

Parsha Plug: Pesach

Sefat Emet Pesach 1872, pp. 24-25	שפת אמת פסח תרל"ב, כד-כה
<p>He [Yaakov] went down to Egypt-- coerced by Divine command: This is confusing because immediately when Yaakov heard from Yosef he went down to Egypt. Only on the way did God appear to him and say to him "I will go down with you to Egypt" (Bereshit 46:4)! Rather it seems that Yaakov went because of Yosef, and if it were from Heaven, everything would be thus-- so what was the 'coercion from Divine command'? There are those who say it is like the Zohar says, that the 'command' was in exile in Egypt and it was found when Israel went down to Egypt and the redemption was all a repair of the command. This is what the Haggadah means when it comments 'coerced by Divine command'. And the mouth of the command was Yosef, and the meaning is understood, that in truth Yaakov went down to Egypt because of Yosef. And from the ten utterances, the ten commandments were made, as we wrote elsewhere. It seems to me that the 'command' is the recognition of God's kingship in everything. This was hidden in exile, and through the redemption from Egypt, God's greatness became known.</p>	<p>וירד מצרימה אנוס על פי הדיבור. קשה כי מיד ששמע יעקב מיוסף ירד שמה, רק בדרך נראה לו השי"ת ואמר לו אנכי ארד כו' (בראשית מו:ד), אבל נראה שהלך עבור יוסף, ואם כי היה מן השמים, כל הדברים הם כך, ומה אנוס על פי הדיבור. וי"ל על פי מה שאיתא זוה"ק וארא (כה:ב) שהדיבור היה בגלות במצרים, ונמצא כי ירידת ישראל למצרים והגאולה הכל היה תיקון הדיבור, וזה אנוס על פי הדיבור, ופי הדיבור הוא יוסף, והמשכיל יבין, שבאמת ירד עבור יוסף למצרים. והיינו להיות עושין מעשרה מאמרות עשרת הדיברות, כמו שכתבנו במקום אחר פירוש זוה"ק הנ"ל שדיבור שהוא הכרת מלכותו יתברך בכל הדברים, זה היה נסתר בגלות, ועל ידי גאולת מצרים נודע גבורתו יתברך.</p>

- The Sefat Emet points out that Yaakov really went down to Egypt because of Yosef, so why does the Haggadah say he did so because of God's 'coercion', God's דיבור?
- He answers that God can be found in everything, and that we can hold both-- Yaakov went down because of Yosef, who was the 'mouth', but the words were coming from God, the plan was shaped by God. How do you see God's role in your life-- especially when He isn't obvious?

Sefat Emet Pesach 1887, pp. 151-152	שפת אמת פסח תרמ"ז, קנא-קנב
<p>Regarding the counting of the plagues in DeTzaCh, ADaSh, BeAChaV that there were fifty at the sea: All of the counting adds up to 613. And the 613 mitzvot sustain the Torah as is found in the Zohar. And there are also 613 types of opposition, and for this we need the types of plagues. Just like from ten plagues we expand to all of these, so too the Ten Commandments expand to the 613 mitzvot. Just as it began with 'the finger of God' (Shemot 8:15), and afterward it is written that 'they saw God's great hand' (ibid 14:31), so too the Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God.</p>	<p>בענין חשבון המכות דצ"ך עד"ש כו' והמשים על הים כו'. כל החשבונות עולין עד תר"ג. ומאחר שמצינו תר"ג מצות שהם עצות לקיים התורה, כדאיתא בזוה"ק בכמה דוכתי תר"ג עיטין. ממילא יש תר"ג מיני התנגדות, ושעל זה היו צריכין חילוקי המכות האלה. וכמו שמעשרה מכות מתפשטין כל אלה, כמו כן איתא שבעשרת הדברות נכללו התר"ג מצות, וכמו שהתחיל באצבע אלקים (שמות ח:טו), ואחר כך כתיב את היד כו' (שם יד:לא), כמו כן בעשרת הדברות כתובין באצבע אלקים (שם לא:יח).</p>

- The Sefat Emet shows us that the expansion of the plagues is not actually an unfamiliar idea to us-- the Ten Commandments, as we know, are the foundation for 613 mitzvot. What do you make of this connection between the mitzvot and the plagues?
- Do you relate to the idea of positive and negative forces in our lives?
- The Sefat Emet seems to be connecting the somewhat bizarre multiplying of plagues in the Haggadah to a greater narrative/value in Judaism. What do you think that narrative/value is and why do you think it found its way into this part of maggid?

Sefat Emet Pesach 1887, pp. 151	שפת אמת פסח תרמ"ז, קנא
<p>Regarding the statement that increasing the telling of the exodus from Egypt is praiseworthy: The commentators wrote that in every place it is prohibited to increase our praise of God, as it is said in the Gemara (Megillah 18a): Who can tell the greatness of God? Who is able to tell His praise? But in the exodus from Egypt it is praiseworthy to do. It seems that the reason is for someone for whom God has made a miracle, in that place and in that time of the miracle, we are permitted and even obligated to praise. As we say, if God had not taken our fathers out of Egypt we would be slaves. And so, a miracle was done for us. Therefore someone who increases his/her telling is praiseworthy. And so at the end of the Haggadah we say God brought us out and therefore we are obligated to praise, as we have written.</p>	<p>בענין המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח. כתבו המפרשים כי בכל מקום אסור להרבות בשבחיו של מקום, כדאיתא בגמרא (מגילה יח.) מי מלל גבורות ה' (תהלים קו:ב), מי שיוכל לספר כל תהלתו כו', אך ביציאת מצרים משובח עיין שם. ונראה הטעם, כי למי שנעשה לו הנס, וכן במקום ובזמן של הנס, מותרין ומחוייבין להלל ולשבח. ולפי שאמרנו ואלו לא הוציא הקב"ה את אבותינו הרי אנו משועבדין, ממילא נעשה לנו הנס, לכן המרבה לספר משובח. וכן בסוף ההגדה שאומרים ואותנו הוציא כו' לפיכך אנחנו חייבין כו' כמו שכתבנו.</p>

- Why do you think normally, we wouldn't increase our praise of God?
- The Sefat Emet points out that we must see ourselves as the ones for whom the miracle occurred in order to even halachically be able to increase our praise at the Seder. This personalization is a familiar aspect of our Pesach observance-- all of us at the Seder were saved! But what does it mean to you personally to say that if God had not saved our forefathers, *you* would be a slave today?
- How does your answer relate to your experience of Jewish life-- of mitzvot? Why do you think personalization is essential to the maggid section of the Haggadah?

Sefat Emet Pesach 1895, pp. 202	שפת אמת פסח תרנ"ה--תרנ"ו, רב
<p>With a strong hand: There are those who explain this according to the verse 'As I live...Surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm I will rule over you' (Yechezkel 20:33). So too He intended that in Egypt they were not ready for redemption, and God forbid they were assimilating among the Egyptians. Therefore, God made the Egyptians embitter their lives, and so too it is written in the Zohar-- He turned their hearts to hate His people in</p>	<p>ענין ביד חזקה (דברים כו:ח). יש לפרש כמו שכתוב (יחזקאל כ:לג) חי אני כו' אם לא ביד חזקה אמלוד עליכם, כמו כן יתכן שבמצרים לא היו מוכנים לגאולה, וח"ו היו נטמעים בתוכם, ולכן עשה הקב"ה שימררו חייהם, וכן כתוב בזוה"ק שמות (טו:א) בפסוק (תהלים קה:כה) הפך לבם לשנוא עמו עיין שם, כדי שיחפצו</p>

order that they would desire redemption. Therefore the maror recalls that they embittered their lives, for this was preparation for the good. So too with all of the suffering that comes onto Israel when we forget God our Creator-- from the bodily suffering comes the cry and our souls remember, as it is written, 'And they moaned from their labor'. This caused their cries to rise up to God, for from their bodily suffering came feelings of spiritual suffering, and it all was in preparation of redemption. Therefore it is written 'with a strong hand' for it was against their will, for it was not from their own good that they drew close to God, and this is something we praise.

בגאולה. ולכן מרור זכר לוימררו חייהם (שמות א:יד) שזה היה הכנה לטובה. וכמו כן כל היסורים שבאים על בני ישראל כששוכחין את הבורא, ומתוך יסורי הגוף באין לצעקה ונזכרין בנפשותיהם, וכן כתיב (שמות ב:כג) ויאנחו כו' מן העבודה, וגרם זה ותעל שועתם אל האלקים (שם), שמיסורי הגוף באין להרגיש יסורי הנפש, והכל הכנה אל הגאולה. לכן כתיב ביד חזקה בעל כרחך שלא בטובתן נתקרבו אליו יתברך שמו, ויש להלל ולשבח על זה.

- This is a complex text, which can prompt deep discussion at the Seder table. Why do you think the Sefat Emet interprets 'God's strong hand' to mean that God had to essentially push us to leave Egypt? What does this text bring up for you (ex: complacency, assimilation, parenting, a general awareness of God today)?
- Do you relate to this idea of finding God or redemption through suffering? If not, why?
- What do you make of the connection between physical and spiritual suffering at the end of this text? Why do you think the Haggadah spends so much time focusing on the physicality of our redemption in this part of the maggid? What is the relationship between spiritual and physical redemption in the Exodus from Egypt and in your own life today?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Pesah: Finding Freedom*, p.172-173

This scene, "the Covenant between the Pieces," makes it clear that the entire sequence of events leading up to exile and exodus did not simply happen. They were pre-scripted. They were meant to be. That is what the Haggada means when it says that God "calculated the end," and that Jacob "went down to Egypt – compelled by what had been spoken." Despite the apparently free actions of human agents, there was a Providence at work behind the scenes. This is as close as Judaism gets to Greek tragedy. The story of Pesah is thus understood by the Torah not as just a historical event, not even an event that involved signs and wonders and miraculous deliverances. It always was meant to be part of the journey, prefigured five times in advance by four exiles and a nighttime vision before there even was a Jewish people. The way to the Promised Land passes through Egypt and exile. This was not a detour but part of the route itself, anticipated at the very outset. Why so? The answer lies in the inner logic of the Torah as a set of commands and a way of life, not just for individuals but as a nation in its land. The journey to the Promised Land had to pass through Egypt because Israel was to construct a society that would be the antithesis of Egypt. Therefore they had to know Egypt, experience Egypt, feel it in their bones, carry it with them as an indelible memory that they would hand on to all future generations. They had to experience what it was like to be on the wrong side of power: strangers, outsiders, metics, apiru as they were known in Egypt in those days, people without rights who were subject to the whim of a merciless ruler. The taste of that affliction was never to be forgotten.