה בזה להראות בבריור גמור שאין זו מכה בדרך הטבע, כ"א בדרך נס ופלא, ולכן נקרא מכה זו “ערוב”, על שם הפלא הזה ...

עוד יותר, שכשהביא הקב"ה במצרים את החיות והרמשים מכל המינים השונים, הביא גם כן עם כל מין ומין את מזג האוויר ותכונת האדמה הדרוש לו ...

ולכן אמר ג"כ, תשחת “הארץ” מפני הערב, היינו ששינוי האוויר המשתנה בכל שעה ורגע מקור לחום ומחום לקור, היא השחתת הארץ, וכידוע ששינוי האוויר הפתאומי והתחלפתו התדירית מזיק להביא חליים רעים ומשחית את הארץ.

The above source shows how through the miracles God demonstrated that He is aware of and controls all

details of existence. This demonstration of Divine Providence reached its climax with the death of the first-born Egyptians, where God knew of first-born children even from adulterous and secret relationships. As the Talmud describes, “I am He Who discerned in Egypt between the drop of seed which conceived a first-born and one which did not conceive a first-born” (Bava Metziah 61b).

Apart from the miraculous display of plagues, there was another miracle that occurred just before leaving Egypt: God instructed each Jewish family to take a lamb – which the Egyptians regarded as their god – and slaughter it on the night of the plague of the first-born (Shemot 12:3, Ramban *ibid.*). As the Midrash relates, Moshe responded with great concern: “Master of the Universe! How can I possibly do this thing? Do You not know that the lamb is the Egyptian god?” (Shemot Rabbah 16:3).

This miraculous event is the reason why the Shabbat before Pesach is called Shabbat HaGadol [The Great Shabbat] (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 430:1), as explained in the next source:

7. **Tur, Orach Chaim 430 – The miracle of the first Pesach offering: God instructs the Jews to kill their oppressors’ idol in their presence.**

The reason it is called Shabbat HaGadol is because a great miracle took place on it: the Jews took the Pesach sacrifice in Egypt on the 10th of Nissan, as the verse states, “On the tenth of this month you shall take for yourselves a sheep for each family, a sheep for each house” (Shemot 12:3). When the Jews left Egypt it was a Thursday, as it says in Seder Olam (Ch. 5), so the tenth of the month was Shabbat.

Each person took a sheep for the Pesach offering and tied it to the foot of his bed. The Egyptians asked what they were doing, and they answered that they were going to slaughter the sheep as a Pesach offering because God had commanded them to do so. The teeth [of the Egyptians] were set on edge over the fact that the Jews were slaughtering their gods, but they were unable to say anything. Because of this great miracle we call this Shabbat “Shabbat *HaGadol*” – the *Great Shabbat*.

והטעם לפי שנעשה בו נס גדול שפסח מצרים מקחו בעשור כדכתיב בעשור לחודש הזה ויקחו להם שה לבית אבות שה לבית. (שמות יב:ג). ופסח שיצאו ישראל ממצרים היה ביום חמישי כדאיתא בסדר עולם (פ"ה) ונמצא שעשרה בחודש היה שבת.

ולקחו להם כל אחד שה לפסחו וקשרו אותו בכרעי מטתו ושאלום המצריים למה זה לכם והשיבום לשחטו לשם פסח במצות השם עלינו והיו שינייהם קהות על ששוחטין את אלהיהם ולא היו רשאים לומר להם דבר ועל שם אותו הנס קורין אותו שבת הגדול.

What made this event even more miraculous was that the Jews thought that killing the Egyptian lambs would spell certain death. But in fact, it was this very act that *saved* them from death. For during the plague of the death of the first-born “God passed over the doors [which had been sprinkled with the lambs’ blood]” (Shemot 12:23) and the Jews were saved (Rambam/Maimonides, Moreh Nevuchim/Guide for the Perplexed 3:46).

The Exodus from Egypt culminated in the miracle of God splitting the Reed Sea for the Jewish people, and then closing it upon the pursuing Egyptian army. Shortly after crossing the sea, the Jews were attacked by the nation of Amalek, whom they defeated during a Divinely elongated day of battle, when God miraculously stopped the sun’s trajectory. The Maharal teaches the relative significance of all of the Egyptian miracles based on the Talmud’s explanation in Zevachim regarding Yitro’s motivation to join the Jewish people. Prior to converting to Judaism, Yitro had explored every form of idol worship.

8. **Talmud Bavli, Zevachim 116a – There are three opinions as to which event inspired Yitro to convert and join the Jewish people: the splitting of the Reed Sea, the war with Amalek or the giving of the Torah.**

What did Yitro hear that motivated him to come and convert to join the Jewish people? Rabbi Yehoshua said it was the war with Amalek, Rabbi Eliezer HaModai said it was the giving of the Torah, and Rabbi Eliezer said it was the splitting of the Reed Sea.

מה שמועה שמע ובא, רבי יהושע אומר מלחמת עמלק, רבי אליעזר המודעי אומר מתן תורה שמע ובא, רבי אליעזר אומר קריעת ים סוף שמע ובא, עד כאן.

Rashi in Shemot 18:1 writes that two events inspired Yitro to join the Jewish people: the splitting of the Reed Sea and the war with Amalek. The Maharal explains that Rashi agrees with Rabbi Yehoshua that Yitro arrived after the war with Amalek.

9. **Maharal, Gur Aryeh, Shemot 18:1 – The ten plagues in Egypt could not account for Yitro's decision to join the Jewish people, for he would have come earlier.**

Do not explain “And Yitro heard all that God had done for the Jewish people [Shemot 18:1] literally as it is written in the Torah, for it is not logical to say that Yitro came to convert on account of hearing about all the miracles. For if so, he would have come much earlier [than the splitting of the Reed Sea and the war with Amalek] (to convert, since the miraculous ten plagues in Egypt lasted for one full year prior to his arrival).

דאין לפרש “וישמע יתרו”- “כל אשר לישראל”, כמו שכתוב בקרא, דאין סברא לומר שבא יתרו להתגייר על ידי שמיעת כל הניסים ששמע בם, דאם כן למה בא עכשיו (להתגייר, ולא בא קודם זה הרבה, שהרי הניסים היו במצרים שנה תמימה)...

10. **Ibid. – The plagues in Egypt were localized miracles, in contrast to the global miracles of the splitting of the Reed Sea and the war with Amalek.**

If you will say, now we still have a difficulty, why did Yitro come to convert for these two events [splitting of the Reed Sea and the war with Amalek, as Rashi explains]? One can explain that all the other miracles in Egypt were specific and local – as the astrologers said, “This is the finger of God,” referring to all the plagues in Egypt. Only Egypt was struck ...

Therefore, the specific, local miracles that happened in Egypt did not cause Yitro to recognize that God is greater than all other deities until he saw the war with Amalek and the splitting of the Reed Sea. For the (miracle) in the war with Amalek was in the heavens to stop the movement of the sun, to arrest the movement of the heavenly sphere ... and this is not considered a specific, local event since the sun serves the entire world. Similarly, the splitting of the Reed Sea was considered a global event since all the waters in the world split at the same time.

ואם תאמר, דהשתא נמי קשה, למה דווקא בשביל אלו שנים, ויש לומר כי כל שאר הניסים היו פרטים, כמו שאמרו החרטומים “אצבע אלוקים היא” בכל מכות שהיו במצרים, לפי שהם מכות פרטים, לא נלקה רק מצרים בלבד...

לכך במכות פרטיות שהיו במצרים לא גרם שיבוא יתרו להכיר כי הוא יתברך גדול מכל האלוהים, עד שראה מלחמת עמלק וקריעת ים סוף. שמלחמת עמלק היה בשמים, להעמיד החמה לבטל מערכת השמים... ודבר זה אינו נחשב פרטי, כי השמש משמש לכל העולם, והיה גם זה בכלל העולם. וכן קריעת ים סוף היה נחשב בכלל העולם, כי הים הוא יסוד המים, ובשביל זה כל המים נבקעו.

11. **Ibid.** – If the splitting of the Reed Sea was a global miracle, why did Yitro wait for the war with Amalek to convert?

If you will ask, after Yitro realized that the splitting of the Reed Sea was a global miracle, why did he need to wait for the miracle that happened in the war with Amalek to join the Jewish people? One can answer that even though the splitting of the Reed Sea was a global miracle and not localized, it was still based in the terrestrial sphere and not in the upper sphere. Yitro needed to know “that God is the God of both the heavens and the earth” ... The war with Amalek proved to Yitro that God also rules the heavens.

ואם תאמר, אחר ששמע קריעת ים סוף שהיה בכלל העולם, למה הוצרך לו מלחמת עמלק? ויש לומר דאף על גב שהיה קריעת ים סוף מכה כללית, לא פרטית, לא היתה רק בתחתונים ולא בעליונים, והיה צריך לו לדעת “כי ה' הוא האלוקים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת” ... זה על ידי מלחמת עמלק, שהיה מעמיד מערכת השמים בשמים.

12. **Ibid.** – Why should Yitro wait for the giving of the Torah if he already understood that God rules the heaven and the earth?

Nevertheless, to Rabbi Eliezer HaModai, who said that Yitro came to convert after the giving of the Torah, the splitting of the Reed Sea and the war with Amalek were not sufficient – they only showed that God rules the earthly and heavenly spheres. Yitro needed to know that there is no other deity besides God, even above the heavens; and the Torah is on the level of going even beyond the heavens.

אמנם לרבי אליעזר המודעי שאמר כי מתן תורה שמע, מפני שהוא סובר כי לא די בכך במה ששמע קריעת ים סוף ומלחמת עמלק, שבזה לא נודע לו רק כי הוא מושל בתחתונים ובעליונים, וצריך שנודע לו כי אין בלעדו למעלה מן השמים, והתורה מדריגתה על השמים.

In summary, the splitting of the Reed Sea demonstrated God's control of the earth, the war with Amalek showed God's mastery of heaven, and the giving of the Torah revealed that there is no other God, even beyond the heavens.

PART B. LESSONS TAUGHT BY THE MIRACLES

1. **Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz, Da'as Torah, Shemot p. 75** – The purpose of the miracles of the Exodus was for us to learn that what we perceive with our eyes is only the surface layer of existence.

The truth is that the main purpose for the whole Exodus from Egypt is belief in the concept of miracles. The main idea is to know and recognize that at the heart of existence is a spiritual core.

One should know that existence is *not* just that which we see with our physical eyes, or sense with our physical senses. The physicality that we see in Creation is only clothing for the true existence.

האמת היא, כי התכלית העיקרית בכל ענין יציאת מצרים היא האמונה בכלל הנסים, ועיקר הענין הוא להאמין ולהכיר בעצם מציאות רוחניות הבריאה,

לידע כי הבראיה אינה זאת אשר הוא רואה בעיניו הבריות, זאת אשר הוא חש בחושיו הגשמיים, החומר והגשם שאנו רואים בבריאה הוא רק לבוש להבריאה האמיתית.

What is the true core to existence [which the Egyptian experience demonstrates]? It is spirituality, which is the source of all Creation.

ומהי באמת, היא הרוחניות שהיא המקור לכל היצור.

2. **Rabbi Avigdor Miller, A Nation is Born, p. 81 – The plagues each contained lessons about God.**

The Ten Plagues were Ten Tests of Israel, whether they would properly learn the lessons of the plagues. All the plagues had common lessons, in addition to the individual purpose of each plague. Among the general lessons of all the plagues were the following:

- In order to know God, meaning: to gain more awareness of God
- In order to demonstrate that Israel was God's chosen people, "set apart" from Egypt and all the nations
- In order to demonstrate the emptiness of the worship of false gods that were unable to protect even themselves
- In order to engender in Israel a powerful emotion of gratitude so that they would eagerly accept the Torah at Sinai and remain loyal to it forever

3. **Rabbi Akiva Tatz, Living Inspired, p. 152 – The miracles of the Exodus teach us that the natural order of the Jewish people is to be *above* the natural order of the world. Therefore, the night that recalls the miracles of Egypt is called the *Seder* ("order") Night.**

The Sfas Emes expresses the connection between the miracles commemorated at the *Seder* and the rest of Jewish history in the most beautiful manner. He asks why we call the procedure of *Seder* Night a "*seder*" – the word "*seder*" means "order," a regular, predictable series of events. Strange that we celebrate the most potent series of miracles, the sharpest departures from the natural order, with the name *seder*, "order"!

His answer is unforgettable. *For the Jewish people, our natural order is the miraculous! We have a seder of miracles. We were forged in impossible circumstances, conceived in a blaze of miracles, born beyond time. We can never descend into the natural; for us to do so would be souring of the worst kind, transforming matzah to chametz; lethal in the extreme.*

As David Ben-Gurion once commented in an interview on CBS (5 October 1956), "In Israel, in order to be a realist you must believe in miracles."

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ☞ After Pharaoh's refusal to free the Jewish people, God brought about the Ten Plagues.
- ☞ The miracle of the plagues and their special order was to demonstrate (1) God's existence, (2) God's Providence and control of all the world's details, and (3) God's absolute and unparalleled power. They also served to teach us that what we perceive with our eyes is only the surface layer of existence and that the Jewish people were chosen by God for a special destiny above the natural order of the world.
- ☞ The splitting of the Reed Sea demonstrated God's sole control of the earth, the war with Amalek showed God's mastery of heaven, and the giving of the Torah revealed that there is no other God, even beyond the heavens.
- ☞ The miracles of the Exodus teach us that the natural order of the Jewish people is to be above the natural order of the world.

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHAT EVENTS CAUSED THE ENSLAVEMENT IN EGYPT?

A famine affecting the entire region was felt less in Egypt due to the astute advice of Yosef to Pharaoh. Yaakov led his family to Egypt in response to the famine in Canaan. His descendants were later forced into servitude by the Egyptians.

WHAT PURPOSE DID THE SLAVERY SERVE?

Our rabbis detected a minor flaw in Avraham's trust in God. The slavery of Egypt and subsequent redemption helped prevent this minor shortcoming from developing into a serious deficiency in his descendants by serving to enhance their trust in God. It also helped reduce their longing for materialism and promoted greater spiritual yearning.

WHY DID GOD REDEEM THE JEWS THROUGH A YEARLONG SERIES OF MIRACLES AND NOT JUST ONE?

Obviously, God could have liberated the Jews via one devastating plague against the Egyptians. Instead, he methodically demonstrated His mastery over the world to both Egyptian and Jew by bringing the plagues in a set order with the goal of teaching belief in His omnipotence.

IS THERE IS ANY ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE EVENTS OF THE EXODUS?

An ancient Egyptian "notepad" dating back to the time of the Israelite enslavement confirms many of the conditions the slaves were subjected to as described in the Torah. Another source bears an account of sufferings that befell the Egyptians remarkably similar to several of the plagues.

WHAT LESSONS FROM THE SLAVERY IN EGYPT 3,330 YEARS AGO APPLY TO MY LIFE IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

Man today theoretically possesses the freedom to choose what he wishes to do with his life, however he is often not at liberty to achieve his true potential due to enslavement to his *yetzer hara*. The Exodus demonstrates the ability of man to free himself from the shackles of spiritual enslavement.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

SECTION II. MIRACLES AND FREEDOM

Mishnah, Eduyot 2:10

Pri Chadash, Orach Chaim 430

Talmud Bavli, Nedarim 32b, s.v. *v'amar Rami bar Abbah* ...

Meshech Chochmah, Shemot 12:16

Tanya, Likutei Amarim, 31

Rabbi Akiva Tatz, Pesach: Faster than Time (audio class, www.simpletoremember.com)

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