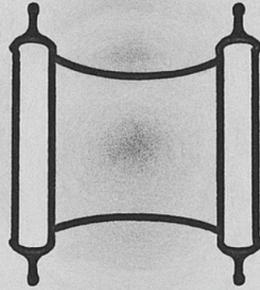


בס"ד

**Menachem Nachum
of Chernobyl
Me'or Einayim
Parshas Bo**



*Dedicated in Honor of the
Yahrzeit of*

לע"נ

שָׂרָה מְרִים בֵּית אַבְרָהָם

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Introduction

Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, author of *Me'or Einayim*, was among the earliest Hasidic masters to articulate a unified spiritual psychology in which knowledge, faith, exile, redemption, Torah, and free will are all interdependent facets of one inner process. In this maamar on the Exodus from Egypt, he presents a sweeping explanation of Pharaoh's hardened heart, the nature of free choice, the meaning of spiritual exile, and the inner purpose of Israel's bondage, framing the entire story of Egypt as the exile and redemption of daat, conscious divine awareness.

The difficulty is well known, which the commentators mentioned: how is free choice taken from him, when it should have been free.

הַקּוֹשֵׁי מִפּוֹרְסוּמַת שְׁזָכְרוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים אִיךָ נוֹטֵל מִמֶּנּוּ הַבְּחִירָה שֶׁהִיְתָה רְאוּיָה לְהִיּוֹת חֲפְשִׁית.

And according to our approach, we will set our attention to be precise in the word "these" in his saying, "so that I may place these My signs in his midst," for it is as if he points with a finger to the signs, that these are the ones before his eyes.

וְעַל-פִּי דְרָכֵינוּ נֹשִׂים לֵב לְדַקְדָּק מֵלֵת אֱלֹה בְּאִמְרוֹ לְמַעַן שִׁיתִי אֵת אֱלֹה בְּקִרְבּוֹ הוּא כְּאֵלוֹ מוֹרָה בְּאֶצְבַּע עַל הָאוֹתוֹת שֶׁאֱלֹהֵם אֲשֶׁר לְנֶגֶד עֵינָיו.

And in truth, it was not to the sight of his eyes; rather, the matter of the Exodus from Egypt was that knowledge was in exile with Pharaoh.

וּבְאֵמַת לֹא לְמַרְאֵה עֵינָיו הָיָה אִמְנָם עֲנִין יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם שֶׁהִיְתָה הַדַּעַת בְּגָלוּת אֶצֶל פְּרַעֲה.

And this is that the people, even the children of Israel, did not know the Lord, even though they had it by tradition from the mouths of the holy forefathers, the fathers of the world.

וְהוּא כִּי הָעָם אֶפְלוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדְעוּ אֵת ה' אֶרְעֵל-פִּי שֶׁהִיָּה לָהֶם בְּקַבְּלָה מִפִּי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם הַקְּדוֹשִׁים אֲבוֹת הָעוֹלָם.

Nevertheless, because they were the fourth generation, the true knowledge was forgotten from them, about which King David, peace be upon him, said to Solomon his son, "Know the God of your father" (1 Chronicles 28:9).

מְכַל-מְקוֹם בַּעֲבוּר שְׁהָיוּ דוֹר רְבִיעִי נִשְׁכַּח מֵהֶם הַדַּעַת הָאֵמֶתִי שֶׁעָלָיו אָמַר דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם לְשַׁלְמָה בְּנוֹ (דְּבָרֵי הַזְּמִים א' כ"ח, ט') דַּע אֵת אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ.

And this was the essence of the exile, that knowledge was in exile in Egypt; therefore Pharaoh the wicked said, "Who is the Lord" (Exodus 5:2), denying the fundamental principle.

וְזֶהוּ עֵיקַר הַגָּלוּת שֶׁהִיְתָה דַּעַת בְּגָלוּת בְּמִצְרַיִם וְלָכֵן אָמַר פְּרַעֲה הַרְשָׁע מִי ה' וְגו' שֶׁכִּפַּר בְּעֵיקַר.

For he did not believe except in sorcery, for he was a great sorcerer, and he did not know the Lord, for it is written, "there is none besides Him."

שֶׁלֹּא הָאֱמִין רַק בְּכַשְׁפִּים שֶׁהִיָּה מְכַשֵּׁף גָּדוֹל וְלֹא יָדַע אֵת ה' כִּי אֵין מִלְּבָדוֹ כְּתִיב.

And even sorcery, which contradicts the heavenly retinue, has no power to act without the will of the Blessed Name, as

וְאֶפְלוּ כַשְׁפִּים שֶׁמְכַחֲשִׁים פִּמְלִיאָה שֶׁל מַעֲלָה אֵין לָהֶם וְכוּלֵת לְפַעוּל בְּלִתִּי רְצוֹן הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ כְּמַבּוֹאֵר בְּשֵׁם בְּמַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינְיָא בֶן דּוּסָא.

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explained there in the incident of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa (Sanhedrin 67b).

Therefore, when the Blessed Name wished to redeem His people, the children of Israel, from Egypt, so that they would have true knowledge, and to teach that the Lord is God, Who is mighty and the Master of ability and the Master of all powers, He said, "so that I may place these My signs in his midst."

ולכן כשִׁרְצָה הַשֵּׁם יִתְבַּרֵּךְ לְגַאוֹל אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם שִׁיְהִיָּה לָהֶם הַדַּעַת הָאֲמִתִּי וְלַהוֹרוֹת כִּי ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים שֶׁהוּא תַקִּיף וּבַעַל הַיְכוּלָת וּבַעַל הַכּוֹחַת כָּלֵם אָמַר לְמַעַן שִׁיתִי אֹתֵי אֵלֶּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ.

Because he denied the fundamental principle due to lack of knowledge and said, "Who is the Lord," I will combine these My signs in his midst; that is, it was with him in exile.

בְּעֵבוֹר שֶׁהוּא כָּפַר בְּעֵיקַר בְּשִׁבִיל חֶסְרוֹן דַּעַת וְאָמַר מִי ה' אֲצַרְפָּה אוֹתֵי אֵלֶּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ כְּלוּמַר שֶׁהִיָּה אֲצִלוֹ בְּגָלוֹת.

And through this combination, the word "Elohim" will be complete, and he will know that the Lord is God, Who is mighty and the Master of ability, and there is none else besides Him, even sorcery as stated.

וְעַל־יְדֵי זֶה הַצְּרוּף יִהְיֶה תַבַּת אֱלֹהִים בְּשִׁלְמוֹת יוֹדֵעַ כִּי ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא הַתַּקִּיף וּבַעַל הַיְכוּלָת וְאֵין עוֹד מְלַבְדּוֹ וְאִפְלוֹ כְּשִׁפְיִים כְּאָמַר

And with this will be explained the difficulty of the commentators mentioned above.

וּבְזֶה יִבְאֵר קַשְׁיַת הַמְּפָרְשִׁים הַנִּזְכָּרִים.

For behold, the essence of choice is what the verse said, "See, I have set before you today life and good, etc., and you shall choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19).

כִּי הִנֵּה עֵיקַר הַבְּחִירָה הוּא שֶׁאָמַר הַכָּתוּב (דְּבָרִים ל', ט"ו) רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת הַטּוֹב וְגו' וּבַחֲרַתְּ בַחַיִּים שָׁמַ, י"ט.

And with what does a person choose the good from the evil if not with knowledge.

וּבַמָּה יִבְחַר אָדָם הַטּוֹב מִן הָרַע אִם לֹא בְּדַעַת

When a person has knowledge to distinguish between good and evil, then he can choose the good and despise the evil.

כְּשִׁיְהִיָּה לוֹ לְאֵדָם דַּעַת לְהַבְחִין בֵּין טוֹב לְרַע אִזּוּ יוּכַל לְבַחֵר בְּטוֹב וּלְמַאֵס בְּרַע

And behold, in the exile of Egypt, knowledge was in exile, as stated, and there was then not complete choice with complete knowledge.

וְהִנֵּה בְּגָלוֹת מִצְרַיִם הִיָּתָה הַדַּעַת בְּגָלוֹת כְּאָמַר וְלֹא הִיָּתָה אִזּוּ הַבְּחִירָה הַשְּׁלֵמָה בְּדַעַת הַשְּׁלֵם

For this is the essence of the Exodus from Egypt, that knowledge went out from exile and choice could be with knowledge.

כִּי זֶהוּ עֵיקַר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם שֶׁיֵּצֵא הַדַּעַת מִן הַגָּלוֹת וְיִכּוּל לְהִיֹּת הַבְּחִירָה בְּדַעַת

As opposed to exile, when knowledge was with him in Egypt, then also the choice could not be;

מֵה שֶׁאֵין כֵּן בְּגָלוֹת כְּשֶׁהִיָּה אֲצִלוֹ בְּמִצְרַיִם הַדַּעַת אִזּוּ גַם הַבְּחִירָה לֹא הִיָּתָה יְכוּלָה לְהִיֹּת

and if so, choice was not taken from Pharaoh at all, for there was not yet choice, as stated;

וְאִם כֵּן לֹא נִטְלוּ מִפְּרַעֲהוֹ הַבְּחִירָה כָּלֵל שֶׁהָרִי לֹא הִיָּתָה עַדִּין הַבְּחִירָה כַּנִּזְכָּר

for it came into being afterward, when they went out from Egypt and knowledge went out from exile; then there was upon what choice could take effect, as stated.

שֶׁהָרִי נִתְהַנֶּה אַחַר כֵּךְ בְּצִאֲתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְיֵצֵא הַדַּעַת מִן הַגָּלוֹת אִזּוּ הִיָּה עַל מֵה לְחוּל הַבְּחִירָה כְּאָמַר

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<p>And with this will also be explained another difficulty of the Rambam;</p>	<p>וְעַם זֶה יִתְבָּאֵר עוֹד קִשְׁיוֹת הַרַמְבַּ"ם.</p>
<p>and it is explained in the New Zohar in the name of the early ones concerning the matter of choice that is given to a person freely and the knowledge of the Blessed Name, how can both be as one.</p>	<p>בְּשֵׁם קַדְמָאֵי עַל Zohar Hadash וְהוּא מְבוֹאֵר בְּ עֵינֵי הַבְּחִירָה לְשִׁמּוֹן לְאֲדָם חִפְשִׁית וַיְדִיעַת הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ אִיךָ יוֹכַל לְהִיּוֹת שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּאֶחָד.</p>
<p>But indeed, behold, as we said, the essence of choice is in knowledge;</p>	<p>אִךְ אֲמַנָּם הִנֵּה כַּאֲשֶׁר אֲמַרְנוּ כִּי עֵיקַר הַבְּחִירָה הוּא בַּדַּעַת.</p>
<p>when a person knows the Lord with complete knowledge, then there is relevance to choice,</p>	<p>כְּשִׁידַע אָדָם אֶת ה' בַּדַּעַת שְׁלֵם אִזּוֹ יֵשׁ שְׂיָכוֹת לַבְּחִירָה.</p>
<p>whereas without knowledge there is no relevance to choice.</p>	<p>מָה שְׂאִין כֵּן בְּלֹא דַעַת אִין שְׂיָכוֹת לַבְּחִירָה.</p>
<p>And since so, choice and knowledge are all one;</p>	<p>וּבְהִיּוֹת כֵּן הַבְּחִירָה וְהַדִּיעָה הֵכַל אֶחָד.</p>
<p>for with what does a person choose? Is it not with knowledge?</p>	<p>כִּי בְּמָה בּוֹחֵר הָאָדָם הֲלֹא בַּדַּעַת.</p>
<p>And the knowledge of the Blessed Name is the choice;</p>	<p>וְהַדַּעַת שֶׁל הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ הוּא הַבְּחִירָה.</p>
<p>if so, this is the very knowledge of the Creator, blessed be He, that He knows choice;</p>	<p>אִם כֵּן זֶהוּ עֶצֶם יְדִיעַת הַבּוֹרֵא בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁהוּא יוֹדֵעַ הַבְּחִירָה.</p>
<p>and they are not matters that contradict one another, but everything is one, as stated; and understand.</p>	<p>וְאִינָם עֲנִינִים סוֹתְרִים זֶה אֶת זֶה רַק הֵכַל אֶחָד כִּנְיָה וְהִבֵּן.</p>
<p>However, that which is explained in the Talmud, "A person does not commit a transgression unless a spirit of folly enters him" (Sotah 3a), is about another matter.</p>	<p>אֲמַנָּם מָה שְׁמִבְּאֵר בְּש"ס אִין אָדָם עוֹבֵר עֲבִירָה אֲלֵא אִם כֵּן נִכְנַס בּוֹ רוּחַ שְׁטוּת הוּא עַל עֵינֵין אַחֵר.</p>
<p>For is it not known what the verse said, "And the righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).</p>	<p>כִּי הֲלֹא יָדוּעַ מָה שְׂאָמַר הַכֶּתוּב וְצַדִּיק בְּאֲמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה ((חֲבַקּוּק ב', ד')).</p>
<p>For sometimes a person falls from knowledge, and this is a way of testing from the Blessed Creator, that they take knowledge from him to see whether he will stand in the ways of the Lord.</p>	<p>כִּי לְפַעְמִים אָדָם נוֹפֵל מִן הַדַּעַת וְהוּא דְרָךְ נִסְיֹן מִהַבּוֹרֵא יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁנוֹטְלִין מִמֶּנּוּ הַדַּעַת לְרִאוֹת הַיַּעֲמֹד בַּדְרָכִי ה'.</p>
<p>And nevertheless, "the righteous holds fast to his way," in his faith;</p>	<p>וְאִף עַל פִּי כֵן יֵאָחַז צַדִּיק דְרָכּוֹ בְּאֲמוּנָתוֹ.</p>
<p>and even though they take knowledge from him, nevertheless he goes and strengthens himself in the ways of the Lord.</p>	<p>וְאִף עַל פִּי שְׁנוֹטְלִין מִמֶּנּוּ הַדַּעַת מִכָּל מְקוֹם הוֹלֵךְ וּמְתַחַזֵּק בַּדְרָכִי ה'.</p>
<p>As opposed to this, if he does not have faith, then when he falls from knowledge and a spirit of folly enters him, he can commit a transgression, Heaven forbid.</p>	<p>מָה שְׂאִין כֵּן אִם אִין לוֹ הָאֲמוּנָה אִזּוֹ כְּשִׁנּוּפֵל מִן הַדַּעַת וְנִכְנַס בּוֹ רוּחַ שְׁטוּת יוֹכַל לַעֲבֹר עֲבִירָה חַס וְשָׁלוֹם.</p>
<p>And to this our Sages intended when they said, "A person does not commit a transgression unless a spirit of folly enters him,"</p>	<p>וְלָזֶה כְּוִנּוּ רַבְנֵי בְּאֲמַרְם אִין אָדָם עוֹבֵר עֲבִירָה אֲלֵא אִם כֵּן נִכְנַס בּוֹ רוּחַ שְׁטוּת.</p>

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<p>meaning that he falls from knowledge by way of a test.</p>	<p>רצה לומר שנופל מן הדעת דרך נסיון.</p>
<p>But in the exile of Egypt, knowledge was not with them at all, and there was then no relevance to choice, as stated.</p>	<p>אך בגלות מצרים לא הייתה הדעת אצלם כלל ולא הייתה אז שיכות לבחירה כאמור.</p>
<p>And this is because knowledge was in smallness, meaning that they were in knowledge like a minor who has no knowledge.</p>	<p>וזהו לפי שהיתה הדעת בקטנות רצה לומר שהיו בדעת כמו קטן שאין לו דעת.</p>
<p>Therefore they said there, "A minor has no thought."</p>	<p>ולכן אמרו בש"ס קטן אין לו מחשבה.</p>
<p>And this is what the verse said further, "And so that you shall tell, etc., that which I made sport of Egypt" (Exodus 10:2), from the language of a suckling and a nursing child,</p>	<p>וזה שאמר הכתוב עוד ולמען תספר וגו' את אשר התעללתי במצרים (שמות י', ב') מלשון עולל ויונק.</p>
<p>like "that I made myself small in Egypt," meaning that knowledge was in smallness in Egypt.</p>	<p>כמו אשר התקטנותי במצרים רצה לומר שהיתה הדעת בקטנות במצרים.</p>
<p>And after this it said, "And you shall know that I am the Lord," meaning that they would have complete knowledge when they went out of Egypt, to know the Lord with knowledge.</p>	<p>ואחר זה אמר וידעתם כי אני ה' רצה לומר שהיתה להם הדעת השלם בצאתם ממצרים לדעת את ה' בדעת.</p>
<p>It is stated in the holy Zohar, "Come to Pharaoh"; it should have said "Go to Pharaoh."</p>	<p>איתא בזהר הקדוש בא אל פרעה לך אל פרעה מבצעי ליה.</p>
<p>And also the difficulty that the commentators mentioned, which I wrote above.</p>	<p>וגם הקושיא שזכרו המפרשים שכתבתי לעיל.</p>
<p>For behold, the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt was that knowledge was in exile with Pharaoh the wicked in Egypt, and therefore Israel went into exile there, to extract the knowledge from there,</p>	<p>כי הנה הנס של יציאת מצרים היה שהדעת הייתה בגלות אצל פרעה הרשע במצרים.</p>
<p>and the hardship of the servitude completed it.</p>	<p>ולכן גלו ישראל לשם להוציא הדעת משם.</p>
<p>And it is stated in the Tikkunei Zohar: "And the Egyptians enslaved them with mortar," this is a kal vachomer;</p>	<p>נקשי השעבוד השלים.</p>
<p>"and with bricks," this is clarification of halachah;</p>	<p>ואיתא בתקוני זהר ויעבדו מצרים בחמר דא קל וחמר.</p>
<p>"and with all labor in the field," this is a baraita;</p>	<p>ובלבנים דא לבון הלכתא.</p>
<p>"all their labor which they labored with them with harshness," this is refutation;</p>	<p>ובכל עבדה בשדה דא בריתא.</p>
<p>meaning to say that everything was in exile in Egypt.</p>	<p>את כל עבדתם אשר עבדו בהם בפרך דא פרקא.</p>
<p>And when they were enslaved, they extracted the knowledge, which is the Torah, from exile.</p>	<p>רצה לומר שהיה הפל בגלות במצרים.</p>
<p>And when they worked with mortar, they extracted the kal vachomer from exile,</p>	<p>וכשעבדם הוציאו את הדעת שהוא התורה מן הגלות.</p>
<p>and likewise in all the other labors, as stated.</p>	<p>וכשעבדו בחמר הוציאו את הקל וחמר מן הגלות.</p>
	<p>וכן בשאר כל העבודות כאמור.</p>

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And therefore, when Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, said, "Behold, the children of Israel did not listen to me," etc.,	וְלֹכֵן כְּשֶׁאָמַר מֹשֶׁה רַבְּנוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם הֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְגו'.
Rashi explained: this is one of the ten kal vachomers in the Torah;	פֶּרֶשׁ רַש"י זֶה אֶחָד מֵעֲשָׂרָה קַל וְחֹמֶר שֶׁבַּתּוֹרָה.
meaning to say that when he said this kal vachomer, he extracted the kal vachomer in the Torah from exile,	רָצָה לוֹמַר כְּשֶׁאָמַר קַל וְחֹמֶר זֶה הוֹצִיא אֶת הַקַּל וְחֹמֶר שֶׁבַּתּוֹרָה מִן הַגְּלוּת.
for the entire Torah was in exile in Egypt, since knowledge was in exile, and knowledge is the Torah.	שֶׁכָּל הַתּוֹרָה הִיטָּה בְּגְלוּת מִצְרַיִם כִּינּוּן שֶׁהַדַּעַת הִיטָּה בְּגְלוּת וְהַדַּעַת הִיא הַתּוֹרָה.
And behold, the Torah begins with a bet, "In the beginning G-d created," etc.,	וְהִנֵּה הַתּוֹרָה מִתְחִלָּה בְּבֵי בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא וְגו'.
and why did the Torah not begin with an aleph, which is first of all the letters.	וְלָמָּה לֹא הִתְחִילָה הַתּוֹרָה בְּאֵי שֶׁהוּא רֵאשׁוֹן לְכָל הַהֹוֹתוֹת.
Because the world could not exist even one hour, and would be nullified from existence,	מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה הָעוֹלָם יָכוֹל לְהִתְקַיֵּם אֶפְלוּ שְׁעָה אַחַת וְהָיָה בֵּטֵל מִמְּצִיאֹת.
due to the great radiance of the letter aleph, which hints to the Master of the world,	מִפְּנֵי גְדֻלַּת בְּהִירוֹת אוֹת אֵי שֶׁהוּא רִמְזָה לְאֱלוֹפוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם.
which is the Blessed Name in His glory and essence, as it were.	שֶׁהוּא הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּכְבוֹדוֹ וּבְעֶצְמוֹ כְּבִיכּוֹל.
Rather, "For the Lord God is a sun and a shield" (Psalms 84:12);	(אֵד כִּי שֶׁמֶשׁ וּמָגֵן ה' אֱלֹהִים (תְּהִלִּים פ"ד, י"ב).
meaning to say that just as it is impossible to exist because of the great radiance of the sun,	וְרָצָה לוֹמַר כְּמוֹ שֶׁבְּשֶׁמֶשׁ אֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּם מִפְּנֵי גְדֻלַּת בְּהִירוֹת.
which is the letter aleph, the Master of the world,	אוֹת הָאֵי שֶׁהוּא אֱלוֹפוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם.
only through a covering and a shield, which is the letter bet;	רַק עַל יְדֵי מַחְסֵה וּמָגֵן שֶׁהוּא אוֹת הֵב.
and through it the letter aleph can be constricted and also be in the Torah.	וְעַל יְדוּ יוֹכֵל לְהִצְטַמְצֵם אוֹת הָאֵי לְהִיוֹת גַּם כֵּן בַּתּוֹרָה.
For behold, after the bet of "Bereishit," we immediately find many alephs	שֶׁהֲרִי אַחֵר אוֹת בֵּי שֶׁל בְּרֵאשִׁית מְצִינוּ תְּכַף כַּמָּה אֱלֶפֶי"ן.
in the word "Bereishit" and in the word "bara Elokim,"	בְּמִלַּת בְּרֵאשִׁית וּבְמִלַּת בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים.
after it was constricted through the letter bet.	אַחֵר שֶׁנִּתְצַמְצַם עַל יְדֵי אוֹת בֵּי.
And this is "Come to Pharaoh," meaning through the bet will be the aleph in the Torah.	וְזֶה בֵּא אֶל פְּרֹעֹה רָצָה לוֹמַר עַל יְדֵי הֵבִי יִהְיֶה הָאֱלֹהִי בַּתּוֹרָה.
And since now the Torah is in exile, therefore "I have made his heart heavy," etc.,	וּבְעֵבוֹר שְׁעִתָּה הַתּוֹרָה הִיא בְּגְלוּת לְכֵן הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת לְבוֹ וְאֶת וְגו'.
so that Israel will be enslaved with mortar and with bricks, to extract the Torah from exile.	שִׁישְׁתַּעֲבָדוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחֹמֶר וּבְלִבְנִים לְהוֹצִיא אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מִן הַגְּלוּת.

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And as it is written in the Tikkunim, “with mortar,” this is kal vachomer,

וְכִמוֹ שֶׁכְּתוּב בְּתַקּוּיִים בְּחֹמֶר דָּא קַל וְחֹמֶר

as mentioned above, that through this they extracted the kal vachomer from exile,

כְּמוֹ שֶׁאֲמַרְנוּ לְעֵיל שְׂבִיחָה הוֹצִיאוּ אֶת הַקַּל וְחֹמֶר מִן הַגְּלוּת.

and similarly in the other labors.

וְכִיּוֹצֵא בְּזֶה בְּשָׂאֵר הָעֲבוּדוֹת

And this is “so that I may place these My signs in his midst,”

וְזֶה לְמַעַן שִׂיתִי אֶת־י אֱלֹהֵי בְּקִרְבּוֹ

for the letters, which are of the Torah, must be extracted from exile.

שֶׁהָאוֹתִיּוֹת שֶׁהֵם שֶׁל הַתּוֹרָה צָרִיף לְהוֹצִיא מִן הַגְּלוּת

And the verse concludes, “so that you shall tell, etc., that which I made sport of,” etc.,

וּמַסִּים הַכְּתוּב לְמַעַן תִּסְפֹּר וְגו' אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלְלֵתִי וְגו'.

meaning to say that I made Myself small, that knowledge was in smallness,

רָצָה לִזְמַר שֶׁהִתְקַטַּנְתִּי שֶׁהִיָּתָה הַדַּעַת בְּקִטְנוּת

and now, “and you shall know,” etc., as stated above.

וְעַתָּה וַיִּדְעַתֶּם וְגו' כְּמוֹ שֶׁאֲמַרְנוּ לְעֵיל

[NOTE Summary:

The maamar opens with the classic question raised by the commentators: how could Pharaoh’s free will be taken away through the hardening of his heart, when free choice should be inviolate. The author establishes that true bechirah, free choice, exists only where there is daat. Citing “See, I have set before you life and good... and choose life,” he explains that choosing good over evil requires discernment. Without knowledge, choice is not yet operative.

This becomes the key to understanding Egypt. The essence of the Egyptian exile was not primarily physical bondage but the exile of daat itself. Knowledge of God was held captive by Pharaoh. Even Israel, though they possessed a received tradition from the holy patriarchs, had lost living, experiential knowledge due to the passage of generations. Pharaoh’s declaration “Who is Hashem” expresses not mere arrogance but ontological denial rooted in this absence of daat. He believed only in sorcery and natural forces, not recognizing that even forces which appear to contradict the heavenly order have no power independent of divine will.

Because daat itself was in exile, full free choice did not yet exist. Therefore Pharaoh’s heart was not hardened by the removal of an already present freedom. Rather, freedom had not yet come into being. Only with the Exodus, when daat emerged from exile, did authentic bechirah become possible. Pharaoh was not deprived of choice, because choice had not yet fully entered the world.

This framework resolves an additional philosophical problem raised by the Rambam: how divine foreknowledge can coexist with human free will. Since choice itself is an expression of daat, and divine knowledge is the ultimate daat, there is no contradiction. Human choice and divine knowledge are not opposing

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forces but two levels of the same reality. God's knowing is not external observation but the very root of the choosing process itself.

The maamar then addresses the Talmudic statement that no person sins unless a spirit of folly enters him. This refers not to the Egyptian condition, where daat was absent entirely, but to a different spiritual dynamic. Sometimes a person temporarily falls from clarity as a test from Heaven. In such moments, the righteous live by faith, holding fast even when understanding is withdrawn. Faith sustains a person when daat is momentarily eclipsed. One who lacks faith, however, may fall into sin when daat departs and confusion takes hold.

Egypt represents a deeper state: not a test through temporary concealment, but a condition of daat in katnut, spiritual infancy. Israel's consciousness was like that of a minor, whom the sages say lacks full cognitive agency. This is alluded to in the verse "that I toyed with Egypt," interpreted as deriving from the language of an infant or suckling, indicating divine contraction into a diminished mode of revelation. Only afterward does the Torah say, "and you shall know that I am Hashem," pointing to the acquisition of mature daat at the Exodus.

The Zohar deepens this by explaining why God says "Come to Pharaoh" rather than "Go to Pharaoh." The redemption required entering the place where daat was imprisoned. Israel's enslavement itself was the instrument of extraction. Each form of labor corresponded to a category of Torah reasoning held captive in Egypt. Mortar represents kal vachomer, bricks represent clarification of law, field labor represents baraitot, and crushing labor represents refutation. Through suffering and toil, Israel released Torah logic from exile.

This is why when Moshe says "Behold, the children of Israel did not listen to me," Rashi identifies it as one of the Torah's kal vachomer arguments. By articulating that reasoning, Moshe freed kal vachomer itself from exile, demonstrating that the Torah was beginning to emerge alongside daat.

The maamar then explains why the Torah begins with the letter bet rather than aleph. Aleph represents the infinite clarity of the Master of the World, which creation could not bear directly. Bet functions as a shield and contraction, allowing divine light to be present in a form the world can endure. Once this constriction is in place, aleph can appear repeatedly within the Torah. "Come to Pharaoh" thus means that through bet, aleph can reenter Torah consciousness.

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart was therefore not cruelty but necessity. Israel had to be subjected to forms of labor that would extract Torah letters, structures, and reasoning from exile. This is the meaning of placing divine signs within Pharaoh, namely embedding Torah letters within the very locus of exile until they could be reclaimed.

The section concludes by returning to the earlier theme. "That I toyed with Egypt" signifies the period of diminished daat. "And you shall know that I am Hashem" marks the completion of redemption, when daat becomes whole and free choice finally becomes real.

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Practical Takeaway:

Spiritual freedom is inseparable from clarity of awareness. When a person lacks daat, choice is limited, distorted, or absent. Growth therefore begins not with forcing moral decisions, but with cultivating knowledge, reflection, and inner awareness of God. At the same time, when clarity temporarily fades, faith becomes the anchor that preserves direction until understanding returns. Redemption, both personal and collective, consists in extracting awareness from whatever inner Egypt holds it captive and allowing conscious choice to finally emerge.

Chassidic Story:

In the early years of Hasidism, Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl was once approached by a young scholar who felt crushed by confusion. He complained that he no longer understood his learning, his prayers felt empty, and his efforts brought only exhaustion. He feared that Heaven had abandoned him.

The Rebbe listened quietly and then asked the man what he did each day. The scholar described long hours of study, followed by labor to support his family, all performed with a sense of heaviness. The Rebbe nodded and said that Egypt was not only a land but a state of mind. There are times when a person's daat is taken captive, not as punishment but as a form of labor.

He explained that just as Israel extracted Torah through brickmaking and mortar, a Jew extracts inner Torah through perseverance when clarity is absent. If the man would continue acting faithfully, even without understanding, his labor itself would redeem his daat.

Years later, that same man became a teacher known for extraordinary clarity and patience. He would tell his students that the most important learning of his life came during the years when he understood nothing, because that was when he learned how Torah is carried through faith until knowledge is ready to return.

Therapeutic Frame: Daat, Choice, and Psychological Agency

The maamar reframes free will not as a binary on–off switch, but as a function of daat, integrated awareness. In modern psychological terms, agency depends on reflective functioning. When a person cannot perceive, name, and integrate reality, choice is not fully online. Behavior still happens, but it is reactive rather than chosen.

Egypt is presented as a collective state of diminished consciousness. Daat was not merely suppressed; it was exiled. In such a condition, asking why Pharaoh did not “choose differently” is like asking a dissociated person why they did not act with insight they did not possess. The maamar insists that responsibility presupposes awareness. Without awareness, there is behavior, but not full agency.

This resolves the apparent cruelty of Pharaoh's hardened heart. Nothing was taken away. Psychological capacity had not yet emerged. Choice only becomes meaningful once awareness is restored.

Cognitive Development and Moral Capacity

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The text explicitly compares Egypt to katnut, infancy. A child is not morally culpable in the same way an adult is, because the structures that support evaluation, inhibition, and foresight are not yet developed. The sages' statement that a minor lacks thought reflects this developmental reality.

In Egypt, the collective psyche functioned at this immature level. Moral reasoning, discernment, and reflective choice were undeveloped because daat itself was inaccessible. Redemption, therefore, is described not as punishment ending, but as maturation beginning.

Only after daat exits exile does the Torah speak in the language of knowing, choosing, and responsibility.

Faith as Psychological Holding When Insight Collapses

The statement that a person sins only when a spirit of folly enters them is reframed with clinical precision. There are moments when daat temporarily recedes, not because of pathology but because of testing, stress, or inner transition. In these moments, faith functions as a stabilizing attachment system.

Faith is not opposed to understanding. It is what holds behavior steady when understanding is unavailable. A person with faith maintains values even when insight is offline. A person without faith becomes vulnerable to impulsivity, confusion, and self-sabotage.

This distinction is critical. Egypt represents absence of daat. A personal test represents temporary loss of access to daat. The therapeutic response to each is different. One requires development. The other requires containment.

Trauma, Labor, and the Extraction of Meaning

The Zohar's mapping of Egyptian labor to forms of Torah reasoning describes how meaning is rebuilt through struggle. Mortar, bricks, field labor, and crushing toil correspond to structured reasoning, clarification, expansion, and challenge.

From a therapeutic lens, this mirrors how cognition reorganizes after trauma. Meaning is not restored abstractly. It is rebuilt through embodied effort, repetition, and endurance. Insight returns only after the psyche has reprocessed experience at multiple levels.

Moshe's use of a kal vachomer is not incidental. It signals the reemergence of structured reasoning. When higher-order thinking returns, freedom is already underway.

Containment Before Illumination

The teaching about the Torah beginning with the letter bet rather than aleph speaks directly to psychological containment. Raw truth without containment overwhelms. Insight without structure destabilizes. The psyche, like the world, cannot survive unfiltered intensity.

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The bet represents boundary, framing, and protection. Only within containment can illumination appear safely. Once containment exists, the aleph, clarity and divine unity, can emerge repeatedly without destroying the system.

Therapeutically, this affirms that pacing matters. Growth requires structure before revelation.

Modern Story

A therapist once worked with a man who felt crushed by guilt over years of destructive behavior. He kept asking why he had not chosen differently. Every explanation increased his shame.

Eventually, the therapist asked a simple question: "At the time, what could you actually see?"

The man realized that during those years he lived in survival mode, emotionally numb, cognitively narrowed. He was functioning, but not choosing. Insight had not been available.

Only after stabilizing his life did reflection emerge. With awareness came responsibility, but also compassion. He stopped asking why he had failed before awareness existed, and started asking how to choose now that it did.

That shift marked the beginning of real freedom.

Integration

The maamar teaches that redemption is not moral pressure but consciousness restoration. Choice follows awareness. Faith sustains when awareness wavers. Structure protects when truth overwhelms.

Freedom begins when daat comes home.

END NOTE]

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