

We now have a series of parshiyos where Bnei Yisroel are developing as a nation in Egypt. Before they came down to Egypt, Yaakov Ovinu and Yosef had a plan for the golus. Yosef assured Yaakov that he can support the entire family on the royal treasury's expense. The next 71 years that Yosef is in charge, he took care of them.

When Yaakov brought his family down to Egypt, he sent Yehudah ahead to Goshen to set up a yeshiva. Chazal tell us there was always a yeshiva in Klal Yisroel – Avrohom, Yitzchok, Yaakov all had yeshivos, and they brought their yeshiva down with them to Egypt. It is not possible for Klal Yisroel to exist without Torah learning at any point in history from the very beginning – starting with Avrohom Ovinu's yeshiva.

Yehudah set up the yeshiva in Goshen. Yosef set up a ghetto in Goshen for all the Jews to live in. This was the vision of Yaakov Ovinu. Klal Yisroel have to be separate. They can be friendly with the Egyptians and even be supported by them. But they live in a separate world. They are different. That is how it is supposed to be.

However, after Yosef and his brothers died, things begin to change. The original generation of Yaakov Ovinu had passed into memory, and the vision of Klal Yisroel maintaining their separate identity began to fade away. They spread out of the ghetto and started to live all over Egypt. At the time, Egypt was the most wealthy and most technologically sophisticated country in the ancient world, and the Jews wanted to integrate. They stopped bris miloh.

The immediate response to this trend to assimilate was that the affection the Egyptians had for the Jews turned into hatred. A new king arose who forgot all about Yosef and started to plot and scheme how to enslave and oppress the Jews.

Egypt had a very corrupt society – totally immersed in znus – as the Torah in Acharei Mos tells us. But although the Jews adopted the avodo zoro of Egypt, they did not have any breaches in znus with the exception of a single woman – Shlomis bas Divri. There were certain lines that Klal Yisroel kept themselves from crossing – even while deeply involved in Egyptian culture. This was so much so that the Torah itself testifies that all the Jewish children belonged to their father's family even though they were totally at the mercy of the Egyptian masters.

There were three separate groups of Jews in Egypt.

One group was Shevet Levi. They remained in the beis midrash and preserved the mesorah of the Ovos, kept performing bris miloh, and did not assimilate whatsoever all 210 years in golus. The Rambam writes that Levi was the Rosh Yeshiva and they were supported by Pharaoh the entire time.

The rest of Klal Yisroel were interested in joining Egyptian society. Pharaoh and the Egyptians wanted to enslave them. But how do you do it? You can't just announce "you are all slaves" and expect it to happen. Pharaoh came up with the idea of starting a national service. Cities need to be built, and all loyal citizens of the country are being asked personally by Pharaoh to volunteer to work for the good of the country. Naturally, all the Jews enthusiastically enlisted because they wanted to show how patriotic they were! They started working together with Pharaoh and the Egyptians. But slowly and gradually, all the Egyptians got exemptions and only the naive Jews who wanted to prove their loyalty remained working and eventually became slaves. They wanted to become part of Egypt and Egypt turned against them because they felt threatened by them.

Klal Yisroel started integrating and adopting all the corrupt culture of Egypt and sunk into the 49 levels of tumoh.

Among those who were enslaved there were two groups. One group resigned themselves to being slaves as the price of being integrated into Egyptian society. Another group had regrets about the whole assimilation process and started to cry out to Hashem and hoped to get back their original identity one day.

With all this background, Hashem sent Moshe Rabbeinu to start the

process of geuloh and deliver the ten makkos. These makkos had three objectives. One was to punish the Egyptians for their cruelty. The second was to teach the Egyptians that their avodo zoro is false. The third reason was to impress deeply in the hearts of Klal Yisroel that Hashem runs the world completely and is not subject to any other force or power.

When Moshe comes to Pharaoh, he speaks in the Name of YKVK who runs the world. Pharaoh says he doesn't recognize this Being. Hashem really told Moshe to come to Pharaoh to represent the G-d of the Ivrim. Pharaoh understood that every nation and ethnic group has their own deity whom they follow. The Ivrim have their G-d too. But Moshe is coming to Pharaoh with a very strange concept – YKVK. There is one supreme Being who controls everything and He chose a special nation that He will personally guide. Yisroel means that we live in front of Hashem. He alone is our audience.

Chazal tell us that Pharaoh looked up YKVK in his book of gods and couldn't find it. This concept was completely foreign to him. Pharaoh managed to convince himself that he created the world! He is the head of the most powerful nation of the ancient world. Chazal tell us that Pharaoh convinced everyone else that he had no physical needs. Even though the reality was that he was human and had physical needs which he attended to for 15 minutes every day, Pharaoh somehow lived with the contradiction and continued to fool himself for the rest of the day – as most people do.

The first makkoh was blood. A very insidious, cynical thing is happening with this makkoh. The Nile River is the only reliable source of water and was worshipped by the Egyptians as the source of all life in Egypt. Moshe came along and declared that he is turning their source of life into a source of death. He will destroy the whole basis of their avodo zoro. He does it. The Nile turns to blood and everything in it dies. But people aren't so easily able to change their whole worldview.

The Chartumim, who were the priests who were in charge of the Nile worshipping cult, couldn't allow Moshe to do something so impressive. They were desperate to outdo him. So they said we can also turn the Nile into blood just like Moshe! But without even realizing it, they created a complete contradiction to their entire belief system. They themselves turned the very thing they worshipped as a source of life into a source of death!

Then there was the makkoh of Tzefardim. Some say it was frogs and some say it was crocodiles. They also came out of the Nile. The source of life becomes a source of total devastation. And again, along comes the Chartumim and they also bring destruction from the Nile which is supposed to be the source of life! But, they can't get rid of them. They turn to Moshe and beg him to get rid of the tzefardim.

The next makkoh is kinim. Until now, Hashem has allowed the Chartumim to imitate the makkos of death and destruction from the Nile to show how bankrupt their belief in the Nile is. Now Hashem challenges them to try to create and control the tiniest form of life – kinim. They can't do it. They can only destroy life. They can't create it. Only Hashem can both destroy and create life. It is the finger of Hashem.

These are makkos of D'TzaCh which show Moshe is clearly in touch with a superior power. The next three, A'Da'Sh, are meant to show that Hashem is an intelligent power that is aware of human beings and can make distinctions between Jews and Egyptians. These makkos cause such death and destruction, but do not affect a single Jew. Hashem is showing that He is aware of human affairs and is out to protect His special people from harm. Moshe is teaching lessons to Pharaoh and Klal Yisroel about Hashem who is an intelligent force which makes distinctions and shows the sheker of avodo zoro.

Then we come to the last four makkos – B'A'Chav. They show Hashem's complete mastery over all physical forces and powers. Only Hashem is in charge and He can break any law of nature He wishes. Even though Borod alone displayed this to the Egyptians, Hashem now wants to impress these lessons so deeply that it will penetrate the heart of every Jew permanently. It will guarantee that it will be passed on to all future

generations.

Then we have makkas choshech. There is a large section of the Jewish population who are now too comfortable to leave Egypt. They were released from slave labor during the last year of the makkos, and they didn't get the message that they need to leave and become Hashem's people by accepting the Torah at Sinai. You can show the truth to their face and they aren't phased by it. It makes no impression on them. They have to die in makkas choshech because Hashem isn't leaving a single Jew in Egypt. The rest of the Jews are either burying the 80% who died, or are preparing to leave Egypt by spying around the Egyptians' houses in the darkness. They are going to find their treasures to know what to ask them for when they leave.

This is the difficult part of the geuloh process. People don't want to change. They will turn and twist themselves into pretzels to avoid the uncomfortable reality that they need to change. Once you accept the truth that Hashem is running the world, it means you have to change the way you live. It is too much for people to accept and they go into denial.

Then we have one of the most incredible Rashis in chumash. Hashem tells Moshe Rabbeinu that makkas bechoros will occur at midnight. But when Moshe conveys this to Pharaoh, he changes the language and says "about midnight". Why the change? Rashi explains that if Moshe would have said the makkoh would happen precisely at midnight, it is likely that the Egyptian clocks would be off by a few minutes and they would think the makkoh happened a little bit early or a little bit late. This will give them the excuse to dismiss the whole makkoh as a joke! Just imagine what Rashi is telling us. The Egyptians have gone through 9 catastrophic makkos which all happened just as Moshe predicted. They will see all the first-born Egyptians die instantaneously. But if it happens a little off midnight, they will reject it! It doesn't prove anything! They will dismiss the whole message of the makkoh.

Moshe doesn't want to leave any room for the message to be lost, so he has to say "around midnight". Once he gives them any opportunity to explain the makkoh away, they will jump at it no matter how irrational it is. They are so desperate to not have to change the way they live.

So 80% of Klal Yisroel didn't want to accept the lessons of the makkos and didn't want to leave. They all died during makkas choshech. They didn't want to face the uncomfortable reality that they have to change their lives.

The Ramban at the end of Parshas Bo explains that the entire process of geulas Mitzrayim was to illustrate hashgocho protis and ein od milvado. Hashem controls and runs everything that happens down to the finest detail. Even though we don't see it nowadays, we saw it during the makkos – with open nissim – so we can know that even through nature, Hashem is making nissim nistarim to arrange things to happen.

It may have been drilled into the hearts of every Jew who left Egypt, but to continue this belief by future generations is not so easy.

Rav Avrohom ben HoRambam in his fundamental sefer Hamaspik, first says the belief in hashgocho protis is an absolute obligation on every Jew, and it is counted among the number of 613 mitzvos of the Torah. But it isn't so easy. There is a scientific worldview held by many from Jews that everything runs according to predictable natural law – our health, economics, politics, etc., and they relegate Hashem into some abstract concept. They don't really believe Hashem is an active part of their lives, running it minute by minute. Our obligation is to truly live our lives knowing and feeling that Hashem is with us at all times running every detail.

Hashgocho protis means there is no other power in this world that makes things happen. People fool themselves into thinking they are in charge of their lives. Pharaoh thought he created the world and for 23 hours and 45 minutes he was a god. For 15 minutes a day he had to confront the fact that he was human and he quickly forgot about it afterwards. This was the reason for the 10 makkos – to teach the world that there is no other force that has absolute power besides Hashem.

Makkas borod was an interesting makkoh. Hashem said there never was, and never will be, such a hailstorm in the history of Egypt. Anything left outside will be killed. In response, all the Egyptians went inside to be on the safe side, but most left their slaves and animals outside. Only those who feared Hashem also brought their animals and slaves inside ahead of time.

Later at Yam Suf, we find that Pharaoh had a massive army of horse-drawn chariots. Where did these horses come from? From those

same Egyptians who feared Hashem a few weeks earlier. Was this a contradiction? No. They were being absolutely consistent. The main value they had throughout was keeping their wealth. When keeping their wealth meant fearing Hashem's word, they feared Hashem's word and brought their property inside before the hailstorm. When all their Jewish slaves left Egypt and their whole economy was threatening to collapse, they needed to send out their horses and chase Klal Yisroel to bring back their wealth!

This teaches us a lot about ourselves. We have no problem keeping the Torah and doing mitzvos when it's convenient – when it fits our agenda. But that's not a real commitment. I often wonder why certain bochurim come to yeshiva. It used to be that you only decided to come to yeshiva if you were sincerely committed to learning while you were there. But nowadays, people have all sorts of cheshbonos and agendas in coming to yeshiva. Pure avodas Hashem is very far from their minds.

People have to be mature and ask themselves why are they here? What do I want to accomplish with myself during my lifetime? What am I doing in yeshiva? Am I maximizing my time?

Hashem gave our generation an unbelievable opportunity to sit and learn on a mass scale that was never available before in our history. Some people react to this incredible fact with a sense of privilege and enthusiasm to learn. Others first ask – is the pizza good? Are the tiyulim exciting and fun? Stop and think about the fact that you are living in a unique time in history! But people don't stop and think. In Egypt, people didn't stop and think and they paid a steep price. And even those who feared Hashem only feared Him up to a point – not when it went against their selfish agenda.

The makkos were also for us. The lessons were integrated into us so deeply that 3500 years later, fathers still tell their children about the nissim and that Hashem runs the world. But it isn't just telling a story one night a year at the seder. It is an absolute obligation to integrate these lessons in our everyday lives. We live in a very complex world where science and medicine are impressed in people's minds as the only source of health and control over their lives. We need to know that at the end of the day, Hashem is in control, and He decides if the medicine works or not.

The lessons of these parshiyos are critical for understanding what a person's purpose in this world is all about. While you are in yeshiva, appreciate that you have a unique opportunity you need to maximize.

There are two midrashim I think about regularly. One midrash explains that the first pesukim of Bereishis refer to the four goluyos of human history before Moshiach. Tehom is the bottomless abyss which refers to Rome and then Christianity. Another midrash addresses the malochim going up and down on the ladder seen in Yaakov's dream. These malochim symbolized different goluyos. Most go up and then eventually go down – each empire's domination over the world eventually wanes and fizzles out. Persia, Greece, Rome, all lost their power and became ordinary countries. But Edom's maloch keeps going up and up and up and doesn't seem to come down! Hashem assures Yaakov that Edom and its successor Christianity will eventually collapse as well. We are seeing this happen in our generation where Christianity is losing relevance and secularism is rapidly taking over the entire world.

But then the midrash in Bereishis continues to explain that there is a ruach of Hashem which will hover over the face of the water. Edom's domination will come to an end and there will be a return to Torah learning. This is the water over which the spirit of Hashem hovers. Then comes yehi or, which is Moshiach. All of what is happening is preparing the light of Moshiach to shine forth at the end.

But this happens only if we take our limud Torah seriously. If not, Hashem will turn the world upside down to make us realize that we need to take our job more seriously. Three years ago, Hashem caused the whole social fabric of the entire world to collapse with this microscopic virus from China. He is setting the stage for us to bring Moshiach through the widespread limud Torah available today. We have to take advantage of this opportunity.

In Egypt we had two groups. Those who rose to the challenge and received the message that we are Hashem's chosen nation and need to leave. Then there were those who were comfortable and didn't want to leave. It is vitally important for us to hear the messages Hashem is sending us.