

The Incredible Shabbas HaGadol Miracle

Six Hundred Thousand “Bechorim” Killed Their Six Hundred Thousand Fathers in order to Sanctify the Name of Heaven with Their Deaths

The Shabbas Kodesh which approaches auspiciously—the Shabbas immediately preceding Pesach—is known as Shabbas HaGadol. The Tur writes (O.C. 430):

“שבת שלפני הפסח קורין אותו שבת הגדול, והטעם לפי שנעשה בו נס גדול, שפסח מצרים מקחו בעשור כדכתיב (שמות יב ג) בעשור לחודש הזה ויקחו להם איש שה לבית אבות שה לבית, ופסח שיצאו ישראל ממצרים היה ביום ה' כדאיתא בסדר עולם, ונמצא שי' בחודש היה שבת, ולקחו להם כל אחד שה לפסחו וקשר אותו בכרעי מטתו, ושאלום המצריים למה זה לכם, והשיבו לשחטו לשם פסח במצות השם עלינו, והיו שינייהם קהות על ששוחטין אלהיהם, ולא היו רשאים לומר להם דבר, ועל שם אותו הנס קורין אותו שבת הגדול.”

The Tur attributes this appellation to the great miracle that occurred on the Shabbas prior to the exodus from Egypt—“yetzias Mitzrayim.” The exodus took place on a Thursday. On the preceding Shabbas, the tenth of Nissan, every Jew was commanded to take a lamb for his family as a Pesach offering and tie it to the foot of his bed. When the Egyptians would ask curiously about this strange ritual, they would respond that they planned to sacrifice these animals to their G-d. The Egyptians, who worshipped the lamb, were powerless to react and were forced to watch silently.

Another explanation for this appellation, Shabbas HaGadol, is presented by the Beis Yosef (ibid.) in the name of the Tosafos (Shabbos 87b):

“ועל כן קורין אותו שבת הגדול לפי שנעשה בו נס גדול, כדאמרינן במדרש (שמות רבא פרשת בא) כשלקחו פסחיהם באותה שבת, נתקבצו בכורות אומות העולם אצל ישראל ושאלום למה היו עושין כך, אמרו להן זבח פסח לה' שיהרגו בכורי מצרים, הלכו אצל אבותיהם ואל פרעה לבקש ממנו שישלחו ישראל ולא רצו, ועשו בכורות מלחמה והרגו מהן הרבה, הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים קלז-י) למכה מצרים בבכוריהם.”

According to the Midrash, when the people of Yisrael took their lambs for the korban Pesach on that Shabbas, the firstborns of the various nations gathered around Yisrael. They inquired as to the nature of this ritual. They replied that the animals were to be offered to Hashem, Who would then kill the firstborn Egyptians. The firstborns—the “bechorim”—then went to their fathers and to Pharaoh, beseeching them to send Yisrael away; their request was denied. The “bechorim” then engaged in battle against their elders and many were killed, as it is written (Tehillim 136, 10): **“to Him Who smote the Egyptians through their firstborns.”**

The Maharsha's Explanation as to Why Only the Firstborns Gathered Together

In the Maharsha's Chiddushei Aggados (ibid.), he combines the two reasons: (1) The reason presented by the Tur that the Egyptians were prevented from protesting the indignity that their gods were going to be slaughtered and (2) the reason presented by the Tosafos that the “bechorim” waged battle against their fathers and killed them. First he addresses Tosafos's statement in the name of the Midrash that when Yisrael took their korban Pesach animals: **“The firstborns of the nations of the world gathered together by Yisrael and asked them why they were performing this ritual.”**

The Maharsha inquires: Why did only the firstborns gather to ask Yisrael why they were taking these animals? For, at first the firstborns had no clue that HKB”H planned to kill the firstborn Egyptians. This only became common knowledge after Yisrael responded to their inquiry: **“זבח פסח —it is a Pesach sacrifice to Hashem, Who is going to kill the firstborn Egyptians.** That being

the case, what prompted the firstborns to gather together and confront Yisrael about their peculiar ritual more so than any of the other Egyptians?

The Maharsha explains the matter based on the well-known fact that the zodiac sign which prevails during the month of Nissan is Aries, known in Hebrew as the lamb. It is the first and in a sense the leader of the signs of the zodiac. The Egyptians worshipped the lamb, considering it their zodiac sign and their god; hence, they took great care to pay it proper respect down on earth, as well. For this reason, the Egyptians specifically chose the firstborns to be the priests serving this deity. As firstborns, they were considered worthy to serve the deity that was the head and firstborn of the zodiac signs. Therefore, when Yisrael took the lamb—an Egyptian god—to sacrifice to Hashem as a korban Pesach, it was the firstborns specifically who reacted. For, they were the priests who worshipped the lamb; they wanted to know what the people of Yisrael were doing with their gods.

When Yisrael responded: **“It is a Pesach sacrifice to Hashem, Who is going to kill the firstborn Egyptians,”** they were aghast that their gods were going to be slaughtered and that they themselves were going to die. Their teeth were blunted; they were unable to speak due to their fear. This prompted them to approach their fathers and plead that they send Yisrael out of Mitzrayim so that the “bechorim” would not die; however, the fathers refused. Consequently, the “bechorim” waged war against their fathers and killed many of them. Thus, the two reasons presented above go hand in hand. They were unable to speak out in protest, as explained by the Tur, and they killed their fathers as explained by the Tosafos.

Now, it behooves us to explain why HKB”H arranged for this incredible miracle to occur on the Shabbas preceding Pesach. As we know, HKB”H does not perform miracles unnecessarily. Seeing as Yisrael did not actually depart Mitzrayim on that Shabbas, but only departed on the night of Pesach—after HKB”H killed all of the firstborn Egyptians—what purpose was served by this miracle—the “bechorim” killing their fathers on the Shabbas preceding the exodus?

Furthermore, it is worthwhile examining why our blessed sages chose to refer to this special Shabbas prior to Pesach as **Shabbas HaGadol**. Why not call it Shabbas HaNes to commemorate the miracle, or Shabbas Bechorim to

commemorate the rebellion of the “bechorim” against their fathers or even Shabbas HaPesach to commemorate the taking of the animals for the korban Pesach? Why did they choose the name Shabbas HaGadol and how does this appellation relate to the miracle that occurred?

How Did the Egyptians Merit Sanctifying the Name of Heaven

Let us begin to shed some light on the matter by presenting a precious introduction from the incredible teachings of the great Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, zy”a, in Kedushas Levi (Shemos). He explains why HKB”H Himself visited the plague of “Makkas Bechoros” upon the Egyptians. This fact is elucidated in the Pesach Haggadah from the passuk (Shemos 12, 12): **“ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה, אני ולא מלאך, והכיתי כל בכור —and I shall pass through the land of Mitzrayim on this night,” I and not a malach; “and I shall smite every firstborn in the land of Mitzrayim,” I and not a seraph.**

The Kedushas Levi is astonished. After all, we have a passuk that states explicitly (Eichah 3, 38): **“מפי עליון לא תצא —from the mouth of the Most High neither evil nor good will emanate.** Rashi comments in the name of the Midrash: **“אמר רבי יוחנן מיום שאמר הקב”ה (דברים ל-טו) ראה נתתי לפניך את החיים ואת הטוב וגו’, לא יצא רעה וטובה מפיו, אלא הרעה באה מאליה —Rabbi Yochanan said: From the day HKB”H said, “See, I have placed before you today life and good, . . .” neither evil nor good will emanate from His mouth; instead, the evil will come automatically to those who perform evil deeds, and the good to those who perform good deeds.** That being the case, how did HKB”H visit “Makkas Bechoros” upon the Egyptians Himself? Here is his explanation:

“אמנם נבאר דבאמת מאתו יתברך לא תצא הרעה רק כל הטובות, וכאשר יפקחו עינינו לראות גודל תועלת המגיע לרשעים עצמם, מחמת הכאה שמכה השי”ת אותם, נראה בחוש התועלת הגדולה, רק הרשעים האומות בעצמם אין להם לב להבין להתלהב ולהשתוקק ולכסוף באהבה עזה וחמדה, לקבל הכאה באהבה וברוב חיבה ותשוקה וחמדה, לחסות בנועם השם על ידי ההכאה זו, דידוע דעל ידי הכאת מצרים נתגדל ונתקדש שמו הגדול והקדוש בעולם אשר לא נודע עדיין.”

If we would only open our eyes, we would appreciate the tremendous benefit which accrues to the evildoers as a result

of their punishment from the Almighty. Punishment should be welcomed with love, adoration and appreciation and draw one closer to Hashem. For, it is known that as a result of the Egyptians' punishment, His divine name was sanctified throughout the world.

Accordingly, the Kedushas Levi addresses the following passuk in parshas Beshalach related to “kriat Yam Suf” (Shemos 14, 30): **וַיֹּשַׁע ה' בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם, וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַיָּד הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' בַּמִּצְרַיִם, וַיִּירָאוּ הָעָם אֶת ה'** **on that day, Hashem saved Yisrael from the hand of Mitzrayim, and Yisrael saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Yisrael saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Mitzrayim; and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.** If we examine the precise language employed by the passuk, we find the term **“יד הגדולה”** employed—literally **“the great hand”**—which connotes the attribute of “chesed, as opposed to **“יד החזקה”**—literally **“the mighty hand”**—which connotes the attribute of “din.” That being the case, why does this passuk employ a term connoting “chesed” when the Egyptians were strewn dead along the seashore? Here is his answer:

”כי זה היה חסד גדול למצריים שהם היו כלים לניסי ה', שעל ידם נתקדש שמו הגדול והיו העם יראים את ה' מפחדו ומהדר גאונו. וזהו וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה אשר עשה ה' במצרים, כלומר החסד אשר עשה ה' במצרים, ומפרש איזה חסד היה למצרים, ואמר הפסוק [ויראו העם את ה' ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו], שהחסד הוא שהם היו כלים שיהיו העם יראים את ה' ויאמינו בה', כלומר שהיו כלים להאמונה בה“.

It was a tremendous “chesed” to the Egyptians that they served as instruments for Hashem’s miracles. His divine name was sanctified due to them, causing the people of Yisrael to revere Hashem, as indicated by the passuk above. Thus, by employing the term “**יִירָא הַגִּדּוּלָה**”, the passuk indicates that Hashem performed an act of “chesed” on behalf of the Egyptians; then the passuk explains the nature of the “chesed”: “**וַיִּרְאוּ הָעַם אֶת ה'**” “**וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ בֹה**”—they were the vehicles causing the nation to revere Hashem and to acquire “emunah” in Hashem.

Notwithstanding, according to this understanding, we can only wonder what merit entitled the “bechorim” of Mitzrayim—the priests to their idolatry—to deserve the great “chesed” of serving as vehicles to sanctify the name of Heaven. For, as we have learned, HKB”H Himself struck down every

“bechor” in Mitzrayim without the assistance of an agent. As a result, the Egyptians expelled Yisrael from Mitzrayim, and the name of Heaven was sanctified by the historic exodus from Egypt—“yetzias Mitzrayim”—which is the source for all of the mitzvot which commemorate “yetzias Mitzrayim.” A good example is the Aseres HaDibros which HKB”H begins with the commandment of (Shemos 20, 2): **אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים—I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Mitzrayim from the house of slaves.** Rashi comments in the name of the Mechilta: **“The taking out is sufficient reason for you to be obligated to Me.”**

On Shabbas HaGadol Even the “Bechorim” Realized that the Egyptian Deity-- the Lamb--Lacked Substance

It appears that we can explain the matter based on the following passuk (ibid. 12, 21): **“ויקרא משה לכל זקני ישראל ויאמר: Moshe called to all the elders of Yisrael. He said to them: Draw away and take for yourselves sheep for your families—and slaughter the Pesach offering.** Rashi explains (ibid. 6) in the name of the Mechilta: **“ולפי שהיו שטופים בעבודת כוכבים אמר להם משכו: ולפי שהיו שטופים בעבודת כוכבים אמר להם משכו—because they were engulfed in idol-worship, they were instructed to withdraw their hands from idols and false gods and take a lamb for the sake of a mitzvah.**

Here we have definite proof that Yisrael were deeply immersed in the Egyptian “avodah-zarah” of the lamb—the head of the zodiac signs. Thus it should be evident to any intelligent person that it was the “bechorim” of Mitzrayim, the priests for this deity, who provided the negative influence causing Yisrael to sink in the tumah of the “avodah-zarah” of the zodiac sign of the lamb.

Therefore, in preparation for their geulah from Mitzrayim, HKB”H commanded Yisrael to take a lamb—the Egyptian god—as a korban to Hashem on Shabbas HaGadol. By taking their lambs, Yisrael demonstrated that they were withdrawing their hands and their belief from the deity of the sign of the lamb. They were declaring their absolute emunah that the sign of the lamb possesses no power of its own; rather, like all of the other zodiac signs, it, too, is dependent on Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael—the Creator of the Universe, Who controls all of the heavenly bodies and constellations.

So, when the “bechorim” saw what Yisrael were doing, they immediately came and asked why they were taking these lambs—these Egyptian gods that they had been taught to believe in. In response, Yisrael answered that they were taking: **“A Pesach sacrifice for Hashem, Who was going to kill the firstborn Egyptians.”** In other words, they took the lamb, the “bechor” of the zodiac signs, to sacrifice as a korban Pesach to Hashem in order to demonstrate that they possessed the absolute emunah that no independent force exists other than Hashem. In the merit of sacrificing the korban Pesach, HKB”H would kill all of the firstborn Egyptians, who were the priests of the sign of the lamb, the “bechor” of the zodiac signs.

Thus, we find a fascinating phenomenon. On the very same Shabbas HaGadol on which Yisrael took their lambs for a korban Pesach to Hashem, they also influenced the priestly Egyptian “bechorim” to accept the fact that their gods lacked any real substance. For, upon seeing that Yisrael were taking these lambs for korbanot, and not a single Egyptian priest dared open his mouth to protest the indignity this represented to the Egyptian gods—for they now feared the Jews—they finally understood that the Egyptian gods were insignificant and meaningless. Therefore, they approached their fathers and pleaded with them to heed the voice of Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael—Who reigns supreme over the zodiac sign of the lamb—and release Yisrael from Mitzrayim. When they refused, because they still believed that the Egyptians gods would save them, the “bechorim” waged war against them and killed them.

Six Hundred Thousand “Bechorim” Killed Their Six Hundred Thousand Fathers

Continuing onward along this exalted path, let us endeavor to explain the wonders of Hashem’s ways—the master orchestrator. He commanded Yisrael to take a lamb on Shabbas HaGadol as a korban Pesach to Hashem in order to uproot idolatry from their midst. In this manner, He orchestrated the great miracle resulting in the deadly battle between the Egyptian “bechorim” and their fathers. Now, we find a tremendous chiddush in the Midrash Shochar Tov regarding the passuk (Tehillim 136, 10): **“למכה מצרים בבכוריהם—כי לעולם חסדו—to Him Who smote Mitzrayim with their firstborn, for His kindness endures forever.** On that very

same Shabbas HaGadol prior to Pesach, the “bechorim” killed six hundred thousand of their fathers. Here is the passage from the Midrash:

“למכה מצרים בבכוריהם. בשעה ששלח הקב”ה מכת בכורות, אמר להם כחצות הלילה ומת כל בכור. נכנסו כל הבכורות אצל אבותיהם ואמרו להם, כל מה שאמר משה הביא עלינו, אין אתם מבקשים שנחיה, בואו והוציאו את העברים האלו מבינינו ואם לאו אנו מתים. השיבו להם, אפילו כל המצרים מתים אינן יוצאים מכאן... מה עשו הבכורות, מיד יצאו ונטלו כל אחד חרבו והרג את אביו, שנאמר למכה מצרים בבכוריהם. למכה בכורי מצרים אין כתיב כאן, אלא למכה מצרים בבכוריהם, ששים ריבוא הרגו הבכורות כאבותיהם.”

In anticipation of Makkas Bechoros, HKB”H informed them that every firstborn would die around midnight. This prompted the “bechorim” to approach their fathers. They said: **“Everything Moshe has said, he has visited upon us. Do you not want us to remain alive? Expel these Hebrews from our midst; otherwise, we shall die.”** They replied: **“Even if all of the Egyptians die, they are not leaving here . . .”** What did the firstborns do? Each one immediately went out and drew his sword and killed his father, as it says: **“To Him Who smote Mitzrayim with their firstborn.”** It does not say here: **“To Him Who smote the firstborns of Mitzrayim”;** rather, **“To Him Who smote Mitzrayim with their firstborn.”** The firstborns killed six hundred thousand of their fathers.

The simple, straightforward explanation is that HKB”H arranged for the “bechorim” to kill precisely six hundred thousand of their fathers—no more and no less—as retribution for the taxing labor and enslavement they subjected the six hundred thousand members of Yisrael to—as it is written (Shemos 12, 37): **“ויסעו בני ישראל מרעמסס סכותה כשש מאות אלף—Bnei Yisrael journeyed from Raamses to Succot, about six hundred thousand on foot, the men, aside from the children.**

Notwithstanding, in my humble opinion, this event possesses a much deeper significance. The Midrash states that **“each one immediately went out and drew his sword and killed his father”;** then it adds that they killed precisely six hundred thousand of their fathers. This suggests that the number of firstborn sons was also six hundred thousand. Subsequently, on the night of Pesach, HKB”H killed those very same six hundred thousand “bechorim” who killed their fathers Himself. Let us endeavor to explain why HKB”H orchestrated the events in this

manner; first the “bechorim” killed their fathers and then He killed them on the night of Pesach.

Six Hundred Thousand “Bechorim” as Ransom for Six Hundred Thousand Yisrael

I was struck by a wonderful solution to this obscure riddle based on an amazing principle regarding Makkas Bechoros found in the Midrash HaGadol and in the Mechilta of Rashby parshas Bo (Shemos 12, 30). On the night of Pesach, HKB”H killed six hundred thousand firstborn Egyptians to serve as a ransom for the six hundred thousand members of Yisrael:

”רבי שמעון אומר, אין פחות משש מאות אלף בכורות שמתו באותו לילה, שנאמר (ישעיה מג-ג) כי אני ה' אלקיך קדוש ישראל מושיעך, נתתי כפרך מצרים כוש וסבא תחתיו וגו', ואתן אדם תחתיו ולאומים תחת נפשך, והכופר [היה] אחד תחת אחד.”

Rabbi Shimon says that no less than six hundred thousand firstborn died on that night, as it states (Yeshayah 43, 3): “For I am Hashem your G-d, the Holy One of Yisrael, your Savior; I gave Mitzrayim as your ransom, and Cush and Seba in your place. . . I put people in your place and regimes in place of your soul.” The ransom was one for one.

This teaches us quite explicitly that Bnei Yisrael required redemption for having been immersed in the “avodah zarah” of Mitzrayim. Hence, HKB”H took as ransom in their place the six hundred thousand firstborn Egyptians that He killed Himself, so to speak, on the night of Pesach. This is conveyed by the passuk: **“I gave Mitzrayim as your ransom.”** Rashi explains: **“They served as your redemption; their firstborn died and you, My firstborn son, was spared; you deserved to be annihilated, as it states (Yechezkel 20, 8): “And I intended to pour My fury upon them, to spend My anger on them, in the midst of the land of Mitzrayim.”**

It makes perfect sense that HKB”H would choose the “bechorim” of Mitzrayim to serve as ransom and substitutes in place of Yisrael, HKB”H’s firstborn son. After all, they were the priests of the “avodah zarah” of the sign of the lamb, the head of the zodiac signs. They were the ones who prevailed upon Yisrael to believe in the “avodah zarah” of Mitzrayim. Seeing as HKB”H’s acts are pure and His ways are just, He chose to kill the “bechorim” of Mitzrayim who caused Yisrael

to sin; they served as ransom and substitutes for Yisrael.

Nevertheless, this still requires further explanation. For, we learned from the Midrash that on Shabbas HaGadol, the “bechorim” killed six hundred thousand of their fathers. So, why weren’t the fathers of the “bechorim” sufficient ransom for the six hundred thousand members of Yisrael? Why was it still necessary to kill the six hundred thousand Egyptian firstborns as substitutes for Yisrael? In truth, justice was served! For, when Moshe returned to Mitzrayim from Midyan, HKB”H says to him in no uncertain terms (Shemos 4, 22): **“ואמרת אל פרעה כה אמר ה' בני בכורי ישראל, ואומר אליך שלח את בניך—ויעבדני ותמאן לשלחו, הנה אנכי הורג את בנך בכורך”** **to Pharaoh, “So said Hashem, My firstborn son is Yisrael. So I say to you: Send out My son that he may serve Me—but you have refused to send him out; behold, I shall kill your firstborn son.”**

With that statement, HKB”H intended to convey the message that all of Yisrael are considered His firstborn son. For, He was destined to kill all six hundred thousand firstborn Egyptians as ransom for the six hundred thousand members of Yisrael. Seemingly, it should have sufficed to kill only the number of “bechorim” corresponding to the number of firstborn Yisrael as ransom; the rest of Yisrael could have been ransomed by killing the other Egyptians. However, in this manner, HKB”H proved that all of Yisrael possess the status of: **“בני בכורי ישראל”**—all of Yisrael are My firstborn. Therefore, it was necessary to kill all six hundred thousand firstborn Egyptians as ransom for every member of Yisrael.

Still, we have yet to complete the picture. We have yet to explain why HKB”H arranged for the six hundred thousand “bechorim” to kill their six hundred thousand fathers on Shabbas HaGadol. Seeing as their fathers could not serve as ransom in place of Yisrael—HKB”H’s firstborn son—what purpose was served by the fact that the “bechorim” killed their fathers?

On Shabbas HaGadol the “Bechorim” Became Vessels to Sanctify the Name of Heaven

It appears that we can propose a reasonable idea based on what we have learned from the Kedushas Levi. He explained that although evil does not emanate from HKB”H, nevertheless He Himself in His full glory delivered the plague

of Makkas Bechoros, because, in truth, a great chesed accrued to the “bechorim.” Their deaths constituted a tremendous kiddush-Hashem. We wondered how the “bechorim” merited becoming the instruments for this kiddush-Hashem, necessitating HKB”H’s direct intervention.

Yet, based on what we have discussed we can rejoice at having gained a deeper appreciation of Hashem’s thoughts and acts, so to speak. He commanded Yisrael before Pesach—on Shabbas HaGadol—to take a lamb as a korban Pesach for Hashem in order to uproot the “avodah zarah” of the Egyptian gods from their hearts. When the “bechorim” saw that nobody stood up to protest this apparent indignity, their faith in the Egyptian gods was also uprooted. This prompted them to go to their fathers and demand that Yisrael be sent out of Mitzrayim. For, they realized that the zodiac sign of the lamb was impotent against the will of Hashem.

Accordingly, we find that the notion of “avodah zarah” was already uprooted from the hearts of the firstborn Egyptians on Shabbas HaGadol. Their fathers, however, refused to listen to them and to acquiesce to their request, because they still believed that the zodiac sign of the lamb possessed the power to subdue Yisrael. A battle ensued resulting in the deaths of six thousand Egyptian fathers at the hands of their “bechorim.” Thus, they performed a tremendous kiddush-Hashem, demonstrating to the entire world that they no longer believed in the lamb or in any of the other Egyptian deities; they recognized the absolute dominion of HKB”H.

Who can even begin to portray such an unbelievable scenario?! Six hundred thousand Egyptian priests, who spent their entire lives devoted to the belief and worship of the Egyptian deity of the lamb, marching to their fathers to plead for their lives—to expel Yisrael from Mitzrayim. For, they witnessed the taking of their gods to be sacrificed as a korban Pesach for Hashem and realized that their gods were powerless against the will of Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael.

In the merit of these two things, they became worthy vessels for the great chesed of sanctifying the name of Heaven with their deaths. Firstly, despite being priests to the Egyptian gods all of their lives, they abandoned their belief in those false gods. Secondly, they killed their six hundred thousand fathers, who refused to release Yisrael, because they maintained their faith in the Egyptian gods. Thus, the “bechorim” merited being struck down by HKB”H Himself, in His glory, on the night of Pesach, during Makkas Bechoros. As a result, Yisrael departed Mitzrayim by means of an incredible display of “kiddush-shem-shamayim.”

We can now provide a very nice explanation for Chazal’s choice of the appellation **Shabbas HaGadol** for the Shabbas preceding Pesach. On that day an unbelievable miracle transpired; the “bechorim” killed six hundred thousand of their fathers; this entitled them to become vessels to sanctify the name of Heaven when HKB”H killed them on the night of Pesach during Makkas Bechoros. We find that when HKB”H manages the universe in accord with the attribute of chesed, He is referred to as “**gadol**”—as it is written (Devarim 10, 17): “הַאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא” —**the great (“gadol”), mighty and awesome G-d**. The Tikunei Zohar explains (Tikun 70, 123a) that HKB”H is described by these three adjectives, because He manages the universe with the three attributes of “chesed” (divine kindness and love), “gevurah” (restraint and severity) and “tiferes” (beauty and splendor).

This is the reason for the appellation “**Shabbas HaGadol**.” For, on this Shabbas, the “bechorim” killed their six hundred thousand fathers. As a result, they became instruments worthy of HKB”H’s chesed. This chesed was manifested when HKB”H Himself delivered the plague of Makkas Bechoros on the night of Pesach, thereby sanctifying the name of Heaven through them. This then is the significance of the title “**Shabbas HaGadol**”; it was the Shabbas on which HKB”H revealed Himself as “**HaGadol**” by performing an act of chesed on behalf of the “bechorim” of Mitzrayim—preparing them to be vessels through which an amazing kiddush Hashem was performed.

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