

## מקץ

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# **KABALAS HATORAH — TIME AND AGAIN**

ויסר פרעה את טבעתו מעל ידו ויתן אתה על יד יוסף

And Pharaoh removed the signet-ring from his hand and put it upon the hand of Yosef (*Bereishis* 41:42).

The transfer of Pharaoh's signet-ring marked the beginning of an era that finally culminated in the receiving of the Torah some 200 years later.

The signet-ring was the king's ultimate symbol of power; with it, decrees were signed into law, edicts became reality, the king's desire became the people's will. The king never parted with it, for the ring was the one instrument which sealed all his proclamations. The fact that Pharaoh placed it into Yosef's hand indicated Yosef's designation as second in command to Pharaoh (Rashi *ibid.*).

There is one other recorded instance of a king performing a similar act.

גדולה הסרת טבעת יותר מארבעים ושמונה נביאים ושבע נביאות שנתבאו להן לישראל

The act of transferring the ring [from Achashveirosh to Haman] achieved more [for *Klal Yisrael*] than forty eight prophets and seven prophetesses who prophesied for *Klal Yisrael* (*Megillah* 14.).

The existence of the office of prophet within *Klal Yisrael* was for the purpose of encouraging *Klal Yisrael* to do *teshuvah*. The *Gemara* testifies that the total effort of all the forty-eight prophets and the seven prophetesses was ultimately for naught — they were unsuccessful in their bid to get *Klal Yisrael* to repent. The transfer of power, from Achashveirosh to Haman *Harasha*, however, was such a frightful scenario, that it served as the impetus for complete repentance. The looming threat of total annihilation shook the very foundations of *Klal Yisrael's* sense of security and galvanized them into total repentance (see Maharsha and *Anaf Yosef*, *ibid.*). This paved the way for a new *Kabalas Hatorah*:

קיימו מה שקבלו כבר

They affirmed what they accepted earlier (*Shevuos* 39.).

While *Kabalas Hatorah* at Sinai was a forced act of acceptance, the *Kabalas Hatorah* at *Purim*-time was entirely of *Klal Yisrael's* own volition.

The episode with Haman was recognized by *Chazal* as the epitome of persecuted terror. In fact, when the *Gemara* wants to illustrate a period of unmitigated horror, the name of Haman comes to the fore:

אלה הקדוש ברוך הוא מעמיד להן מלך שגזרותיו קשות כהמן, וישראל עושין תשובה  
ומחזירן למוטב

But Hashem will establish for them a king, whose edicts are as wicked as Haman's, and Yisrael will repent and return to the path of righteousness (*Sanhedrin 97:*).

The fear elicited by Haman's wicked intentions caused a *teshuvah* so pure that it totally cleansed *Klal Yisrael* of all sins and elevated them to the exalted state of *Kabalas Hatorah* at Sinai, and even to that of Adam *Harishon* before the sin (see Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* 35).

In preparation for the *Kabalas Hatorah* at the time of Haman, a fascinating series of events took place. Eleven years prior to the destruction of the first *Beis Hamikdash*, Nevuchadnetzar, King of Babylon, conquered *Eretz Yisrael* (*Melachim II 24:10*). Nevuchadnetzar was only interested in selected treasures as his spoil. Included in his limited plunder were one thousand members of *Klal Yisrael's* Torah elite, "*hecharash vehamasgeir*" (*ibid.* 24:16). He left the land and its inhabitants intact; he wanted the cream of the crop for his personal service. He incorporated "the craftsmen and the gate sentries" into his civil service, and many of them attained high government positions. Daniel, for example, became "ruler over the whole province of Babylon," while Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah became head of the affairs of the province of Babylon (*Daniel 2:48-49*), and Nechemiah was appointed cup-bearer to King Artachshastu (*Nechemiah 5:14*). Nevuchadnetzar's purpose was to make personal use of those "on whom there was no blemish...skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding sciences..." (*Daniel 1:4*); Hashem's purpose was much deeper. These one thousand elite Torah scholars were designated to prepare Bavel for the future *galus* of *Klal Yisrael*. They were meant to attain highly respected government positions and make the land fertile with Torah, so that eleven years later, when the rest of *Klal Yisrael* was sent into *galus Bavel*, they would be greeted by upstanding and secularly respected leadership figures who had already established a Torah-way of life in Bavel. Hence, the newly arrived immigrant masses did not come into a barren world, but instead, entered a thriving Torah community. A *galus* indeed — but a place of Torah, nevertheless. In fact, Hashem prepared it so that when His children finally did go into *galus*, it was to be into a land where the language was most similar to the language of the Torah (*Pesachim 87:*).

*Galus Bavel* marked the end of Jewish monarchy over *Klal Yisrael* and the beginning of rule by Torah Elders. "*Hecharash vehamasgeir*" were the Torah elders who were to establish themselves in the new land prior to the arrival of the masses. The new language was similar enough to that of the Torah so that the newly arrived immigrants could still be conversant with the Torah. However, it was dissimilar enough to the old language that the Jewish royal family felt as uncomfortable as the newly arrived immigrants. This served to discourage them from usurping the leadership position from the newly established, but fluent-in-Aramaic, *charash* and *masgeir*. In fact, when Ezra *Hasofer* reestablished the nation in *Eretz Yisrael*, he maintained Aramaic as the official language, not *Lashon Kodesh*, so that the royal family would be lulled into the same passivity they displayed in Bavel.

Interestingly, even after the masses joined with *hecharash vehamasgeir* in Babylonian exile, the "*dalas ha'aretz*" — the poor ignorant class of *Klal Yisrael* — was left behind in *Eretz Yisrael* (*Melachim II 25:12*). This class had the potential to stymie the growth and development of a new

Torah community in *galus*. The ignorant would have been closed to the idea of a totally Torah-driven lifestyle — a new *Kabalas Hatorah*. Their absence allowed a climate for a new acceptance of *teshuvah*. In fact, many new Halachic innovations were instituted in Bavel, which did not previously exist in *Eretz Yisrael* (*Bava Kama* 38., 103:; *Shabbos* 9:; *Eruvin* 28.; *Menachos* 99:; *Sukkah* 44.; *Kidushin* 69:., etc.). Although this *Kabalas Hatorah* was actually triggered by the transfer of the ring of Achashveirosh to Haman, much preparatory work was required by Hashem to make all this possible.

Similarly, the transfer of the signet ring from Pharaoh to Yosef was preparatory to *Kabalas Hatorah* at Sinai, and required parallel preparation by Hashem. Yosef's elevation to second-in-command in Mitzraim was, in reality, the election of Yosef to the role of king of *Klal Yisrael* in Mitzraim (*Zohar, Mikeitz* 41:41). Yosef's eighty year reign made him the longest reigning Jewish monarch (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 11). It was his iron-fisted Torah rules that prepared the *B'nei Yisrael* for the two hundred and ten year Egyptian Exile and ultimately *Kabalas Hatorah*.

The Torah reveals:

וחמשים עלו בני ישראל מארץ מצרים

...and the children of Israel went up armed, out of the land of Egypt (*Shemos* 13:18).

Rashi (*ibid.*) explains that the word “*Chamushim*” — “armed” — indicates that only one out of every five Jews was worthy of redemption, and that the other unworthy eighty percent perished in Mitzraim (*Zohar, ibid.*). The Mechilta (*ibid.*) exclaims that only one Jew out of five hundred thousand actually left Mitzraim. Only the purest Jews were found to be worthy of redemption and of becoming the “*Am Chavivin*” — “Beloved Nation.”

Could it be that eighty percent of the Jews were actually unworthy of redemption? That only twenty percent (according to the lower estimation) were worthy of becoming the “Chosen People?” The answer is that the unworthiness of the eighty percent was only relative. They were not actually evil — they were foot draggers and procrastinators. Hashem predicated that the *Yetzias Mitzraim* would be for the express purpose of *Kabalas Hatorah*. Therefore, Hashem had to select the best of the Jews, those who would shout “*Na'aseh venishma*” at the top of their lungs at Sinai. It is true that these twenty percent accepted the Torah with their own *bechirah* (see Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* 32), but had the other eighty percent been there, the scene would have been different. They would have said, “Not so fast — we have to think about it.” They would have wanted to know what kind of contractual obligation they would be entering into with Hashem. They would have created a certain confusion, assuring that the Torah would not be accepted. Therefore, it was imperative that they remain behind in Mitzraim. It was not that they were actually evil — but that they would have clouded the climate for acceptance of the Torah. Hence, with these foot-draggers out of the way, Hashem was assured that the Torah would be accepted by *Klal Yisrael*.

Death is not necessarily a punishment; for Hashem does not owe anyone a set number of years to live. Every individual lives for the number of years Hashem sees fit in the grand scheme of things. If a person has served his purpose, there is no longer any need for him to continue to live. If Hashem sees that an individual will only deteriorate spiritually in longevity, Hashem does that individual a favor by removing the longevity. Hence, the eighty percent who perished in

Mitzraim did not necessarily suffer a death of punishment, but perhaps a death of benevolence. For, had they been at Sinai, the course of history would have been different. Had *Klal Yisrael* rejected the Torah at Sinai, the universe would have been destroyed (*Avodah Zarah* 3.). It was, therefore, an act of benevolence for these individuals, and for the universe, that their demise was premature.

The twenty percent that Hashem knew would shout “*Na’aseh venishma*,” did so only due to the teaching of Yosef *Hatzadik*; a teaching made possible only by an individual who was appointed by Pharaoh to have supreme power with which to rule and guide his people. Hence, *Kabala Torah* was accomplished in both instances by the transfer of a signet ring.

And so we have Yosef, who became the second most powerful man in Mitzraim, and Haman, who became the second most powerful man in Media/Persia; both were pivotal in directing *Klal Yisrael* towards a *Kabala Hatorah*. Both instances of *Kabala HaTorah* necessitated the elimination of a significant segment of the population of *Klal Yisrael*. Both were designed and executed by the obvious *Yad Hashem* manipulating history.

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