



## “And the people bowed and prostrated themselves” The Surprising Fact that Yisrael Celebrated the “בשורת הבנים” Even regarding the Evil Son

In this week's parsha, parshas Bo, we read (Shemos 12, 26):  
“והיה כי יאמרו אליכם בניכם מה העבודה הזאת לכם, ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה”  
אשר פסח על בתי בני ישראל במצרים כנגפו את מצרים ואת בתינו הציל, ויקוד העם  
“and it shall be that when your children will say to you, ‘What is this service to you?’ You shall say, ‘It is a Pesach offering to Hashem, Who skipped over the houses of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt, while He smote the Egyptians, but He spared our households,’ and the people bowed and prostrated themselves.” Rashi comments: על בשורת הגאולה וביאת “הארץ ובשורת הבנים שיהיו להם” — the people bowed on account of the tidings of the redemption and the coming into the land and the tidings of the sons which they would have.

Surprisingly, the question: “What is this service to you?” -- “מה העבודה הזאת לכם”—is the question the Torah associates with the wicked son, which we are all familiar with from the Haggadah: “רשע מה הוא אומר, מה העבודה הזאת לכם, לכם ולא לו” — What does the wicked son say? “What is this service to you?” — “to you,” but not to himself. That being the case, what is the great cause for celebration? Furthermore, what is the significance of the response HKB”H provides for the wicked son: “ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה” אשר — פסח על בתי בני ישראל — you shall say, “It is a Pesach offering to Hashem, Who passed over the houses of Bnei Yisrael.” Surely, even he is well aware of the fact that we are talking about the korban Pesach. It is only because of his wickedness that he is defiant and asks disparagingly: “What is this service to you?” — “to you,” but not to himself. So, what benefit is served by saying to him: “It is a Pesach offering to Hashem”?

What is even more puzzling is the fact that the author of the Haggadah disregards the answer given to the wicked son in the Torah and suggests an alternate response: “ולפי שהוציא את עצמו מן הכלל כפר בעיקר, ואף אתה הקהה את שניו ואמור לו, בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי -- ממצרים, לי ולא לו, אילו היה שם לא היה נגאל” — since he excludes himself from the group, he denies everything. You, too, should blunt his teeth, and say to him: “It is because of this that Hashem

did so for me when I went out of Egypt” — “for me,” but not for him. Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed. This harsh response does not appear in the Torah; instead the Torah addresses this son mildly: “ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה” -- You shall say, “It is a Pesach offering to Hashem.” It doesn't belittle him or blunt his teeth. So, what possessed the author of the Haggadah to disregard the answer that is written in the Torah and supplant it with a very different answer?

### How Can HKB”H Be Described as Passing Over the Houses of Yisrael

Before unraveling this enigma, let us focus on the Torah's categorization and depiction of the korban-Pesach (ibid. 11): “פסח הוא לה”. Rashi explains: “The korban is called Pesach to commemorate the skipping and passing over; HKB”H skipped over the houses of Yisrael that were located among the houses of the Egyptians. He would jump from Egyptian to Egyptian, while the Yisrael in the middle was spared. You should perform all aspects of this offering for the sake of Heaven (l'shem shamayim).” Rashi's concluding words: “You should perform all aspects of this offering l'shem shamayim”—relate to the Torah's categorization: “פסח הוא לה”—it is a Pesach-offering to Hashem.

Additionally, why does Rashi go out of his way to depict the process of “passing over”? It didn't suffice for him to explain that HKB”H skipped over the houses of Yisrael, but he added: “He would jump from Egyptian to Egyptian, while the Yisrael in the middle was spared.” This addition seems superfluous and quite obvious. In truth, the very description of HKB”H as skipping over the houses of Yisrael deserves explanation. After all, HKB”H is not a physical entity or body that needs to skip from place to place. He accomplishes all of His feats by merely willing them to happen. He merely wills the firstborn Egyptians to die and wills the firstborn of Yisrael to remain alive. So, what is the import of stating that He skipped over the houses of Yisrael?

Additionally, it is worth examining the addendum that Moshe Rabeinu added to HKB”H’s directive. HKB”H merely instructed (ibid. 7): “ולקחו מן הדם וגתנו על שתי המזוזות ועל המשקוף על הבתים אשר: **“they shall take some of its blood and place it on the two doorposts and on the lintel upon the houses in which they will eat it. . . and I will see the blood and I shall skip over you.** Moshe, on the other hand, sees fit to admonish Yisrael that they should also not leave their houses (ibid. 22): **“ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בוקר”**—**you shall not leave the entrance of the house until morning.**

Last but not least, it is important to explain what we have learned in the Gemara (B.K. 60a). There the Gemara explains why Moshe warned Yisrael not to leave their homes: **“תאני רב יוסף, מאי דכתיב ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בוקר, כיון שניתן רשות למשחית, אינו מוכיח בין צדיקים לרשעים—Rav Yosef taught a Baraita: What is the meaning of that which is written: “And as for you, you shall not leave the entrance of the house until morning?” Once the force of destruction has been given authority to wreak damage it will not distinguish between the tzaddikim and the reshaim.** This is seemingly incredible. How is it possible that HKB”H does not allow the force of destruction to distinguish between the tzaddikim and reshaim? After all, didn’t Avraham Avinu say (Bereishis 18, 25): **“חלילה לך מעשות כדבר הזה להמית צדיק עם:—it would be sacrilege for You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the righteous with the wicked . . . Shall the Judge of the earth not do justice?!”**

### Better that the Arrow Should Enter Me and Not My Children

We shall begin to shed some light on the subject by referring to a passuk in parshas Yisro (Shemos 19, 4): **“אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי:—you have seen what I did to Mitzrayim, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me.** Rashi provides the following clarification: **“The eagle is different from the other birds for it is only afraid of man - that perhaps man will shoot an arrow at it. For no bird soars higher than the eagle, and therefore he places his young on top of him when he flies and says, ‘Better that the arrow should enter Me and not My children.’ I too did so (said Hashem when the Egyptians attacked Bnei Yisrael, as it says): ‘And the malach of G-d travelled, etc., and came between the camp of Mitzrayim, etc.’ And the Egyptians would shoot arrows and catapult stones, and the cloud would intercept them.”**

In Avodat Yisrael, the Maggid of Kozhnitz, zy”a, wonders: Who has the power to shoot arrows against the will of the

Almighty—forcing Him to proclaim, as it were: **“Better that the arrow should enter Me and not My children”?** He provides the following explanation:

**“אלא הענין הוא כך, כי בשעת יציאת מצרים וקריעת ים סוף, וכן בכל זמן כשמגדיל הבורא ברוך הוא חסדיו על עמו ישראל, רוצה המקטרג לקלקל, כמו שאיתא שאמר השר [של מצרים], הללו עובדי עבודה זרה והללו עובדי עבודה זרה, ומדוע אתה ברוך הוא נושא פנים להם. וזה הקטרוג נקרא חיצים שמורה [גם על קטרוג] בלשון, כמו שכתוב (ירמיה ט-ז) חץ שחוט לשונם וכיוצא בהם.**

**ואף על פי כן הקב”ה מגדיל חסדו, ודן את דיגנו, ומוציא משפטינו לאורה, ומסיר כל המקטרגים וסותם פיהם. וזה שכינה הכתוב, ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, ואומר מוטב יכנס החץ בי, שהקב”ה מסיר הקטרוג מעל עמו ישראל ולא יכנס בהם החץ, ומקבל על עצמו כביכול להשיבם תשובה ניצחת ולהסיר כל תלונה.”**

When Hashem is compassionate towards us, the prosecuting angels try to intervene by finding fault with our actions. Their allegations resemble arrows. Notwithstanding, Hashem subdues and silences them; He carries us and protects us by absorbing all of the arrows our prosecutors aim at us. He accepts upon Himself, as it were, the responsibility of convincingly refuting their allegations.

Still, his sacred words deserve further clarification. For, if on the one hand, Yisrael were unworthy of being redeemed, as the prosecutors claimed: **“הללו עובדי עבודה זרה והללו עובדי עבודה זרה—these are idolaters and these are idolaters;** what difference would it have made if HKB”H protected them by absorbing the arrows aimed at them, so to speak? After all, we find a passuk which states explicitly (Mishlei 29, 4): **“-- מלך במשפט יעמיד ארץ:— through justice a king establishes a land;** in other words, justice must prevail under all circumstances. On the other hand, if a compelling argument exists to refute the prosecutor’s allegations, then there is seemingly no need for HKB”H to absorb his arrows.

### It Is Ever So Apparent to You that It Is Our Desire to Act in Accordance with Your Will

It appears that we can provide clarification by referring to the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Beshalach 234):

**“והמים להם חומה. שירד סמאל ואמר לפניו, רבנו של עולם לא עבדו ישראל עבודה זרה במצרים, ואתה עושה להם נסים, והיה משמיע קולו לשר של ים, ונתמלא עליהם חימה ובקש לטבען. מיד השיב לו הקב”ה, שוטה שבועלם, וכי לדעתם עבדוהו, והלא לא עבדוהו אלא מתוך שעבוד ומתוך טירוף דעת, ואתה דן שוגג כמזיד ואונס כרצון.”**

**Samael protested to Him: “Master of the Universe, didn’t Yisrael worship avodah-zarah in Mitzrayim? And, yet, You are performing miracles on their behalf.” He voiced his complaints**

**to the prince of the sea; and he became enraged and wished to drown them. Immediately, HKB”H responded to him: “You incredible fool! Did they worship idols of their own accord? They only worshiped idols because of their enslavement and out of mental duress. You are judging an unintentional act as being deliberate, and a compelled act as being voluntary.**

We can elaborate on HKB”H’s response by recalling what we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 17a): **“רבי אלכסנדרי בתר דמצלי, אמר הכי, רבון העולמים גלוי וידוע לפניך שרצוננו לעשות רצונך, ומי מעכב, שאור שבעיסה ושעבוד מלכויות, יהי רצון לפניך שתצילנו מידם, ונשוב לעשות. After praying (Shemoneh Esreh), Rabbi Alexandri would say the following: “Master of the Universe, it is apparent and known to you that it is our will to perform Your will; and who prevents us from doing so? The yeast in the dough (referring to the yetzer hara) and the oppression of foreign regimes.**

We learn here that a Jew’s internal desire is to act in accordance with the will of the Almighty. Yet, when he intends to make that desire a reality, the yetzer hara—referred to as the “yeast in the dough”—intervenes along with the burden of our oppressors in galut. They try to do everything in their power to prevent a Jew from fulfilling his true heart’s desire.

Now, this positive, virtuous thought, concealed within a Jew’s inner self, is apparent only to HKB”H. As Rabbi Alexandri declared after reciting Shemoneh Esreh, HKB”H is privy to the mysteries of one’s heart: **“Master of the Universe, it is apparent and known to you that it is our will to perform Your will.”** In contrast, the heavenly prosecutor only sees a person’s external actions and self. Therefore, at “kriat Yam Suf,” the “samech-mem” came to prosecute Yisrael—claiming that they were no different than the Egyptian idol-worshippers.

As we learn from the Midrash, HKB”H responded with a compelling rebuttal: **“You incredible fool!”** You only see a Jew’s external actions but are totally oblivious to the whims of his heart: **“Did they worship idols of their own accord? They only worshiped idols because of their enslavement and out of mental duress.”** To Me it is apparent and known that their inner desire is to act in accord with My will. You, however, in concert with their servitude in galut Mitzrayim, prevent them from making their will a reality. Thus: **“You are judging an unintentional act as being deliberate, and a compelled act as being voluntary.**

This then was HKB”H’s response to the prosecutorial forces who had the audacity to attack Yisrael with their malicious arrows and catapults: **“Better that the arrow should enter Me”—**

let them accuse Me of showing Yisrael undeserved favor and performing miracles on their behalf; **“and not My children”—** for their accusations of avodah zarah will not prevent Yisrael’s geulah. For, it is apparent to HKB”H that Yisrael’s inner desire is to perform Hashem’s will; they were merely victims of coercion perpetrated by the yetzer hara and the oppression of galut. This truth was concealed from the prosecutorial force, who is totally unaware of the whims of a Jew’s heart.

### **HKB”H Skipped Over Yisrael’s External Appearances**

Following this line of reasoning, we shall proceed to explain the phenomenon of HKB”H passing over the houses of Bnei Yisrael while wiping out the Egyptians. Upon careful consideration, we see that we can define three levels of human behavior. The highest level is that of the tzaddik. He acts righteously and properly, as dictated by the precepts of the Torah. This is true both of his inner virtuous thoughts and his external good deeds. We espouse this doctrine in our morning prayers: **“לעולם יהא אדם-- ירא שמים בסתר ובגלוי”** **a person should always fear Heaven privately as well as openly.** The lowest level of human behavior is that of the rasha. Both his inner thoughts and heart’s desires as well as his external actions are evil.

In addition to these two categories, however, there is an intermediate level. Such a person’s heart and inner self yearn to serve Hashem, but the yetzer and the oppression of galut prevent him from doing so. This is what transpired in Mitzrayim, where the “samech-mem” accused them of practicing avodah zarah just like the Egyptians. Knowing that that was ludicrous, HKB”H reacted angrily: **“You incredible fool!”** How can you judge their unintentional acts as being deliberate and their coerced acts as being voluntary? A person falling into this category lies in the middle between **“good and evil”**; externally, he appears to be bad, but internally, his heart is good.

We can now appreciate why HKB”H skipped over the houses of Yisrael. For, a person’s essence is his internal neshamah, housed within his physical body. This is analogous to a person who enters his house for protection. Just as a house requires a mezuzah to afford it protection, so, too, does the body require the mitzvah of milah to protect it from the persuasions of the yetzer hara. [Both the mezuzah and the milah are imprinted with the name י”שד for protection.]

This then is the interpretation of the passuk: **ואמרתם זבח פסח—HKB”H “passed over the houses of Bnei Yisrael”—**in other words, their external

manifestations. Instead, He looked only at their internal selves. There the immense difference between Yisrael and the Egyptians was apparent. The Egyptians worshipped avodah zarah even in their hearts; whereas Yisrael yearned to serve Hashem, as they were taught to do by their holy ancestors.

This provides us with a very nice interpretation of Rashi's intriguing comment. Regarding the phrase **"it is a Pesach-offering to Hashem,"** Rashi comments: **"The korban is called Pesach to commemorate the skipping and passing over; HKB"H skipped over the houses of Yisrael that were located among the houses of the Egyptians."** Rashi is implying that HKB"H skipped over and overlooked Yisrael's external behavior and appearance—even though they appeared similar to the Egyptians externally. Then Rashi adds the following explanation: **"He jumped from Egyptian to Egyptian, while the Yisrael in the middle was spared."**

In other words, Rashi is referring to the Yisrael who maintained an intermediate status, lying in the middle between a tzaddik and a rasha. His heart was pure and virtuous, but externally his actions were similar to those of the neighboring Egyptian. Nevertheless, he was spared due to the fact that HKB"H passed over the houses of Yisrael, overlooking their external appearances. To emphasize this point, Rashi concludes his comment with the following: **"You should perform all aspects of this offering l'shem shamayim."** In other words, let us not be fooled into thinking that it is sufficient to serve Hashem internally, in our hearts and thoughts. We must know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is essential to serve Hashem with external deeds, as well!

## **"You shall not leave the entrance of the house"— Do Not Abandon the Internal Focus of Your Heart**

At this point, we can begin to appreciate why Moshe Rabeinu saw fit on his own to admonish Yisrael: **"You shall not leave the entrance of the house until morning."** He was indicating to them that they should connect with that inner aspect of their hearts that remained pure and untainted—like a person remaining within the shelter of his house, his external body. Thus, he warned them not to venture out from the entrance of the house. For, their external selves were not pure and untainted; instead they should remain attached to that internal aspect within.

This explains very nicely why Moshe juxtaposed this warning not to venture out of their houses with his earlier directive to place the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts: **"ולקחתם אגודת אזוב וטבלתם בדם אשר בסף והגעתם אל המשקוף ואל שתי המזוזות מן הדם אשר בסף, ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בקר"—you shall take a bundle of hyssop and dip it into the blood that is in the basin, and touch**

**the lintel and the two doorposts with some of the blood that is in the basin, and as for you, you shall not leave the entrance of the house until morning.**

This can be understood based on a lengthy explanation provided for us by the author of the Tanya in Likutei Ma'amarim (18). He teaches us that every Jew, even sinners and those who lack significant knowledge and intelligence, has inherited a pure neshamah from the holy Avot. However, this aspect of their being appears dormant in the confusion of Olam HaZeh. Yet, when it is aroused, every Jew is ready and willing to sacrifice his life for the sanctity of Hashem.

Now, we learn in the Midrash (S.R. 17, 3): **"והגעתם אל המשקוף, בזכות אברהם, ואל שתי המזוזות, בזכות יצחק ויעקב, ובזכותם ראה את הדם ולא ייתן המשחית"—and you shall touch the lintel in the merit of Avraham; and the two doorposts in the merit of Yitzchak and Yaakov; in their merit, He will see the blood and He will not permit the force of destruction . . .** Based on what we have learned, we can suggest that HKB"H commanded them to place the blood on the entrances to their houses, on the lintel and on the two doorposts—which correspond to the three holy Avot—in order to arouse the innermost aspect of their beings--the neshamah located in the body, which resembles a house. In that innermost place, a Jew yearns to serve Hashem with the neshamah he inherited from his holy ancestors.

So, when Moshe heard this command from HKB"H, he had the wisdom and foresight to instruct them: **"You shall take a bundle of hyssop and dip it into the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with some of the blood that is in the basin"**—in order to arouse your innermost selves which you inherited from the holy Avot. Then, he adds the following warning on his own: **"You shall not leave the entrance of the house until morning"**—do not venture out or stray from that innermost attachment, because from the aspect of your external body, you are not yet complete.

We can now better appreciate Rav Yosef's elucidation regarding Moshe's addendum: **"And as for you, you shall not leave the entrance of the house until morning?"** **Once the force of destruction has been given authority to wreak damage it will not distinguish between the tzaddikim and the reshaim.** We were bothered by the fact that this seems to contradict the fundamental concept that Hashem is just: **"השופט כל הארץ לא יעשה משפט"**. Yet, based on what we have learned, it is understandable. For, there is a huge difference between how HKB"H judges and punishes versus how the force of destruction functions. HKB"H sees both a person's external actions and his inner thoughts

and deliberations. David HaMelech expresses this phenomenon as follows (Tehillim 44, 21): **“אם שכחנו שם אלקינו ונפרוש כפינו לאל זר, —if we had forgotten the name of our G-d and extended our hands to a strange god; G-d would investigate this, for He knows the secrets of the heart.** Upon seeing that a person’s inner self remains good, HKB”H can be just and spare him.

The force of destruction’s situation is quite different, seeing as it is incapable of discerning man’s inner thoughts. Therefore, it can only evaluate a person’s external appearance and actions. Hence, if a person commits an actual sin, he punishes the person along with the true rasha, who is rotten to the core, even in the depths of his heart. This is the message Rav Yosef conveys so eloquently: **“Once the force of destruction has been given authority to wreak damage it will not distinguish between the tzaddikim and the reshaim.”** In other words, it is incapable of distinguishing those who lie in the middle **“between the tzaddikim and the reshaim,”** and perforce punishes everyone who has committed a sin externally. With regards to a total tzaddik, who has not even committed an outright transgression, it certainly has no jurisdiction.

**“ואמרתם זבח פסח” – Believe Sincerely that a Tikun Exists for the Wicked Son**

We shall now rise to the challenge of explaining the answer HKB”H commanded us to give the wicked son: **“היה כי יאמרו אליכם -- בניכם מה העבודה הזאת לכם will say to you, “What is this service to you?”** Seeing as he employs the term **“לכם” — “to you”**—his meaning is patently clear. In the words of the Haggadah: **“לכם ולא לו”**—he is most definitely excluding himself. Such a proclamation will cause the parents of such a child extreme anguish and heartache; for they will know that their son is a rasha.

Therefore, in order to provide them with moral support that there is still hope for such children, HKB”H offers them the following words of consolation and encouragement: **“ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה”** **“אשר פסח על בתי בני ישראל במצרים”**. In other words, you should derive consolation from the fact that HKB”H passed over **“the houses of Bnei Yisrael”**—representing their external manifestations, such as the worshipping of avodah zarah in Mitzrayim. Instead, He took into account their inner desires, knowing that they truly wished to conform with His will. This should reassure these parents and give them hope for their outwardly wicked son. So, even if he asks: **“מה זבח פסח הוא לה”**—they should rest assured that in his heart, he still possesses that Jewish flicker that he inherited from

the holy Avot. Therefore, hope remains that that inner flicker will awaken and he will perform complete, wholehearted teshuvah.

This then is the consolation for the parents of the wicked son. Even if he falls victim to sacrilege to the point that he asks: **“What is this service to you?” — “to you,” but not to himself**—they should not despair. Instead: **You should say, “It is a Pesach offering to Hashem, Who skipped over the houses of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt, while He smote the Egyptians, but He spared our households.”** In other words, just as HKB”H spared Yisrael, while He smote the Egyptians—even though they worshipped avodah zarah, He designed a path of teshuvah for them; similarly, the wicked son is afforded tikun by means of teshuvah. Apropos this wonderful news: **“The people bowed and prostrated themselves.”** Rashi explains that they were celebrating **“the good tidings regarding the sons they would have”**—who would ultimately perform teshuvah.

Hence, the people bowed down in celebration. For, they were reassured that even the wicked son possesses an inner flicker that he inherited from the holy Avot. Due to this amazing legacy, every Jew is willing to sacrifice his life for the sanctity of Hashem. Now, however, this wicked son’s legacy is in a dormant state. When we succeed in rousing it from this dormant state, he will experience a spiritual awakening and perform teshuvah.

**The Message Conveyed by the Author of the Haggadah: “ואף אתה הקהה את שיניו”**

Still, it remains for us to explain the message being conveyed by the author of the Haggadah. Surprisingly, he does not suggest that we respond to the wicked son with the response provided by the Torah: **“ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה”**. Instead, he formulated the following well-known response: **“ואף אתה הקהה את שיניו ואמור לו, --you, too, should blunt his teeth, and say to him: “It is because of this that Hashem did so for me when I went out of Egypt” — “for me,” but not for him. Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.**

Let us suggest an explanation. Regarding the wise son, HKB”H commanded that we respond to his query as follows (Devarim 6, 20): **“כי ישאלך בנך מחר לאמר מה העדות והחוקים והמשפטים אשר צוה ה' --אלקיני אתכם, 'ואמרת לבנך' עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים”** **“when your son will ask you tomorrow, saying, “What are the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances that Hashem, our G-d, commanded you?” You shall say to your child, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim.”** In similar fashion, in response to the

simple son, the Torah instructs us to respond (Shemos 13, 14):  
 "והיה כי ישאלך בנך מחר לאמר מה זאת, 'ואמרת אליו' בחזק יד הוציאנו ה' ממצרים"  
 "מבית עבדים—**and it shall be when your son will ask you in the future, "What is this?" you shall say to him, "With a strong hand Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim from the house of bondage."** Note that in both of these instances, we are instructed to address the child directly.

This is not the case with regards to the wicked son. The Torah doesn't say: "Say to him." It merely says: "You shall say (without specifying to whom), 'It is a Pesach-offering to Hashem.'" This led the author of the Haggadah to conclude that it would serve no purpose to respond to him directly with a legitimate answer. After all, the wicked son made it patently clear that he was excluding himself from the group by saying: "What is this service to you?" — "to you," but not to himself. Due to his extreme wickedness and his impervious heart, he is not yet amenable to actually hear a legitimate response to his question. Therefore, the Torah specifically employs the term: "ואמרתם"—implying that you are speaking to yourselves words of encouragement: "יבח בסח הוא לה" "יבח בסח על בתי בני ישראל"—in Mitzrayim Hashem overlooked the Jews' outward behavior and only considered their inner thoughts and desires. Similarly, the wicked son is only wicked outwardly, but in the depths of his heart, he is still good.

However, the author of the Haggadah doesn't stop there. He adds: "You, too, should blunt his teeth." The wicked son must be dealt with sternly and told in no uncertain terms that "had he been there, he would not have been redeemed." His spirit guided by his yetzer hara must be broken, in keeping with the Gemara's teaching (Berachos 5a): "לעולם ירגיז אדם יצר טוב על יצר הרע"—**a person should constantly agitate his yetzer tov to battle against his yetzer hara.** The author of the Tanya explains this concept in Likutei Amarim (29). It is essential to subdue one's animalistic tendencies. Here are his precise words:

"דהיינו לרגוז על נפש הבהמית שהיא יצרו הרע, בקול רעש ורוגז במחשבתו לומר לו, אתה רע ורשע ומשוקץ ומתועב ומנוול וכו', ככל השמות שקראו לו חכמינו ז"ל, באמת עד מתי תסתיר לפני אור אין סוף ברוך הוא הממלא כל עלמין, היה הוה ויהיה... ואתה מנוול וכו' מכחיש האמת הנראה לעינים... והנה על ידי זה יועיל לנפשו האלקית להאיר עיניה באמת."

A person should become enraged with the animalistic side of his being, which is his yetzer hara. He should tell it that it is evil, disgusting, undesirable, etc. Ask it how long it plans to conceal the divine light from you. Tell it that it is hiding the obvious truth from you. In this manner, the godly part of his being will ultimately shine through.

## The Good Tidings regarding the Sons They Would Have

I would like to add a juicy tidbit concerning that which is written in relation to the wicked son: "The people bowed and prostrated themselves." Rashi explains that they were celebrating: "The tidings of the sons which they would have." First, however, I would like to address Rashi's comment regarding HKB"H's statement: "אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים-- you have seen what I did to Mitzrayim, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles. Like the eagle, HKB"H says: "Better that the arrow should enter Me and not My children." Let us explain why HKB"H describes Yisrael here as children.

We will begin by presenting what we have learned in the Gemara (Kiddushin 36a). There, we find a dispute between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Meir regarding the interpretation of the passuk (Devarim 14, 1): "בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם, בזמן שאתם נוהגים מנהג בנים אתם" קרויים בנים, אין אתם נוהגים מנהג בנים אין אתם קרויים בנים, דברי רבי יהודה, רבי מאיר אומר, בין כך ובין כך אתם קרויים בנים" — **"you are sons to Hashem, your G—d": when you behave like sons, you are referred to as sons; when you do not behave like sons, you are not referred to as sons; this is the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah. Rabbi Meir says, under all circumstances you are considered sons.**

There is an obvious difficulty with this notion, which is addressed by the Bnei Yissaschar (Sivan 2, 5) in the name of the great Gaon Chida, ztz"l, in Rosh David (Emor). He explains why teshuvah is an effective means of tikun for Yisrael but not for goyim. HKB"H is like a father to Yisrael and we are His children.

Now the Gemara teaches us that (Kiddushin 32a): "האב שמחל" "על כבודו - כבודו מחול" — a father is permitted to forego his kavod. Therefore, as our father, HKB"H is justifiably allowed to accept Yisrael's teshuvah and forego His kavod. With respect to the goyim, however, HKB"H is a king, as it is written (Tehillim 47, 9): "מלך אלקים" "G—d is king over the nations (goyim)." Similarly, it states elsewhere (Yirmiyah 10, 7): "G—d is king over the nations (goyim)." Now, concerning this latter situation, the Gemara teaches us that (Kiddushin 32b): "מלך שמחל על כבודו אין" "מלך שמחל על כבודו — even if a king forgoes his kavod, it is not forgiven. Therefore, it is inappropriate to accept their acts of teshuvah.

This still poses a difficulty, however. According to Rabbi Meir's opinion — that Yisrael maintain the status of HKB"H's children even when they do not act accordingly — all is well. Yisrael's teshuvah is effective, since they are considered to be G-d's children. Yet, according to Rabbi Yehudah — who holds that when the people of Yisrael sin, they are no longer considered sons

but, rather, are considered slaves — how can their teshuvah be effective? After all, a king cannot forego his kavod with regards to his slaves' misconduct.

## We Are G-d's Children Due to Our Inner Selves

It appears that we can propose a novel idea. Our holy sources explain that every single Jew — even if he has sinned repeatedly, chas v'shalom — no matter who he is or what situation he is in, there still exists a spot in the innermost chambers of his heart that is of divine origin. This divine spark is the source of a Jew's neshamah that was implanted in him by HKB"Y; this sacred spot remains untouched and untainted by one's transgressions; it remains clean and pure.

In the sefer Butzina D'Nehora, authored by the great Rabbi Reb Baruch of Mezhbizh, zy"l, he applies this concept to interpret the following passuk (Tehillim 37, 10): **"ועוד מעט ואין רשע והתבוננת על מקומו ואיננו"** — **Soon there will be no wicked, you will contemplate his place and he will no longer be there.** In other words, even a Jew that has committed so many sins as to be considered wicked, nevertheless: **"ועוד מעט"** — there still remains within him that innermost spot; **"ואין רשע"** — which is not wicked, because the damage caused by his misdeeds cannot reach that spot. To which David HaMelech prays to Hashem: **"והתבוננת על מקומו"** — contemplate this innermost spot; **"ואיננו"** — and you will realize that the wickedness does not exist in this innermost haven, for all of one's sins are merely external manifestations that do not stem from the depth of one's heart.

With this in mind, we can begin to fathom the depth of the mitzvah of teshuvah. It is seemingly difficult to comprehend how someone that has fallen prey to the yetzer hara, is totally under its control and is filthy with sin, can suddenly awaken and summon up the strength to perform teshuvah. The explanation, however, is that the mechanism and source of the mitzvah of teshuvah hinges on the sacred, innermost spark that we have been discussing. By awakening this inner spark that is unblemished from one's sins, one is able to arise to perform sincere teshuvah and to cure all of his 248 limbs and 365 sinews.

This incredible idea is also presented in Dover Shalom (230) in the name of our holy master, Sar Shalom of Belz, zy"l. Once, on Tu B'Shvat, at his hallowed table, while discussing the passuk (Tehillim 130, 1): **"שיר המעלות ממעמקים קראתיך ה"** — **A song of ascents, from the depths, I called to You, Hashem** — he raised the question: How is it possible for a person to overcome the yetzer hara that controls him?

To accomplish this feat, it is recommended that one pray to Hashem that He stir the holy spark that occupies one's innermost being — that place where the yetzer hara has no power or dominion. In this manner, he will overcome the yetzer and draw closer to Hashem. This then is the meaning of the passuk: **"שיר המעלות ממעמקים קראתיך ה"** — I beseech You from the depths of my heart, from that innermost spark, that remains untouched by the harmful effects of my sins. This concludes his remarks.

I also found this holy idea articulated in the sefer "Neos HaDesheh" (Part 3) from a handwritten letter penned by the great and holy author of the "Avnei Nezer". Here are his beautiful words:

**"שיר המעלות ממעמקים קראתיך ה'. נראה ביאור הענין, דהנה בכלי שרת הדין אם הם טהורים כשרים וראויים לעבודה, מה שאין כן אם נטמאו אינם ראויים לעבודה, ואם עבד בהם גם העבודה נפסלת, ואם כן כשאדם חוטא ואבריו נטמאו בטומאת העבירות, אם כן איך מועילה אחר כך תשובה, הלא אבריו טמאים ואיך יכול לעבוד בהם להקב"ה?"**

אך צריך לשוב כאבר שלא נפגם, וזה בפנימיות הלב ועמקו, שבאמת אף אם איש ישראל חוטא לפעמים, אין החטא מעמקי הלב רק בחיצוניות, אבל הפנימיות של ישראל טובה, אם כן צריך להתחיל לשוב מזה המקום שלא נפגם, ואחר שהתשובה נתקבלה ממילא נתקנו כל האברים, וזה ממעמקים מעומקא דליבא."

He is expounding on the same passuk: **"שיר המעלות ממעמקים קראתיך ה"**. Concerning vessels used in the Sanctuary for the holy service, if they were pure and uncontaminated, they were allowed to be used; if, however, they were ritually impure and contaminated, they could not be used. If they were used for another purpose, they were also disqualified. If so, when a person sins and contaminates his limbs with his sins, how can he subsequently perform teshuvah? After all, he would be serving Hashem with contaminated, impure and unworthy limbs.

Hence, it is essential to repent with an untainted limb — the innermost aspect of the heart. By beginning one's process of teshuvah from this untainted place, and one's teshuvah is accepted, then the remaining limbs will be healed in the process, as well. This is the meaning of the reference to **"from the depths,"** from the innermost depths of one's heart and being.

This explanation coincides with the words of the Yismach Yisrael (Noach) which state that this innermost point of one's being arouses a person to perform teshuvah. He employs this concept to interpret the passuk (Yeshayah 6, 10): **"ולבבו יבין ושב"** — **and its heart will understand, so that it will repent and be healed.** The root and mechanism of teshuvah require that the sinner contemplate the depths of his being, the innermost

aspect of his heart, which conceals the glowing ember of the divine spark that is never extinguished. This contemplation will enable him to ignite a fire in his heart which will continue on to purify and sanctify all of his 248 limbs and 365 sinews. This then is the message of the passuk: “ולבבו יבין”—if a person recognizes full-well the power associated with this spark in the depths of his heart, then: “ושב ורפא לו”—he will be able to perform teshuvah and he will be healed.

### The Mechanism of Teshuvah

It appears that we can propose a wonderful chiddush. According to all opinions, Yisrael are considered G-d’s children with respect to that inner spark that was never tainted by sin. Yet, with respect to the remainder of their bodies and beings that were affected and blemished by their misdeeds, they are considered slaves. This relationship is reflected in our prayers when we proclaim: “אבינו מלכנו הטאנו לפניך — **Our Father, our King, we have sinned before you.** In this formula, we refer to HKB”H both as our father and our king. We allude to the fact that from the perspective of the sinful act, we are slaves and He is our king; yet, from the perspective of our innermost selves that were never defiled, we are HKB”H’s children and He is our father.

The dispute between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Meir, however, concerns the circumstance where one is engaged in sin. In that circumstance, the inner spark appears to be dormant and concealed; for, it is covered by the filth of one’s misdeeds and its voice cannot be heard. Since this innermost element is not apparent when one sins, but, rather, it is in a virtual state of exile — concealed somewhere within man’s being — Rabbi Yehudah is of the opinion that it is inappropriate to refer to one as a son at such time. In his opinion, they should be referred to as slaves, reflecting the fact that the parts of their beings that are visible are engaged in sin and rebellion against Hashem, chas v’shalom.

Nevertheless, the Tanna Rabbi Meir maintains: “בין כך ובין כך קרויים בנים — it makes no difference; under all circumstances, Yisrael are considered HKB”H’s children. It is true that when one sins, his innermost self, his divine spark, is obscured within the confines of his heart. Still, since the root of the Jewish being derives from this innermost element, and so do all thoughts of teshuvah that stir within one’s being on a daily basis, Yisrael remain G-d’s children even while engaged in sin. With respect to the untainted, flawless, innermost aspect of their being, their status does not change.

Thus, we have reconciled very nicely the difficulty we had with Rabbi Yehudah’s viewpoint. We were bothered by the fact that if Yisrael are considered slaves rather sons — when they are not abiding by Hashem’s will — how can teshuvah ever be effective? In truth, even according to Rabbi Yehudah, they are only referred to as slaves, because the innermost aspect of their beings appears dormant and is in a virtual state of exile while they are engaged in sin. When a Jew awakens to perform teshuvah, however — calling out from the depths of his being, “ממעמקים קראתיך ה’” — even according to Rabbi Yehudah he would once again be considered a son; for he is revealing his innermost self, his true essence. This allows HKB”H to accept Yisrael’s teshuvah, since, as a father, He can forego His kavod: “אב שמחל על כבודו - כבודו מחול”.

Now, HKB”H’s response to the “samech-mem” at the time of Yetzias-Mitzrayim is easy to understand. It alleged that there was no difference between Yisrael and the Egyptians; both engaged in avodah zarah. HKB”H responded: “מוטב יכנס החץ בי ולא בבני” — **it is preferable that the arrow enter Me and not harm My children.** HKB”H specifically refers to Yisrael as “**My children.**” He was teaching us that even when they worshipped avodah zarah in Mitzrayim, they maintained their status as G-d’s children. For, their idolatrous practices only harmed their external selves. Their inner selves remained intact and unblemished, preserving their status as His children. Therefore, HKB”H, the caring Father, preferred to deflect the accuser’s arrows Himself, making sure that they would not harm His children’s inner spark.

At this point, we can shed some light on Rashi’s comment that the people bowed down in celebration: “על בשורת הבנים שיהיו להם” — because they received good news regarding their children. As we have explained, HKB”H consoled them with regards to the wicked children: “ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה’ אשר פסח על בתי בני ישראל”. In Mitzrayim, HKB”H passed over and overlooked Yisrael’s external appearance as idol-worshippers, and only looked at the inner aspects of their hearts, which remained untainted. In similar fashion, even the wicked sons who ask brazenly: “מה העבודה הזאת לכם” — maintain the status of G-d’s children, due to that inner spark in the depths of their beings, which is unaffected by their sins. Therefore, tikun remains available to them by means of teshuvah. Upon receiving these good tidings, “**the people bowed down and prostrated themselves.**” As Rashi explains, they were thrilled to find out that even their wicked children were still considered “בנים”.

Donated by Family Madeb for the Refuah Shelimah of Lea bat Virgini

To receive the mamarim by email: [mamarim@shvileipinches.com](mailto:mamarim@shvileipinches.com)