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In the *hagaddah* we recite the paragraph of *avodim hoyinu*, in which we declare that we would still be in *Mitzrayim* had *Hashem* not taken us out. This sentence needs an explanation. Nothing in the world happens unless *Hashem* makes it happen. Doesn't it go without saying that if *Hashem* did not act then it would not have happened? What is the *hagaddah* trying to tell us? Perhaps, the *hagaddah* means to say that it is impossible that *yetziyas mizrayim* could have happened naturally. He is telling us that we would never have come out without *Hashem* performing supernatural miracles. But that is also hard to understand. How does the *hagaddah* know that? Surely, if *Hashem* wanted to, He could have arranged for *yetziyas mizrayim* to happen without miracles. What then does the *hagaddah* mean?

The *Maharal* addresses this question. However, in order to fully appreciate his answer, we must first familiarize ourselves with the *Maharal's* approach to *yetziyas mizrayim*. The *Maharal* wrote a *sefer* titled *Gevuros Hashem* specifically about this topic. Near the beginning of the *sefer* (chapter 3), the *Maharal* quotes a *Midrash* on the *possuk* (*Devarim* 4:34)

הַנִּסָּה אֱלֹקִים לְבוֹא לְקַחַת לּוֹ גּוֹי מִקְרֵב גּוֹי בְּמִסְתַּת בְּאֵתֶת וּבְמוֹפְתִים ... כֹּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לָכֶם ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֶיךָ

"Has a G-d tried to take for Himself a nation from the midst of a nation with trials, with signs and wonders ... like all that *Hashem* your G-d did for you in *Mitzrayim* before your eyes?"

The Jewish people in *Mitzrayim* are described as a nation in "the midst of a nation". The Hebrew word used here for "the midst" is "*mikerev*". This relates to the word "*ha'kerev*" in last week's *parsha* (*Vayikra* 7:3), which refers to the innards of an animal. ("*Ve'es hachelev ha'mechaseh es ha'kerev*" - "the fat that covers the innards"). Based on this, the *Midrash* compares the *Yidden* in *Mitzrayim* to an unborn baby calf in the innards of its mother. The *Midrash* (*Yalkut siman* 826) states

"כְּעוֹבֵר שֶׁהוּא נִתּוֹן בְּתוֹךְ מַעִיהַ שֶׁל בְּהֵמָה וְהָרוּעָה נוֹתֵן יָדוֹ וְשׁוֹמְטָהּ, כִּךְ הִנֵּסָה אֱלֹקִים לְבֹא לְקַחַת לּוֹ גּוֹי מִקְרֵב גּוֹי."

"Just like a baby that is positioned in the womb of an animal and the shepherd positions his hand and removes it, so too – 'Has a G-d tried to take for Himself a nation from the midst of (*mikerev*) a nation?'"

The *Maharal* explains that *Bnei Yisroel* entered *Mitzrayim* as seventy individuals, not yet a full nation. Inside *Mitzrayim*, almost unbeknown to the world, this future nation grew and matured. Two hundred and ten years after entering, a fully formed nation was born. The gestation of the nation occurred in *mitzrayim*, similar to the gestation of a calf inside an animal. *Yetziyas mizrayim* was the birth of the nation.

Chazal tell us (*Taanis* 2a) that there are three keys that *Hashem* does not hand over to an intermediary. They are the keys of rain, birth and *techiyas hameisim*. These three things represent life itself, and only *Hashem* makes them happen. *Hashem* has appointed *malachim* to oversee other natural phenomena, but these three things are orchestrated directly by *Hashem*. One of these three is the keys of birth. The *Maharal* adds that if this applies to the birth of an individual, it certainly applies to the birth of a nation.

This then, writes the *Maharal* (*Gevuros Hashem* chapters 52, 55), is what the *hagaddah* means to tell us when it states that we would still be in *Mitzrayim* had *Hashem* not taken us out. We would still be in *Mitzrayim* were it not that *Hashem bi'kevodo ve'atzmo* brought us out. *Yetziyas Mitzrayim* is a birth event, and the keys of birth are not handed to a *shliach*. As the *hagadda* itself states, "*lo al yedei*

malach ve'lo al yedei sorof ve'lo al yedei shliach elah Hakodosh Boruch Hu bi'kevodo uve'atzmo". Only Hashem Himself orchestrates the birth of a nation.

One of the talmidim of the Vilna *Gaon* was *Rav Menachem Mendel* of Shklov. He, in turn, had a *talmid* named *Rav Yitzchok Isaac Chover*, author of the *Pischei Shearim*. *Rav Yitzchok Isaac Chover* also wrote a *pirush* on the *hagaddah* called *Yad Chazokoh*, with a remarkable introduction that he titled *Poseach Yad*. In this introduction, *Rav Yitzchok Isaac* elaborates on the comparison between *yeztiyas mitzrayim* and childbirth.

He quotes the *Gemara (Niddah 31a)* which tells us that during the first three months of pregnancy the fetus resides at the bottom of the womb, during the middle three months of pregnancy it resides in the middle part of the womb, and during the last three months it resides in the top part of the womb. This is counterintuitive. We would have expected that as the pregnancy progresses and the baby is nearer to being born it would move down the womb, not higher up. Nevertheless, *Chazal* tell us that in actuality the fetus moves up the womb as the baby grows bigger and passes through these three stages of pregnancy.

Rav Yitzchok Isaac writes that *golus mizrayim* also had three stages, corresponding to the three stages of pregnancy. *Avrohom Avinu* was told "*ki ger yihyeh zaracha be'ertz lo lohem, va'avadum, ve'inu osom*". The first stage of *golus* was the period of being *geirim* "*be'ereetz lo lohem*". The second stage of *golus* began after *Yaakov* and the *shevatim* died, when the *Bnai Yisroel* became *avodim*. The third stage of *golus* began at the time that *Miriam* was born, when the period of *inui* and oppression began. As the stages progressed, it looked less likely that the *Bnai Yisroel* would come out of *Mitzrayim*, and more and more likely that they would stay there forever. It was unthinkable to *Paroh* and the *Mitzriyim* that the *Yidden* would leave and go free. However, just as in pregnancy where the baby moving up the womb is a sure sign that the time of *chevlei leidah* is coming, so too the increased suffering was a sure sign that *yeztiyas mitzrayim* was about to happen.

This year we are all spending *Pesach* in our own homes, and none of us have ever seen anything like it. Children cannot go to their parents, friends and family have to remain apart, and outside the safety of our houses we know that people are dying. We live in a world where time seems to have stopped, our lives are on hold, we are unable to work, and yet we still must make *Pesach* as best as we possibly can. What does this all mean? Why is this happening? What are we meant to feel at the *Pesach seder*?

We do not know when *Moshiach* is coming, or how close we are to the *geulah sheleima*. However, we do know that *Chazal* compare the coming of *moshiach* to *chevlei leidah*. *Klal Yisroel* has already experienced much of the *chevlei leida* that is needed for *biyas moshiach*. *Rav Elchonon Wassermann Hy"d* once told *Rav Eliyohu Lapian zt"l* that the *Chofetz Chaim* had said that the two World Wars were a large part of *milchemes gog u'magog* (see *Lev Eliyohu*, new edition, *Shemos* page 197). Clearly, this year's events are also part of the *chevlei leida* of *biyas moshiach*.

What should our response be at this time? *Rav Nosson Vachtfogel zt"l (Leket Reshimos Chanuka* page 40) writes that he has a *kabala ish mi'pi ish* from *Rav Yeshoshua Leib Diskin zt"l* that "*ehrlischer Yidden*" will be saved during the last period before *moshiach*, and that these "*ehrlischer yidden*" are the people who separate themselves from the *goyish* activities of the rest of the world. There is no better time than now for us to be *machazek* in this *inyan*. *Hashem* has made sure that we are all quarantined in our houses and has already separated us from the *goyish* world. By strengthening ourselves in this area and

committing ourselves to be an *am levodod yishkon* may we all be saved from *chevlei moshiach* and be *zocheh* to see the *biyas goel tzedek*, amen.