

Why was slavery necessary?

-God frequently punishes us in Tanach for something we did wrong:

- Expulsion from Garden of Eden for eating the forbidden fruit
- Flood in Noah's day for "great wickedness" and "corruption" and "evil"
- Multiplicity of languages for Tower of Babel
- Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for "wickedness and sin"
- Turning Lot's wife into a pillar of salt for looking back
- Swallowing up of Korach and his followers for rebellion against Moses
- Exile and destruction of first Temple for idolatry, adultery and murder
- Etc.

-But there is one calamity God sent us without us doing anything wrong: Slavery.

- Jacob and his clan were 70 strong when a famine forced them to go to Egypt, invited by Pharaoh through Joseph, and the next Pharaoh enslaved them for 210 years. They had done nothing wrong to deserve this:

"[God] said to Abram: Know for certain that your offspring will be strangers in a strange land, and will be enslaved and afflicted for four hundred years. But know with equal certainty that I will judge the nation that enslaved them, and that afterwards they will leave with great substance." (Genesis 15:13-14).

[No reason given.]

-The Haggadah says we must be thankful to God for rescuing us from Egypt. But should we not be angry with God for allowing us to get enslaved in the first place for no reason?

Question

Evidently God thought slavery was necessary. But why, and why for so long?

Possible answers

-For our protection

- Jacob's clan in Israel was an easy target for neighbors. In Egypt, a superpower protected us, albeit to exploit us.

-To build up our numbers in safety

- If 210 years = 10 generations and numbers double with each generation (4 children per couple), number was multiplied by $2^{10} = 1024$
- If numbers triple (6 children per couple), multiply by $3^{10} = 59,049$; to get to the 3 million at Sinai, need about 2.9-fold multiplication per generation.
- To build up our identity and community spirit
 - We were all in the same boat and followed the same customs
 - Midrash: The Jews deserved redemption from Egypt because they kept their distinct names, dress and language [Lev. R. 32:5 has names and language; Minor Pesikta, Devarim on Ki Tavo 41a has clothing and food]
- To minimize contact with outside world
 - It may lead to idolatry and other practices later forbidden by Torah
- To eliminate the possibility of intermarriage
 - Egyptians wouldn't want to marry slaves
- To create a scenario that allowed God to show the Jews and the whole world, with miracles and wonders that make a big impression, who was in charge (as He freed the Jews).
- The gratitude felt upon liberation made it easier for us to accept Torah
 - First thing God said at Sinai: "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt, the House of Bondage" (Ex. 20:2)
 - Commentator: The suffering in Egypt was to break our attachment to this world: Suffering makes one more spiritually inclined.
- The slave mentality made it easier for us to accept Torah
 - But once we accepted Torah, slave mentality became a burden, so God waited till generation of Exodus died out before letting us into the Land.
 - Maharal: Pesach is not the time of true freedom, but rather the time when we changed masters [from Pharaoh to God].
 - But one was for the benefit of the master, the other for our benefit.

Points to ponder

- Is all suffering for some greater good?
- Gam zu l'tovah? (This, too, is for the good.) (Taanit 21a)