

## I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery. (5:6)

A well-known question was posed by *Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi* (*Kuzari* 1:25): Since the first *mitzvah* of the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, is the enjoinder to believe in Hashem, why not mention that Hashem created Heaven and earth? Why does our liberation from Egypt play such a critical role in our *hashkafah*, philosophy/outlook. He explains that, while the creation of the world is the penultimate experience, no one was around to see it. *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, the Exodus, was witnessed by millions. There is no question that something witnessed is something remembered. *Yetzias Mitzrayim* left a lasting influence on the psyche of the nation that experienced this seminal event.

*Ibn Ezra* (*Shemos* 20:1) quotes the *Kuzari's* question and replies in a diametrically opposite manner. He explains that, on the contrary, a logical deduction reached through analysis and profound dialectic is the most concrete proof that Hashem is the Master and Ruler of the world. Any intelligent person whose mind is engaged understands that Hashem created the world and that He continues to guide it every moment of its existence. The problem is that, sadly, a large segment of people exists who find reaching a cogent conclusion established on logic and reason quite challenging. They just cannot seem to pick it up and understand. It is for them that Hashem must employ the proof of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, to support the building blocks of faith.

**Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl**, supplements these expositions with a powerful thought. Aside from the *mitzvah* of *emunah*, faith in Hashem, implied by the first commandment, it is upon this *mitzvah* that we must build our obligation to observe Hashem's Torah and observe His *mitzvos*. This *mitzvah* teaches us why a Jew must be observant: Hashem took us out of Egypt. Had He not taken us out, we would still be slaves to the Egyptian Pharaohs.

Our obligation to serve Hashem originates from our obligation to show *hakoras hatov*, appreciate and show gratitude, to Hashem for everything that He has done for us. We must acknowledge that, without Hashem, we are nothing. We cannot function. The event that serves as the watershed for Jewish existence is the liberation from Egypt. This is why we constantly reiterate this fact.

In his *sefer*, *Orchos Chaim*, the *Rosh* writes that the first commandment encapsulates the essential foundation of the Torah: to trust Hashem with all your heart; and to maintain perfect faith in His *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence. It implores us to believe that each and every one of us is under Hashem's individual supervision. The *Alter, zl, m'Kelm* explains that, in this way, one is fulfilling the dual beliefs in his heart: the perfect unity of *emunah*, faith; and *bitachon*, trust, in Hashem.

Included in this belief, writes the *Rosh*, is the knowledge that Hashem sees everything that occurs anywhere in the world at all times. This includes the deepest recesses of one's heart. One

must sincerely believe that Hashem is his G-d. Without faith in Hashem, one's faith remains incomplete. There is no such thing as partial belief.

The *Mashgiach* of Mir and Ponevez, **Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl**, adds that the purpose of Hashem's actions with regard to *yetzias Mitzrayim* is for us to learn His ways. By mentioning *yetzias Mitzrayim* during *Krias Shema*, we remind ourselves that everything and everyone – regardless of his significance – is subject to Hashem's close, undivided scrutiny and supervision. One who is deficient in this belief, even in the least degree, lives with incomplete faith in Hashem, because he believes in an extraneous power other than Hashem.

By affirming that Hashem freed us from the Egyptian bondage, we assert that we have since become Hashem's servants. Furthermore, having descended to the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, spiritual defilement, our moral degeneration had descended to the point that we stood at the precipice of extinction. Indeed, our very survival, our lives, were at stake. Hashem rescued us from that moral abyss, from that state of near obsolescence. This was the *segulah*, treasure, that distinguished the Jewish nation from all other people. We were almost gone. Hashem spiritually resuscitated us. This created a unique bond.

While the *Hashgachah Pratis* manifest by *yetzias Mitzrayim* applies to all people, it is on a special level with regard to the Jewish People. It guards each person's spiritual condition, and, through this vehicle, the Jewish People have the merit of achieving eternal life. Hashem will not allow us to descend to the point of no return.

This follows in the teachings of the *Ramban* who explains (*Shemos* 13:16) that when a Jew attaches a single *mezuzah* to his doorway and takes a moment to contemplate its significance, its meaning and underlying message, he has already acknowledged the fundamentals of faith. The *mezuzah* on the doorpost is witness to the person's belief that Hashem took us out of Egypt. It acknowledges the events of *yetzias Mitzrayim* which are an affirmation of *Hashgachah Pratis*. The *pasuk*, *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*, which is contained within the *mezuzah*, is testimony to *Hashem Echad*, the Oneness of Hashem, which is the foundation of the entire Torah.

In his last *mussar shmuess*, ethical discourse, on *Parashas Vayishlach*, the *Mashgiach* spoke of *Hashgachah Pratis* as the key to *menuchas ha'nefesh*, peace of mind. Simply, a person who lives with the belief that Hashem is One, and that everything in life is Divinely Providential, lives with *menuchas ha'nefesh*. It is only through one's confidence that Hashem deals with every person individually that he can achieve true peace of mind. One who believes in *Hashgachah Pratis* knows that he will be rewarded for the *mitzvos* that he performs and punished for the *aveiros*, sins, that he perpetrates. He relies on Hashem's justice, because he knows that it is just.

A person can advance in Torah and *mitzvos* only when he experiences true *menuchas ha'nefesh*. In turn, one's *emunah* in *Hashgachah pratis*, which facilitates his *menuchas ha'nefesh*, is the result of his belief in *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Therefore, the first commandment sets the foundation for the

others that follow.