

Parashat Shemot [first installment]

The meaning of *Pesach* and the exodus from Egypt [is as follows]:

As you know, the early [generations of mankind] forced the Divine presence to ascend [out of the physical world] to the seventh heaven, because of their sins.¹

Adam and Eve caused the Divine presence to ascend from the physical world to the first (i.e., lowest) heaven when they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Cain caused the Divine presence to ascend from the first to the second heaven when he killed his brother, Abel. The generation of Enoch caused the Divine presence to ascend to the third heaven when they introduced idolatry into the world. The generation of the flood caused the Divine presence to ascend to the fourth heaven because of their social and sexual sins. The generation of the tower of Babel caused the Divine presence to ascend to the fifth heaven by declaring war on G-d. The generation of Sodom caused the Divine presence to ascend to the sixth heaven by their social sins. The Egyptians of Abraham's generation caused the Divine presence to ascend to the seventh heaven.

The [souls of the] Jews of the generation that was in exile in Egypt were derived from the drops of semen that Adam emitted during the 130 years [he was separated from his wife].²

After Adam and Eve ate from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, G-d informed them that they and their progeny would eventually die. In remorse for bringing death into the world, Adam attempted to repent for and rectify his sin. As part of this process, and because he reasoned that there was no purpose in bringing children into the world if they were destined to die anyway, he separated from Eve. It was only 130 years later that he realized the faultiness of his logic, by losing an argument with Lamech's wives. During these 130 years of celibacy, Adam apparently was not able to control himself completely, and committed the sin of wasteful emission of seed.

They had previously been incarnated as the generation of the flood, who used to also spill their seed on the ground, inasmuch as they were derived from the same origin.³

The generation of the flood was the first incarnation of the Adam's wasted drops. Since they were the first "generation" of this ill-conceived seed, their spiritual makeup was powerfully predisposed toward the same mentality that produced them. They therefore committed the same sin that this mentality led to.

They were eventually wiped out. This is the mystical meaning of the verse, "And G-d saw that man's evil was great,"⁴ for wasteful emission of seed is called "evil," and one who wastefully emits his seed is also called "evil," as it is stated in the *Zohar*⁵ with reference to the verse, "the wicked will not abide with You."⁶

¹ *Bereishit Rabbah* 19:7; *Etz Chaim* 36:2.

² *Eiruvin* 18b; *Zohar* 1:55a.

³ *Zohar* 1:56b, 66b.

⁴ Genesis 6:5.

⁵ 1:57a.

⁶ Psalms 5:5.

It follows that the generation of the flood were veritably Adam's evil. This is also the mystical meaning of [G-d's statement before the flood], "I will wipe out the man that I have created."⁷

Inasmuch as the name *Adam* means simply "man," the phrase "And G-d saw that man's evil was great" may be read, "And G-d saw that *Adam's* evil was great," meaning that *G-d saw that* this generation, the physical embodiment of the souls produced by *Adam's evil* emission of seed, was sinning *greatly*, just as he did.

Similarly, the phrase in the following verse, "I will wipe out the man that I have created" may be read, "I will wipe out *Adam*, who I [personally] created," meaning that G-d was planning to wipe out the generation because it was an embodiment of the sin of Adam himself.

They were later reincarnated as the generation of the dispersion. [This generation is also referred to as *Adam's* progeny, as it is written, "And G-d descended] to see the city and the tower that the sons of man had built,"⁸ meaning the direct progeny of Adam, reincarnations of his own seminal emissions.

Here, too, "the sons of man" can be read, "the sons of *Adam*."

[They were only figuratively his "sons,"] since they derived from seminal emissions of the male without the female. They also sinned.

After [these two incarnations,] they had to be purified. For as I have already told you, they were holy and powerful souls,⁹ but evil's grasp of them spoiled them. Once they would be purified and be rid of the sickness of impurity, they would be manifest as holy souls. As you also know, it is specifically the holiest souls that evil attempts to grasp.

We can perhaps understand this as follows. Rabbi Shalom Dovber of Lubavitch states that someone who has never committed the sin of "blemishing the covenant [of circumcision]" on some level cannot truly relate to the inner dimension of the Torah. Now, the most basic meaning of "blemishing the covenant" is wasteful emission of seed, but it can refer also to any sexual aberration, and more subtly, to any lapse of Divine consciousness resulting from being seduced by some foreign promise of spiritual fulfillment. After all, wasteful emission of seed and sexual aberration in general is a misdirection of a person's potential into the wrong channels, and focusing on anything other than G-d is essentially the same thing. The only difference is that in the first case we are talking about reproductive and/or romantic energy while in the second case we are talking about mental or creative energy; in either case, the potential that should have been used to propagate and promulgate Divine consciousness throughout reality has been squandered.

But what causes a person to do this? If, as the Kabbalah insists, we are all "hard-wired" to fulfill our purpose on earth, to make reality into G-d's home by propagating Divine consciousness throughout it, why would anyone do anything contrary to that end? The answer is that evil temporarily succeeds in convincing the person that the sin it is enticing him to commit will in fact serve this purpose, that the "high" he will get from committing the sin (or from diverting his attention from G-d momentarily) will enhance his life, re-energize him, re-inspire him, or in some other way accomplish something in short order that it would take a long time to accomplish through the normal channels. Evil seduces us with a shortcut, because it knows that we know that the path to true, holy self-refinement is a long, hard, and tedious one. Evil plays on and capitalizes on our Divine imperative and our impatience and frustration over how long it takes us to make real progress.

Hence, Rabbi Shalom Dovber said that anyone who has never fallen for this ruse in some way—even if only in a very abstract, refined way—cannot really relate to the inner dimension of the Torah. This is because the inner

⁷ Genesis 6:7.

⁸ *Ibid.* 11:5.

⁹ *Likutei Torah* (Arizal) on Ezekiel, s.v. *vesod*.

dimension of the Torah addresses not the do's and don'ts that the revealed dimension of the Torah addresses, but the more profound issues in life, such as "what is the meaning of life" and "why is there suffering in the world," etc. If a person has never been bothered and frustrated by these questions enough to fall for the bait of a shortcut to their solution, the inner dimension of the Torah will not speak to him.

So, after all this we can perhaps presume that the seminal emissions produced by the sin of "blemishing the covenant," despite their impure origin, do contain within them sparks of very high potential energy, since they originate—even if only subconsciously—in this frustration over life not being the Divine communion it is meant to be.

The fact that evil seeks to overtake holiness accounts for the law that only Jews are required to wash their hands upon rising in the morning. When a person goes to sleep, most of his soul ascends to heaven to give its account for the day and be re-charged. When it departs from the body, evil senses this and immediately rushes in to take over the body. When the soul returns in the morning, it forces evil out, but some residual evil remains on the hands, since the hands are the interface with the physical world and therefore the part of the body most oriented toward material consciousness. Evil can therefore linger on the hands, and it is therefore necessary to "wash" this evil off by rinsing the hand with water, which is a physical manifestation of Divine wisdom, or the Torah. Since a non-Jew's soul is not, as we have explained previously, oriented toward the holy task of disseminating Divine consciousness in reality, but rather just toward creating a just, smoothly-functioning society, evil is not so "interested" or attracted to the non-Jew's body when he sleeps. He is therefore not invaded by evil and does not need to wash his hands when he wakes up.

Now, all souls come [into reality] with states of *chesed* and *gevurah*, which are derived from *da'at*. Coupling is a function of *da'at*, this being the mystical meaning of the phrase, "And Adam *knew* his wife Eve."¹⁰ Coupling is referred to as "knowledge" because the seminal drop originates in *da'at*.

[This is] also [true of] Moses' generation, as is known, for Moses personified *da'at* and thus his generation was a generation of *da'at*, as we have explained elsewhere.¹¹ However, they were drawn to evil.

This is evident from the fact that they suffered the oppression of the Egyptian exile and slavery. Some deficiency of theirs caused a blockage in the flow of Divine beneficence to them.

Thus, the whole purpose of the Egyptian exile was to purify these souls. This is why they were subjected to such oppression, and [the Egyptians] "made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks," corresponding to the mortar and bricks the generation of the dispersion used [to build the tower of Babel]. Understand this.

Of the generation of the dispersion, it is written: "They said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard.' They had bricks for stone and bitumen for mortar."¹² Thus, the Jews' suffering through mortar and bricks atoned for their sins with mortar and bricks in their previous incarnation.

Now, since their sin was only with respect to *da'at*—for the sparks of their souls originated therein—Moses therefore knew that their exile also derived from there.

For, as mentioned above, and as the Arizal will presently state, it is possible to understand the nature of the blemish being produced by examining the effect it produces. The fact that the Jews were being punished with mortar and bricks indicated that they were atoning for the sin of the generation of the dispersion, who sinned with mortar

¹⁰ Genesis 4:1.

¹¹ *Etz Chaim* 32:2.

¹² Genesis 11:3.

and bricks. And that generation had sinned by “blemishing the covenant,” which is a function of *da’at*, the *sefirah* of coupling.

To explain: whenever the Jewish people sin here below and thereby cause some flaw in some Divine attribute or supernal *sefirah* (G-d forbid), evil is able to derive sustenance from this blemish and therefore attaches itself to that point.

We may envision evil as a disease that attacks a weakened immune system.

This is the secret to [understanding] the Egyptian exile, for Egypt and the impurity it embodied derived sustenance from *da’at*. This is particularly so in light for what I have taught you, namely, that Pharaoh and Egypt are positioned in opposition to the supernal neck, which is the back of the supernal *da’at*. This should suffice.

Da’at is manifest in the body in the cerebellum, which is located underneath and at the back of the brain, near the neck. The word for “Pharaoh,” as we have noted, permutes to spell the word for “the neck” (*ha-oref*).

Clearly, this exile resulted from all the Divine beneficence [that flows through *da’at*] being siphoned off to Pharaoh and Egypt. Therefore, the Jews of that generation were subject to them. But, as you already know, when there is a flaw above due to the sins of the generation below, the Divine energies depart, ascending [back to their source] in order that the powers of evil not derive [too much] sustenance from them.

When the Divine beneficence is diverted from its natural flow, this “trips a switch” in the spiritual mechanism of creation that shuts off the valve of Divine beneficence.

I have explained this to you with regard to why *Z’eir Anpin* is at first only six extremities and does not ten become full [*sefirot*, i.e., a *partzuf*] until after the rectification process.¹³

Similarly, at that time [i.e., of the Egyptian exile], *Z’eir Anpin* reverted to its original state, that of “three folded within three.” We always refer to this state as “the first impregnation.” It returned to the womb of *Ima*, and was not revealed outside.

Rabbi Meir Poppers insists that the statement that *Z’eir Anpin* returned to the womb of *Ima* must not be taken literally. Rather, *Z’eir Anpin* remained a full, mature *partzuf*, but was informed only by the same level of mentality it possessed when it was *in utero*. This mentality is called in the *Zohar* “three folded within three,” i.e., *chochmah-binah-da’at* concealed within *chesed-gevurah-tiferet* and *chesed-gevurah-tiferet* concealed within *netzach-hod-yesod*. The latter triplet represents the autonomous functioning of the body, which is essentially what is functioning during pregnancy. Physically, this is reflected in the fact that the embryo is postured in the crouched fetal position, its head bent into the knees. This is also why the Pesach sacrifice was to be offered with “its head on its knees and on its innards.”¹⁴

Thus, we see that transgression in this world causes a blemish in the upper worlds, which backlashes as a withdrawal of Divine consciousness and beneficence in order to prevent evil from taking the opportunity to siphon off this energy for itself. This “exile” of the Divine presence is an immature mentality that must be reconstructed and re-matured in order to restore the optimal consciousness; this is the process of redemption.

¹³ *Etz Chaim* 11:6.

¹⁴ Exodus 12:9.

—translated and adapted from *Peri Etz Chaim*¹⁵

¹⁵ *Sha'ar Chag HaMatzot* 1.

Parashat Shemot [second installment]

This *parashah* begins: “And these are the names of the sons of Israel coming to Egypt, with Jacob, each man and his household came.”¹

Inasmuch as there are seventy facets to the Torah and one of these is [verbal] allusion [*remez*], [we will expound this verse in this manner]. The descent of the Israelites into Egypt alludes to the embryo while still in its mother’s womb, in between those straits.

The word for Egypt, *mitzrayim*, means “straits” or “confinements.” It is therefore an allegory for the confinement of the soul as it leaves its native milieu in heaven and descends into the confinements of physicality, constrained to experience reality within the parameters of time and space.

The phrase “in between the straits” is paraphrased from Lamentations 1:3.

With this [association] we can interpret the phrase “And these are the names of the sons of Israel” as referring to the faculties of the soul. For just as the body possesses 248 limbs and 365 sinews, so does the soul, these being the faculties of the soul “who came to Egypt.”

If we take “Israel” to refer to the soul itself, the “sons of Israel” are the extensions of the soul, its intellectual and emotional faculties.

The soul, or at least that part of it that is invested in the body, is conceived of as being “tailored” perfectly to the body. (Actually, since the soul comes first, the opposite is the case: the body is constructed so as to clothe the body perfectly.)

“...with Jacob” refers to the fact that they enter the child when it is still inside its mother’s womb, “with Jacob,” who is the good inclination [*yetzer hatov*].

Actually, it is explained elsewhere² that the child is born only with the evil inclination, and the good inclination enters only beginning at the circumcision (or at birth, in the case of a girl) and fully at the *bar-* (or *bat-*) *mitzvah*. But as Rabbi Eliezer Nannes (of blessed memory) told my wife, the Divine soul (together with the good inclination) is indeed present at birth, but only becomes manifest gradually, as the child is educated in the ways of the Torah, culminating at the *bar/bat-mitzvah*.

The verse continues “...coming,” rather than “who *came*” [in the past tense], because G-d “forms the spirit of man within him,”³ as is explained in the *Zohar*,⁴ meaning that the more a person continues to mature [spiritually], the more his soul enters [and manifests] within him.

¹ Exodus 1:1.

² See *Sanhedrin* 91b.

³ Zachariah 12:2.

⁴ 2:94b.

It is thus stated there: “There is none holy as G-d...”⁵ [meaning that] even though Israel are holy, they are not intrinsically holy. Rather, G-d sanctifies them. This is the meaning of [the continuation of this verse:] “...for there is none other than You,” [meaning:] His holiness is not derived from others, but is intrinsic, while Israel’s holiness is [not intrinsic, but rather] derived from none other than Him.

[This verse continues:] “...and there is no rock like our G-d.” Our sages interpreted this to mean “there is no artist like our G-d.”⁶

The word for “rock” (*tzur*) is cognate to the word for “artist” (*tzayar*).

For someone who draws a picture [of a person] on paper cannot [at the same time] draw internal organs, such as the stomach, intestines, heart, liver, or spleen, while G-d does not only this but draws the form of another [person] inside the abdominal cavity, i.e., the embryo inside its mother’s womb. And inside the embryo are more internal organs as well as its spirit.

This is the meaning of the verse, “He forms the spirit of man within him,” implying that the more the embryo develops and grows, the more the soul enters it. Our verse therefore says “coming into Egypt” [in the present, indicating an ongoing process of entering], for the soul’s faculties enter little by little.

Afterwards, at birth, when [the embryo] has become a person, i.e., a fully developed body, [the Torah can refer to] “each man and his house,” referring to the body, which has become a “house” for the soul.

[The next word,] “came,” indicates that at birth all the soul’s faculties full enter the body.

After listing the sons of Jacob and describing how they all died off, the Torah continues:

“And a new king arose over Egypt...”⁷ This refers to the evil inclination, who is the “old and foolish king.”⁸

The verse from Ecclesiastes reads: “A poor and wise child is better than an old and foolish king.” The Midrash expounds: “The ‘poor and wise child’ is the good inclination. Why is it called ‘a child?’ Because it only pairs up with a person from the age of thirteen on. And why is it called ‘poor?’ Because not everyone listens to it. And why is it called ‘wise?’ Because it teaches people the upright path [in life]. The ‘old and foolish king’ is the evil inclination. Why is it called ‘a king?’ Because everyone listens to it. And why is it called ‘old?’ Because it pairs up with a person from birth until his old age. And why is it called ‘foolish?’ Because it teaches a person the evil path, until he no longer knows how to be careful, and he doesn’t know how much pain and suffering come upon him [for following it].”

Thus, relative to an individual’s experience of them, the good inclination is “younger” than the evil inclination.

⁵ 1 Samuel 2:2.

⁶ *Berachot* 10a; *Megilah* 14a.

⁷ Exodus 1:8.

⁸ Ecclesiastes 4:13; *Kohelet Rabbah* 4:9.

“...over Egypt” means when the person is in the womb.

We thus see that the Arizal teaches that the good inclination actually precedes the evil inclination in utero. The evil inclination, even in utero, is called “a new king [who] arose over Egypt,” i.e., who usurped the rulership over the embryo from the good inclination, so that at birth, it is the sole conscious source of motivation.

“...who did not know Joseph.” This refers to the Holy One, blessed be He.

The evil inclination is conscious only of the reality of this world.

“And he said to his people...,” i.e., to the powers of impurity—

“...‘Behold, the people of the children of Israel...,’ i.e., the faculties of the soul—

“...are more numerous and powerful than we are.” So what did he do? [He enslaved them—]

“And they built store cities for Pharaoh...,” i.e., for the evil inclination.

The word *Pharaoh* is composed of the same letters as is the word for “the neck” [*ha-oref*].

Pharaoh: *pei-reish-ayin-hei*.

Ha-oref: *hei-ayin-reish-pei*.

The “store cities” are the body, [which the evil inclination seeks to orient toward materialism] so that it serve as a means for the evil inclination to strengthen itself.

“...Pithom...” refers to the mouth, for it is there that all the sensual lusts of eating and drinking, which strengthen the evil inclination, [are expressed]. Thus, the word *Pithom* can be seen as formed of the words for “the mouth of the abyss” [*pi tehom*], for [the evil inclination] says “Give! give!⁹ [more] to eat and drink!” And the abyss swallows without end.

“...and Raamses” can be seen as formed of the words for “an evil stomach” [*ra meses*]. The stomach digests the food, and it thus acts as an evil stomach.

The stomach fills the mind with sensations of satiation and complacency, making the person insensitive to spirituality.

“But the more they...,” i.e., the powers of impurity and the evil inclination, “...afflicted them...,” i.e., the powers of the soul, “...the more they multiplied and the more they spread forth,” for the more the body develops, the more the soul manifests itself within it, as we have stated.

Despite the evil inclination’s hold over the body, the Divine soul and the good inclination gradually manifest themselves as the person grows up. Ideally, the child receives a proper Jewish education, so by the time he or she has reached the age of *bar-* or *bat-mitzvah*, he or she has learned how to control the evil inclination. The Divine soul is then fully manifest in the body and the child is therefore obligated to perform all the commandments.

⁹ par. Proverbs 30:15.

If this is not the case, however, and the child is not educated properly, the manifestation of his or her Divine soul will be stunted, and its full manifestation will have to wait until later on in life. But nonetheless, the very fact that the body develops is enough to obligate the person to full performance of the Torah's commandments at the age of *bar-* or *bat-mitzvah*, for physical development brings with it a minimal measure of spiritual development no matter what. In other words, the normal psychological development and maturity that accompanies physical development is enough to give the growing child the ability to think for himself or herself and contemplate his or her role in society, and if the child were to use this ability properly, he or she could (theoretically, at least) arrive at the conclusion that G-d exists, He has a law for humanity to follow, and so forth. Every thirteen- (or twelve-)year old is thus obligated to fulfill the commandments, no matter what.

The exodus from Egypt is analogous to birth. The ten plagues also have their analogues in this context.

The first plague was that of blood, for the womb cannot open without bleeding first. For if the blood would not come out first, the child would choke and drown in the blood, which correlates to the powers of impurity.

Blood issuing from the womb is associated with the powers of impurity since their issuance always causes the woman to focus on herself, and self-awareness is the antithesis of Divine consciousness, as we have explained previously.

Next was the plague of frogs. The word for "frog" [*tzefardei'a*] can be seen as constructed of the words for "a bird of knowledge" [*tzipor dei'a*]. These are the seventy voices of the woman giving birth, which correspond to the seventy words in Psalm 20, which begins, "May G-d answer you on the day of pain." [These voices] are thus alluded to by a bird, referring to the [sounds women make like] birdcalls and chirps when giving birth.

[The analogue of] the plague of darkness [is as follows]. It is known that during the first trimester, the fetus is in the lower chamber [of the womb], during the middle trimester, it is in the middle chamber, and during the last trimester, it is in the upper chamber. At birth, it rolls down and dwells in darkness and great pain.

Darkness was the ninth plague.

The plague of the firstborn corresponds to the subjugation of the [evil inclination's ancillary] powers of impurity that ruled within the womb. If this would not occur, they would kill the fetus. Even though they made the fetus grow, thus is their way: they descend to entice and ascend to accuse.¹⁰

After having encouraged the fetus to develop with materialistic consciousness, the forces of evil ascend to the heavenly court to accuse it of evil.

Afterwards, at birth, "the first one came out ruddy,"¹¹ referring to the evil inclination.

This verse refers to the birth of Esau, who embodied and serves as the metaphor for the evil inclination.

For although all the other powers of impurity are killed off [at birth], the evil inclination remains, just as in the plague of the firstborn all the firstborn were

¹⁰ par. *Bava Batra* 16a.

¹¹ Genesis 25:25.

killed off except for Pharaoh, the greatest of them, who personified the evil inclination [itself]. Similarly, the evil inclination remains with the child, for this is G-d's intention, that a person should possess an evil inclination. As it is written, "sin crouches at the opening."¹²

This verse refers to the fact that although the evil inclination is with a person from birth, "you can overcome it."

This is why the verse [describing the birth of Jacob and Esau] reads, "and the *first one* came out ruddy," for the first one is the evil inclination, who enters the person's [consciousness] as soon as he emerges from his mother's womb. For the good inclination does not enter [a person's consciousness] until he is thirteen years and one day old.

[The evil inclination is described as being] "ruddy," for it is a shedder of blood.

The evil inclination descends to entice, ascends to accuse, and then descends again as the angel of death to execute the judgement.

Thus, the birth [of the Jewish people, the exodus from Egypt] occurred in the month of Nisan, when of the seven planets—Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon—Mars is ascendant.

Mars is red.

—translated from *Sefer HaLikutim*

¹² Ibid. 4:7.

