



Parashat Shemot



English version

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BEATING THE SYSTEM

There is a sad joke that goes around the yeshiva world each year at this time. Ben Hazmanim usually starts with a fast. Tisha B'Av, Yom Kippur, Taanit Esther. And Sof Zman, the beginning of the end, the decline of momentum for the weaker boys, is from the fast before that. Shiva Assar B'Tamuz, Tzom Gedalia, **Assarah B'tevet**.

If you drive on Menachem Begin Highway at 95 kmph where the speed limit is 80, you fly under the speed cameras without getting a ticket. To get through the Yeshiva system and be a "good boy" and fly under the radar of keeping sederim, you are still "on time" for seder, even if you get there half an hour late. You can leave seder a half an hour early and still consider that you were there to the end. If you come to Shacharit right on time for Barachu and leave as you say Aleinu at the Minyan Factory, then you might even be able to spend less time on Shacharit than you do on Maariv. Then you *really* "beat the system". When you "trim all the fat" off your learning, off your davening, there isn't that much "meat" left to your spirituality or your connection with G-d. I am sure that girls also have their way of "beating the system", if they want to, in their tzniut, davening, or devoting their time and effort to building families.

Anti-system articles always draw the most attention. What I will write sounds in some way anti-system although it really isn't. The problem with the Yeshiva system is that **as an academic one**, it is a failure. It was always a failure. It was meant to be a failure. As Rashi says, in Kohelet, 7:28, בְּנוֹהֵג שֶׁבְעוֹלָם אֵלַי נִכְנָסִים לְמִקְרָא אֵין יוֹצְאִים מֵהֶם, להצליח שראויים למשנה אלא מאה ואותם מאה שנכנסו למשנה אין יוצאים מהם לגמרא אלא עשרה ואותן עשרה שנכנסין לגמרא אין מצליח מהם אלא אחד להוראה הרי אחד

מאלף: A thousand people come to learn in the system, and only one comes out who knows how to be Posek Halacha, a true Rabbi. This can be very depressing. A great turnoff. As an academic system, if you have a school in which 1000 enter in order to become a doctor, or a lawyer, and only one comes out to be a doctor or a lawyer, the school will close down. But our system exists and will continue to exist. Because our system is only a failure in terms of being an academic one, for preparing people with a plan for the future. For something to **do** in life. How many jobs are there in Kodesh anyway? How many Kodesh jobs will help you support your family, long term? Our system is good at only one thing. For building people what to **be** in life. To rewire your B3, your **beliefs**, your **behaviors** and what and who you **belong** to. **At that, our system is the best system in the world.**

Our system is not to build nice, good boys who aren't troublemakers, either. It is to build leaders. To build people with a connection with G-d. Allow me to explain. Hold on, and get ready for the most fundamental, unknown lesson of Torah Chinuch.

The Rama (Y"D 81;7) writes the Halacha, "The milk of an Egyptian woman is like the milk of a Jewess. And still, do not give a child to drink from an Egyptian woman, if it is possible from a Jewess. Because the milk of a gentile blocks the heart and creates a bad nature." The Vilna Gaon brings the Rashba, that this is sourced from 3-month-old baby Moshe Rabbenu, who was not willing to nurse from the Egyptian women, because he would eventually speak to the Shechina.

R' Yaakov Kamenetzky asks how we can learn this halacha from Moshe, having it pertain to every

Jewish child. The whole reason for Moshe's insistence on nursing from a Jewess was because he was, in the future, going to speak to the Shechina! Will every child speak to the Shechina?!? And R Yaakov writes, in Emet Layaakov, that real Chinuch is to ensure that our upbringing of the child is such that it will be possible to speak to the Shechina! ***That is the fundamental of real Chinuch.***

When Yosef was about to sin with Potifar's wife, he jumped back and said something to her that can blow your mind. *G-d regularly comes and chooses from the members of my family, from the best of them, someone to be brought up as an Olah sacrifice (Yitzhak). He regularly comes and reveals Himself in prophesy in the middle of the night. If I listen to you and sleep with you, G-d might come to me in the middle of the night and find me impure (M Rabbah).* That is how Yaakov brought up his children, ready at any minute to speak to the Shechina! G-d can suddenly "appear" in your life and expect you to perform your Tefila, your mission in this world. And if you had a good chinuch, you will be extremely successful.

When I was in eighth grade, I noticed a 6th grader not saying Aleinu. I told him that when he says Aleinu, all of the angels in Heaven stop to listen (See Yalkut Yosef Tefillah 132; 17 in the name of the student of the Maharashal). The boy suddenly opened his Siddur and said every word. It took him almost 5 minutes! I remember the time I gave more tzedakka than usual to a recently widowed woman to pay for her sons' camp. The middleman called me, "Yosef!! You brought tears to her eyes!! She was so thankful, grateful to G-d that she can have a breather!! Yosef, the skies are open for you now! Ask anything you want from G-d, and I am sure He will grant your greatest wishes!!!" I did pray, but I realized, then, how many times in life we do have that time to turn to G-d with a request or with thanks, how many times in life we have the Heavens open, and we let the opportunity go by,

without taking advantage of it. But isn't that what we were brought up to do, to speak to the Shechina?!?!

When you pray, you are talking to G-d. When you learn, G-d is talking to you. How many times we can say Amen, Yehe Sheme Rabba, how many times we can come to learn Torah in the study hall and G-d is waiting for us. This is what we are here for. This is why we bring kids to the world, so that we can raise them in such a way. The reason why sometimes we do not raise them with this in mind, is because we do not look at ourselves as "speaking to the Shechina". What a shame!

The whole academic part of our system is not an end in itself. It is not about effective learning, not about memory. Not about competition, homework or report cards. It is not about how many Siyumim you make, how good you are at listening to shiur or able to say a Shiur, or how well you did on your Semicha test. It is how you are able to use those great concepts or principles that you learn about to connect more and more to the Shechina, and ready to bring the Shechina into your life. There were people who were geniuses in Torah who did not excel in their Yirat Shamayim or in righteous behavior, despite the fact that they were academic heroes. The problem why people burn out in the system, feel abused by it or simply don't "make it" is because they do not understand this fundamental principle of chinuch. Or their teachers or parents did not understand this. The answer to all chinuch issues, the fundamental that needs to be addressed, is not about the Mechanech, or the one who is on the receiving end of the Chinuch. It is about the relationship with the Shechina, and making connection to the Shechina possible. Staying clear of anything that can weaken that connection.

Those who "beat" the system misunderstand it. It is built to help you, just as the speed limit is there to save you from hurting yourself. It is the easiest system to beat. But the only one who you beat is yourself.

BEING G-D'S FIRSTBORN

The hardest question to answer as a religious Jew is, if G-d is everything, and G-d is good, then why is the world so messed up? Why is there so much

bad in the world? Couldn't G-d create a world in which things would just make more sense?

The answer gives a whole new perspective on Judaism. G-d did not finish creating the world. He left it up to mankind to finish creating it. Or more precisely, he left it up to us Jews to finish creating it. Or, even more precisely yet, he left it up to you to finish creating it. And if G-dliness is not felt in our lives and in the world we live, then we know that we are not doing our job well enough.

Every Friday night, when we make Kiddush, we say that we join G-d in creating His world, by bringing spirituality into it. אשר ברא אלוקים לעשות. *That G-d created the world, to make.* What does that mean, that G-d created a world "to make"? The answer is that G-d wants us to put the finishing touches on the world He created. He wants us to bring the message of Shabbat to the world. Shabbat is the meaning behind all Creation, the spirituality behind all matter and everything material. Shabbat is the Creation of meaning behind the Creation. How so?

Shabbat is number seven. All significant subjects in Judaism relate to the number seven. Both Pesach and Sukkot are festivals lasting seven days. Shavuoth, following the counting of the Omer for 49 days, is also the culmination of the seven-week period beginning with Pesach. Shmittah is the seventh agricultural year, and Yovel is the seventh shmittah, marking a total of 49 years, or seven times seven. There are three Patriarchs and four Matriarchs, together equaling seven. There are seven holidays from the Torah, Pesach, Shavuoth, Sukkot, Rosh Hashannah, Yom Kippur, Shmini Atseret, and the last Moed is Tisha B'Av, קרא עלי, מועד, a day that will be a holiday in the times of Mashiach. Why are all significant themes in Judaism related to number seven? Because six defines the dimensions of the physical world: in a three-dimensional cube, there is width, length and depth. Each measurement is defined by two points. The seventh dot is the inside. The meaning. Why the physical object exists.

The power that drives the universe is the power of meaning. If you lack motivation in any specific area, it is usually because one of three reasons: You do not *believe* in yourself in that area; You do

not know *how* to do something that needs to be done in that area; You are not conscious of *why* that area has importance. "Can?", "How?" and "Why?" Shabbat is a chance to meditate over the Why of the World, and to be a living sign of the purpose of Creation, to the entire Universe.

When did we get this gift of Shabbat? After experiencing suffering in Egypt. The Midrash tells us, ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך, *the Egyptians forced B'nei Yisrael to do backbreaking labor.* The word פרך in ב"ש א"ת, exchanging the letters for the letter that appears in their place when counting from the opposite end of the alphabet, you get the letters וגל which has the numerical value of 39 - the thirty-nine categories of work that are forbidden on Shabbat. Why is Shabbat something that we merited in Egypt, in slavery?

If you go through the parasha and you don't pick up the clues, you can be missing the whole inside story. When G-d asks Moshe to warn Pharaoh that if he does not release the Jews, He will bring upon him the Plague of the Firstborn, G-d tells Moshe to mention the following introduction, and the reason why G-d is going to kill the Egyptians' firstborn, measure for measure. ואמרת אל פרעה כה ואמרת אל פרעה כה. *And you shall tell Pharaoh, 'Thus says G-d: Yisrael is My firstborn son' (4:22)* Rashi writes that at this point, G-d signed the deal that Yaakov bought the firstborn rights from Esav.

What is the connection between the sale of firstborn rights by Esav to Yaakov to this point in time, when the Jews are in slavery, and they are about to be redeemed, and they need to go out of Egypt to serve G-d and bring Him sacrifices?

The answer is the story and heartbeat of the Jewish people. It is a long story, an old story, and a story that is not yet over. The story is a story of sacrifice. A heritage of sacrifice. At times, animal sacrifices in our Temple, and other times, sacrificing our bodies, our lives, our dreams, all for the love of G-d. The whole Amidah, the whole Shemonah Esreh, is a build-up of requests that lead to the ultimate request, that G-d accept our



sacrifices. ואשי ישראל-ל ותפילתם מהרה באהבה תקבל ברצון ותהי לרצון תמיד עבודת ישראל עמך.

Yaakov wanted the firstborn rights from Esav, because he wanted the rights to bring the sacrifices. He wanted to be the continuation of the Brit bein Habetarim, the treaty of sacrifices between G-d and the Jewish people, passed from Avraham to Yitzhak. And he knew that if he would merit to be the continuation of G-d's firstborn, not only to gain firstborn rights, but to shoulder responsibility, the torch, the banner of bringing spirituality to the world would be passed on to him. He wanted to be the firstborn who would be responsible for adding the finishing touches to the world, signing G-d's signature on Creation. And that takes sacrifice. If Yaakov wanted those firstborn rights, his family needed to go through Egyptian bondage, exile and Exodus, for they needed to go through what G-d told Avraham, ידע תדע כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם ועבדום, וענו אתם ארבע מאות שנה. *You must surely know that your children will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will be put to hard labor and subjected to suffering for four hundred years.* It was in the decadence and the obscurity of Egypt that we merited to be בני בכורי ישראל-ל, G-d's firstborn.

This is why, even though Esav gave up his portion by selling his firstborn rights for a pot of lentils, G-d did not call Ya'akov His firstborn, until this much-later point of the Jewish story. This is why Esav asked for the right to be buried in Me'arat Hamachpela, next to Leah, in Yaakov's place, for he claimed that although he had given up his firstborn rights, Yaakov did not yet deserve them, and would not have earned them until he went through 400 years of slavery.

This is why G-d told Pharaoh, "If you prevent My children from exercising their right to sacrifice to

Me, I will smite your firstborn, measure for measure." The Jews merited the title of G-d's firstborn; the Jews are about sacrifice, about bringing G-dliness to the world, no matter how steeped in materialism the world may be. The word for sacrifice is קרבן, Korban. The root of that word is קרב, Karov, getting close. We bring G-dliness into the world through sacrificing material possessions and benefits for spiritual values.

I always wondered why the law is that a gentile who keeps Shabbat is punished by death. (Sanhedrin 58b) The Talmud quotes the passuk ויום וליילה לא ישבותו *And day and night shall not rest* (Bresheit 8;22) What does the passuk that is referring to Creation not stopping have any connection to the gentile keeping Shabbat? The answer is because the Jews merited the present of Shabbat, a time when we get a special closeness to G-d, for being His firstborn. This is why it is called נחלת יעקב, an inheritance for Yaakov. Only because we went through the pain and suffering of Egypt did we merit Shabbat, the gift of refraining from working the world, in order to infuse it with spirituality. Because only a Jewish Nation is willing to go through hard times, bringing G-dliness to the world, even in a place of immorality. Although there are gentiles who are spiritualistic, but their spirituality has nothing to do with Jewish spirituality. Judaism is the only religion where spirituality means elevating something material to something spiritual. For the gentiles, spirituality is the opposite of materialism. But Judaism is about partnering with G-d in making the World - even the material world - into a spiritual one.

Judaism is about living a Torah life, a G-dly life. Bringing G-dliness into life, and bringing spirituality into the material world and into the Mitzrayim that we find ourselves in.

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NEAR THE MIR 1:45 – 3:15 ON MONDAYS AND THURSDAYS STARTING THIS
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