

The Real Story of the Exodus – Pesach

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The Exodus from Egypt is a defining moment in the history of the Jewish People which we commemorate every year on Pesach, celebrating our freedom from slavery. This iconic event has become a universal symbol of freedom from oppression. The Puritans in England in the 17th century used it as an allegory for their struggle against absolute monarchy. The American founding fathers used the same narrative in their struggle for independence. Abraham Lincoln adopted this theme in his fight for abolitionism. Martin Luther King, leader of the American civil rights movement during the 50's and 60's, built many of his speeches around it. Reza Pahlavi is right now using this same methodology to incite the masses in Iran against the IRGC.

In this shiur I would like to tell you a story, the *real* story of the Exodus from Egypt, a blow-by-blow account of the events as they took place *on the ground*. The "romantic" notions we tend to paint for ourselves and tell our children about יְצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם are not really (actually they are, but they are not *only*) what happened. The toned-down "children's story" version we relate in the Haggadah omits many unpleasant details that are not exactly romantic or "user-friendly", to put it mildly. Only when we courageously peel away all the rhetoric and romance in search for the *entire truth* and examine reality as it actually happened, can we truly begin to understand the essence of Pesach.

To begin, out of the 210 years Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt, only 86 of them involved slavery and oppression. For the first 124 years we enjoyed lives of stability, tranquility and *nobility* in Goshen as part of the legacy of Yosef, viceroy of Egypt.

The circumstances of how things went sour after Yosef died is well known. How the attitude of the Egyptians to Bnei Yisrael flipped, heralding an *entire generation* of darkness and servitude. This period is well documented in the psukim and the Midrashim (see shiur on [Bo 2024](#)). By the end of the final 86 years, there was not one living Jew who had not been *born into slavery* (actually there was – only one, Serach the daughter of Asher).

At the same time HKB"H inflicts a punishment, He also seeds the remedy to reverse it. Around the time our slavery and oppression in Egypt began in earnest, the Mashiach who would redeem us from this slavery was born. Moshe would return some 80 years later and initiate the process which culminated in Pharaoh setting us free.

Depending on which opinion you follow (there are numerous opinions how long each of the Ten Plagues lasted and what gap there was between each plague), Bnei Yisrael had just witnessed a *mind shattering* series of supernatural, apocalyptic events, unprecedented in human history (except perhaps for the Flood and Sdom).

Although Bnei Yisrael were mostly unaffected by the plagues which smote the Egyptians, it undoubtedly had an unsettling effect on us. Even a slave becomes accustomed to his reality of slavery, the daily routine - the master throwing you out of bed, meal time, the lash on the back. During the Ten Plagues, this routine was disrupted almost *entirely*. For someone born into a reality of slavery, although it may have been heartwarming to see your oppressor suffering, it was at the same time very disconcerting.

We can easily identify with this. It is heartwarming to see how our chief oppressor is currently being bombarded from the air in an apocalyptic fashion from multiple directions. We feel little sympathy for those who have inflicted untold suffering on our people (and the world) meeting their just end. At the same time, I do not believe that a single one of us does not feel disconcerted and uncertain what the future holds. Our routines have been totally disrupted, our reality has been shaken – even if deep down, we know it is a good thing, it is way out of our comfort zone.

Back in Egypt, *one month* prior to walking out of the land of our oppressor, we were busy burying four fifths of our people who died in the plague of darkness. The only thing that comes close to describing it, is the Holocaust during WWII. We were *literally* burying our relatives, neighbors, sisters and brethren with our *own hands*. The day of the Exodus was in fact the *Shloshim* after losing the majority of world Jewry.

Four days prior to the Exodus HKB"H commanded each family to take a sheep, the symbol of the goyim's idol worship and attach it to the leg of our bed. To describe it in contemporary terms, imagine if suddenly tomorrow all the Jews in New York, LA, Atlanta, Boston, Paris, Rome, Berlin, London, Melbourne and Sydney raided every store in the city that sells Christian religious symbols and bought out *every last* figurine of אֱלֹהֵי הַצִּלְצָלִים on the cross. Imagine the store owners unexpectedly selling out their entire stocks in a matter of minutes and when they ask why the Jews are suddenly buying out every item in their store, the reply is "We were commanded to do so by G-d". The store keepers are incredulous "What are you going to do with all these crosses?" to which the Jews reply "This coming Sunday we are going to have a mass demonstration in Times Square and burn every last one of these Christian symbols *in a massive bonfire*, like a kind of 'reverse' Kristallnacht". Can you just imagine how the American media would play that! All the Tucker Carlsons, the Candace Owens, the Megan Kellys, the Norman Finkelsteins ... the entire world would go ballistic. How many Jews in the Diaspora today would have the courage (or stupidity) to do that? Can

we even begin to imagine the fear and dread Bnei Yisrael experienced when they received that command?

Then HKB"H commands us to bring the Korban Pesach (to burn the sheep, the goyim's religious symbol) on the eve of the 15th of Nisan. However, before that *all the males have to have a bris!* The night before leaving Egypt all the Jewish males of all ages had to have the same type of surgery that took Avraham Avinu more than three days to recover from. In Egypt they never had Advil or morphine.

The following morning, before we leave, HKB"H commands the women (the men were basically incapacitated from the bris) to raid the Egyptians' homes, taking *all* their possessions, silver, gold, clothing etc. and load all this loot onto 90 Libyan donkeys *per person*. I looked it up on the internet – the maximum load a Libyan donkey can carry is around 90kg. Each person old enough to walk, has to load up 8 tons of valuables onto 90 donkeys.

I am sure that when HKB"H gave *this* command, it was not met with much opposition, unlike the commands regarding the sheep and the bris which probably were. Being slaves for 86 years with only one possession – the ragged clothes on your back, seeing the Egyptians day in and day out adorned with fine clothing and expensive jewelry must have instilled a desire in Bnei Yisrael to have their own possessions, just like their Egyptian masters. Imagine today, you take the most needy person you can find, someone who doesn't even have bread to eat, to the parking lot of the largest supermarket in town. Tell him he can take as many shopping carts as he likes, go into the supermarket and fill them all up with whatever he likes.

It is not an easy job loading up 8 tons of supplies by hand, I can attest to the fact. In our bakery, we resupply about once a month from our main supplier who loads a palate with about 800kg of merchandise into our trailer with a forklift. Back at the bakery I then have to unload the trailer by hand and move it by trolley to our storeroom. After unloading a mere 800kg it wipes me out for the rest of the day. We are talking about *ten times that amount*. I can guarantee you that the women loading the donkeys could barely walk after that. There was only one person who didn't load any donkeys – Moshe Rabbeinu (he was too busy searching for Yosef's coffin).

We tend to think of Bnei Yisrael triumphantly parading out of Egypt, but it was *not like that at all*. It was approximately 4 million people (600,000 males over the age of 20, plus women, children, etc.), broken emotionally from recently having emerged from a Holocaust, barely able to walk, crippled by decades of back-breaking slavery, missing limbs from rocks crushing them during construction, falling from scaffolding, losing their eyes and hearing, having just performed a bris the previous night, having just loaded up 8 tons of supplies on

90 donkeys, constantly gazing in every direction in petrifying fear that the Egyptians will suddenly pounce on you.

We also left without any food to eat. Normally when you go on a road trip, what is the first thing you organize? Food for the kids in the back seat! There was no time to prepare food. We left Egypt with *raw dough* strapped to our belts. What do you do if 30 minutes after leaving Egypt six-year-old Shlomi says to his mother "I am hungry!" What do you tell him "Sorry Shlomi, there isn't anything to eat yet, you will have to wait!" We left Egypt **בַּצֹּמ**! Yes, there was water to drink, but no food and we didn't know how long we would have to wait until we were able to bake the dough. Sukkot (where they actually baked the dough) was three days journey from Raamses.

This is the way we left Egypt. It was not a glorious, triumphant Exodus - it was more akin to a miserable procession of survivors limping out of a concentration camp, with more donkeys in tow than people!

We have no conception of the mesirut nefesh of Bnei Yisrael who left Egypt, the hardships that they had to endure and the degree of faith that they had to have, to wander out into the unknown, crippled, broken, hungry, exhausted both emotionally and physically. And for what? A promise? A faint glimmer of hope?

This is what HKB"H meant when He said **זֶה אָמַר ה' זְכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ** (ירמיהו ב, ב) **אֲהַבֶּתְּ כְּלוּלֵתֶיךָ לְכַתֹּב אַחֲרַי בְּמִדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה**.

In this context, it is not difficult to understand the "complaining" of Bnei Yisrael in the Midbar, when they repeatedly encountered challenging circumstances, the Egyptians chasing after them on the shores of the Red Sea, when they ran out of water to drink, food to eat. The **שְׁאֲרֵית הַפְּלִטָּה** that left Egypt was *indescribably fragile and vulnerable*.

It was all a trial, a test of faith and we barely made it. We didn't leave 20 million strong as we were two months prior to the Exodus, we left with the barest minimum to seed a nation, 600,000. If it would have been *one person less than that* the Jewish People would not exist. We made it by a hairsbreadth.

By virtue of this leap of faith though, HKB"H began our process of recovery and redemption. He lovingly embraced us in the Clouds of Glory, He "restored the color to our cheeks" by giving us the Mann and the water from the Well of Miriam, which miraculously cured us of all our physical and mental handicaps. 50 days later, when we received the Torah at Har Sinai, we were all 100% intact, in body and mind and we became a nation and were redeemed.

When we speak of Geulah, when we daven to HKB"H for the Geulah, we have to come to grips with the reality of what Geulah *really* means. We need to

stop thinking of the Geulah and Mashiach in "romantic" terms like most of us tend to. When we dance around table after the Pesach Seder and sing לְשׁוֹנֵה הַבָּאָה בְּיְרוּשָׁלַיִם הַבְּנוּיָהּ, we have to truly understand what we are davening for and what this entails – *on the ground*. Especially our generation, which is the Geulah generation.

We have to know what lies ahead for us. The hardships and the tests we will have to endure before the Geulah arrives. How we will probably meet it in a similar state to Bnei Yisrael when they left Egypt – broken, petrified, handicapped, exhausted, sorely diminished and teetering on a hairsbreadth!

Bnei Yisrael left Egypt after 86 years of oppression and slavery. Our generation, the Geulah generation, is now after *1956 years* of oppression and slavery. How much more exponentially handicapped and crippled mentally and emotionally are we after that? How much of our glorious nation have we lost to Holocaust and assimilation? We are a faint shadow of our days of glory as a nation, battered, scarred, petrified.

We see a combination of the Flood, Sdom and the Ten Plagues being unleashed in Iran and we are in awe, but at the same time we are uncertain how all this is going to play out. How do we dare to defy the goyim, most of who are against us and seek our destruction? How can we who *live amongst* them in the Diaspora visibly defy them by exhibiting outward signs of our true allegiance, flagrantly waving our flags in their face? Wouldn't it be better to minimize it instead of flaunt it, in the hope that we will not arouse even more antagonism? How can the tiny country of Israel dare to attack a monolith ten times their size in area and population and in the process bring even more wrath and blame down upon us, that we are warmongers, that we want to plunge the world into a world war?

And for what? For a faint glimmer of a promise made thousands of years ago by Jeremiah? Who cares about Jeremiah when you have cluster missiles raining down on your head? Three years ago, we were living "normal" lives. OK, they weren't perfect, everyone still hated us. But we had "semi-normal" lives. We had our daily routine, we had our shopping malls, our middle to upper class standard of living, we were making do! Now look at us. Three years later that "semi-normal" is but a *dream*. Who of us would not wish it back in the blink of an eye?

Follow Netanyahu? He is power drunk and delusional! How does he think that we can go against the entire world? OK, he temporarily has an ally in Trump, but just 14 months ago we had Kamala and Trump is a complete unknown, he is unpredictable! Who knows what will be in America in the next election. We already have the Democrats against us and now it is also half of the Republicans as well! Europe is totally lost. How many friends do we have in the world? Trump and Modi. That's it! In this reality you want to rear your head and provoke more?

Best to lie low, accept our losses and try to recover internally and at least rebuild the status quo to what it was pre-October 7. It wasn't idyllic, but it was livable!

These are the fearful voices of a nation exhausted by 1956 years of oppression and slavery. We can only have pity on them, try to reassure and help them. What they need is compassion, not condemnation. We need to try help them understand that these circumstances are already beyond our control. These dynamics unfolding are *far beyond* Netanyahu and Trump, they are not orchestrating anything, they are just the shlichim. There is no snap-back, no going back to pre-October 7. History only marches forward, never backwards.

We are the pre-Geulah generation, just like Bnei Yisrael in Egypt 3,338 years ago. History has come *full circle*. הַמְעַגָּל in gematria is פְּסָח. It is all a test, a trial. It is the same rallying call - מִי לְה' אֱלֹהֵי - It is the ultimate test of our faith, in face of certain death. We must accept that we will not all emerge from it intact. A large portion of our nation will not rally to the call and will be lost. Those that remain will emerge *weakened, exhausted and limping*, barely in the game – a hairsbreadth.

However, for those who pass the test, the endgame is assured - by HKB"H Himself, echoed by Jermeiah, Isiah and our other prophets. All they have foretold has come to pass so far, so by the same measure – so too will the rest. That is why R' Akiva laughed!

I would like to wrap up the shiur with one last story, about חוֹנֵי הַמְעַגָּל, as related in the Gemara (תענית כג, ע"א). This story is connected to Pesach in a number of ways. Rashi (מנחות צד, ע"ב) uses it as proof that the matzot mentioned in the Torah (עגת מצות – שמות יב, לט) were *round*. Also the gematria of הַמְעַגָּל is פְּסָח.

Choni ha'Meagel was a contemporary of Shimon ben Shatach, in the time of the 2nd Beit HaMikdash, an enormous talmid chacham and well known as a "miracle worker". One year when there was a shortage of rain, they sent for Choni to pray for rain. Choni prayed from the bottom of his heart, but no rain descended. Choni then drew a circle around himself (מְעַגָּל) עָג עוֹנֶה, and prayed again for rain. Choni cried נִשְׁבַּע אֲנִי בְּשֵׁמֶךָ הַגָּדוֹל שְׂאֵינִי זֶז מִכָּאן עַד שֶׁתִּרְחַם עָלַי בְּיָדְךָ and his prayer was answered. He subsequently became known as Choni ha'Meagel, the one who encircled himself.

Why were his tefilot not answered initially, even though he davened with all his heart? The Yerushalmi (תענית ג, י) says that it was because he was lacking humility and was so sure that his prayers would be answered.

When were his prayers answered? When he closed himself in a "circle", when he was backed into a corner with *nowhere to go*, where the only salvation

was tefilot, totally disconnected from ego, *total submission* that only HKB"H can get him out of this tight spot and that he has nothing to do with it in any way.

That is this Pesach in a nutshell. It is the situation we currently find ourselves in right now, surrounded by a ring of fire from all sides. If we accept that there is no true salvation from the Americans, nor from our sophisticated defensive weapon systems, and the only One who can extricate us from this predicament is HKB"H Himself and we daven from the bottom of our hearts for salvation – that is when our prayers will be answered.

חַיֵּב אָדָם לְרִאוֹת אֶת עֲצֻמוֹ כְּאִלוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם. We say it every year and it theoretically could be applicable every year. HKB"H could bring the Geulah at any time if we are worthy. But this year is *different*. We all see the entire global reality aligning itself with ancient history, in full circle. We see the reality of our nation aligning with how it was in ancient Egypt. When you listen to the TV anchors, it is like they are quoting psukim from the Torah, the same fearful grumblings about what will be! We have run out of time, the 6,000th year, בְּעֵתָהּ, is almost upon us. It is happening now! We are in the circle, like Choni ha'Meagel. All we need to do is transcend fear and answer the call of מִי לֵה' אֲלֵי, to daven to HKB"H this Pesach with all our hearts ... and we *will* be redeemed.

Chag Kasher ve'Sameach

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