

## 70 PERSPECTIVES BUT ONLY ONE TORAH

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### Israel in Mitzrayim

The Brit bein HaBetarim, which foretold 400 years of galut before Israel could inherit its land, makes no mention of the country in which this was to occur. It foretold only that Avraham's children would be strangers and then enslaved and persecuted in a land which was not theirs. There are some commentators who write that the galut could easily be in Eretz Yisrael since at that time the Jews were strangers and subservient there. Why then was the first galut in the land of Egypt? The answer that was where Ya'akov and his descendants came to settle, would make the choice of land merely accidental, whereas the covenant shows that there had to be something special and significant religiously and spiritually.

Egypt was the most powerful country of that time. Its empire included sections of North Africa and the whole Middle East till the borders of Bavel, It was the center of knowledge in medicine and science of that age. The Egyptians constructed buildings and edifices, which even today are marvels of engineering. Historians claim it as the source of written language. Perhaps most important of all, they built a widespread efficient system of canals whereby to irrigate what would otherwise be desert. These building

activities required masses of slaves and a secure system for ensuring they did not escape. Israel's exile in the most developed and powerful country in that world would make its deliverance and exodus most amazing and most miraculous. The power and might of G-d to take a whole nation from such a country would resound throughout the world and throughout the ages.

There is no rainfall in Egypt yet it was the very breadbasket of the entire ancient world because it was well watered by the Nile. As the river rises so water, prosperity and wealth grow and all men, from Pharaoh down to the peasants watch, hope and pray that it rises. Therefore, in Egypt no eyes were lifted to heaven in prayer but rather down to the Nile and its banks. In contrast, Eretz Yisrael has no great lakes and no great rivers; all its water comes from rain and all its wealth comes from above. There people look heavenwards for prosperity and sustenance. So before Israel could enter Eretz Yisrael, they had to be in a galut where there is no connection to Heaven and no connection with G-d (Shem MiShmuel). The Netziv writes that the sin of Moshe in striking the rock instead of speaking, lay in not realizing this connection between prayer and rain in Eretz Yisrael. In the desert water had to be brought through miracles but the generation which was about to enter the land needed to learn that there, their prayers would suffice to bring rain.

The world was created with 10 sayings, there were 10 generations from Adam to No'ach and 10 from him to Avraham

(Avot 5:1-2). When the first 10 sinned, each generation destroyed a tenth of His creation till finally Hashem destroyed that world and created a new one. New generations, nevertheless repeated the behavior which once again merited destruction. However, this time Hashem channeled all the evil down to Egypt so that only that country had to be destroyed. Israel's redemption from exile there would be the vehicle for that destruction through the 10 plagues each of which would destroy one tenth of the evil.

Harav J.B. Soloveitchik writes that Pesach comes as a memorial of two distinct events, the exodus from Eretz Mitzrayim and the breaking of any spiritual or cultural connection with Mitzrayim. The difficulty with breaking the connection lies in the fact that Mitzrayim managed to integrate itself with Israel till its culture and spiritual outlook became almost part of them. This is a theme repeated by many different commentators; for example Rambam in his Guide writes that korbanot were instituted only because Israel was accustomed to the Egyptians offering sacrifices. It is a theme that is well-illustrated even in our own generation. We have witnessed the miraculous kibbutz galuyot but are yet to see their complete integration into a single national entity rather than a continuation of tribes and communities. Basically, this is a problem summed up in a popular saying that it is easy to take the Jew out of galut but difficult to take the golus mentality out of the Jew.

"The Torah describes how Hashem

drew the Israel nation MIKEREV, from the innermost recesses of Mitzrayim. The fetus of an impure animal is also impure as it is so closely part of the mother. Therefore, the word MIKEREV is used to describe removing a fetus from its mother's womb or a calf from the very inside of the cow; in both cases the newborn one seems like an integral part of the others body. Just as it requires the farmer's hand to draw out the calf, so it was necessary for the Hand of Hashem to draw Israel, out of the body and soul of Mitzrayim" (Shem MiShmuel).