

VA'EIRA - 5774

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

Until now, Moshe only requested that our people be permitted to leave for three days to worship HaShem. Par'oh adamantly refused. Towards the end of this parasha Par'oh's

resistance finally breaks down and he gives permission for the people to leave (8:21), but only on his terms: that they do not leave the land of Mitzrayim. Moshe does not accept those terms and insists on going on a three-day journey and there in the Midbar (wilderness) will they worship HaShem with their offerings (8:22). Moshe Rabbeinu knew quite well that they did not intend to ever return to slavery, so why did HaShem have Moshe deceive Par'oh?

Based on Gemara Gittin (40a) [and on historical evidence] that in Mitzrayim there was a law that no slave may worship any religion at all. Par'oh's granting of permission for the Jewish slaves to worship the Jewish G-d implicitly meant that he was freeing them. So there was no deception at all. The Gemara Gittin states that an eved K'na'ani was exempt from putting on Tefillin. If a Jewish Adon (master) would encourage his eved to put on Tefillin, this was tantamount to an implicit indication that he had just freed him.

Gemara Bava Metzia (10a) comments on the passuk (Vayikra 25:55) “ לִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַבְדִּים, אַבְדֵי הֵם וְלֹא עַבְדֵי אֲדֹנָיָם” - Jews are exclusively G-d's servants, and therefore it is not proper for a Jew to sell himself as a slave”. HaShem wants us to be totally and absolutely subservient to Him and only be avadim to Him. One who is a slave to another human being cannot be totally committed to G-d.

The final Makka of מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת [Makkat Bechorot] (the death of every first-born) is the only one of the ten plagues for which we have a Mitzvah to remember. The other nine plagues were simply and entirely punitive. G-d knew that they would not succeed in granting our freedom, but HaShem sent them to punish the Mitzriyim for their viciousness and cruelty towards us. Had He sent the Makkat Bechorot at the beginning, then Par'oh would have relented immediately, but the Egyptians would not have gotten what they deserved. For Egyptian suffering we do not celebrate with Mitzvot.

So Makkat Bechorot served as a dual purpose; it certainly was punitive in nature but it was also the Makka of גְּאוּלָּה [Ge'ulah], therefore it deserved a Mitzvah to remember it. It was on the night that Makkat Bechorot occurred that Par'oh

made the official government declaration freeing the Jewish people. The Mitzvah that recalls Makkat Bechorot is the Mitzvah of פדיון הבן [Pidyon HaBen]. It is not so much intended to recall the sufferings of the Egyptians, who after all, were human beings, but rather to celebrate our gaining independence. Our independence enables us to commit ourselves to total and absolute subservience to HaShem. Hopefully, every Jew will do so!