

Yisro said, “Blessed is Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh.” (18:10)

Yisro maintains that the Jewish nation owes a special sense of gratitude to Hashem for His “personal” involvement in their liberation from Egyptian bondage. Rather than have Pharaoh release them of his own accord, Hashem forced his hand to make him send them out of the country. Indeed, if Pharaoh would have willingly participated in the redemption, we might have reason to believe that he too should be recognized and appreciated. Now we acknowledge that it is only to Hashem to whom we have an obligation of gratitude.

The **Chasam Sofer** interprets this idea in his explanation of the *Avadim hayeenu*, “We were slaves” homily, recited at the beginning of the *Seder*. This serves as the segue into the *Haggadah* and the entire story of *Pesach*. We say, “Had Hashem not taken our ancestors out of Egypt, we, our children, and our children’s children would have remained slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.”

The question is obvious. How does the *Baal Haggadah* know that we would have forever remained slaves to Pharaoh? Throughout history we have observed nations who had once been enslaved, but have broken the shackles of incarceration. Either their fortune finally took a positive turn, or their “host” nation fell prey to another nation which did not believe in slavery. To say that thousands of years after the fact we would still be languishing in Egypt is a strong statement.

The *Chasam Sofer* explains that slavery can appear in different guises. One may be physically free, but in his mind he remains beholden to his master. Such a person, in effect, continues to be a slave. Mental slavery may not be as physically debilitating as physical slavery, but it is equally demoralizing. Had Hashem not personally taken us out of Egypt, but instead put it into Pharaoh’s mind to make an about-face and release the Jews, then every ensuing generation of Jew would maintain a debt of gratitude to that evil despot. Every Jewish child would be raised with a sense of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, to the wicked Pharaoh. That is a form of slavery that is much more difficult to extirpate. It becomes part of one’s mindset. Now we know that we do not owe Pharaoh a thing!

Hashem forced Pharaoh’s hand, thus allowing our minds and our bodies to be free of Pharaoh for all time. Truthfully, this concept applies throughout all of life’s endeavors. We must acknowledge and recognize those who benefit us, but we must be certain that our focus of gratitude is properly pinpointed on the true Benefactor. First and foremost, nothing – absolutely nothing – is achieved without Hashem’s directive. The finest and most successful physician, surgeon, mentor, and savior are helpless without Hashem guiding their hands, mouths, and minds. Having acknowledged Hashem as the true Benefactor, we go on to the individuals who have played an overt role in our successful experience. Gratitude is one of the critical principles of Jewish life, but it is not true gratitude if it is misplaced.