

בא

י א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל-פַּרְעֹה כִּי-אֲנִי הַכְּבֹדְתִי אֶת-לְבָבוֹ וְאֶת-לֵב עַבְדָּיו לְמַעַן שְׂתִי אֶתְתִּי אֵלָה בְּקַרְבּוֹ: ב וּלְמַעַן תִּסְפָּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי וְכוּ-בְנֵי אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלְלֹתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-אֶתְתִּי אֲשֶׁר-שְׂמַתִּי

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְי לְמֹשֶׁה עוֹל לֹת פַּרְעֹה אֲרִי אֲנִי יִקְרִית ית לביה וות לבא דעבדוהי בדיל לשנאח אתי אלין בנייהון: ב ובדיל דתשתעי קדם ברך ובר ברך ית נסון די עבדית במצרים וות אתותי די שויתי

(6) ויאמר ה' אל משה בא אל פרעה. והתרה זו: שתי. (שמואל א' 1, 1) האמור במצרים. ואינו לשון פועל ומעללים, שימי, שאשית אני: (3) התעללתי. שחקתי, כמו פי התעללתי פי (נמדבר כג, כט), הלווא פאשר התעלל צהס עוללת לי (איכה א, כג), אָשַׁר עוֹלָלָ לִי (שם פסוק יג):

בא אל-פרעה - *Come to Pharaoh*. When God chose Moses, he was very reluctant to accept the mission. He argued with the Almighty, according to our tradition (*Shemos Rabbah* 3:14), for seven full days. He considered himself unqualified to be the leader of the people and to confront Pharaoh; he was too modest, too humble. *Moses said to God: Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should take the children of Israel out of Egypt?* (3:11)—who am I, that I am worthy of becoming the redeemer? God answered him, *For I will be with you* (3:12). God promised Moses that He would never desert him; He would participate in the implementation of the mission, and together they would enter Pharaoh's chambers. Therefore, when God instructed Moses to appear before Pharaoh, He used the imperative *bo* instead of *lech*. When Moses addresses Pharaoh, God will be present; when he raises the staff, God will be with him. In effect, God says, *בא עמדי אל פרעה, Come along with Me to Pharaoh*.

There is a *halachic* principle involved here. The *halachah* knows of two kinds of *shelichus*, two types of power of attorney and acting by proxy. One type of *shelichus* is a purely formal-juridic assignment given to a person. The other type of *shelichus* is personalistic and experiential. The former is a practical institution, designed simply to perform legal transactions by proxy. Quite often, one cannot attend to business personally, and therefore the *halachah* provides the opportunity to act through a proxy, to ask someone else to finalize or sanction certain obligations or certain deeds or agreements. This type of acting through a proxy is always associated with the absence of the real owner; for example, Abraham's authorizing his servant to travel to Haran and choose a bride for Isaac. Once the authority is granted, whatever the agent does is valid.

The second kind of *shelichus* is personalistic; it is a relationship between two people who are united by a bond of friendship, two people committed to the same destiny, two people sharing in each other's travails and joys, two people working for the same cause and confiding in each other, two people living an open, frank existence. These two people achieve a common identity from the viewpoint of the *halachah*. Each of them may act in certain areas on the behalf of the other, even though the latter is right there and is capable of performing the same deeds on his own. Essentially, the *shelichus* is a merger of identity. One acts on behalf of the other in the other's presence.

The *shelichus* entrusted to a prophet belongs to the second category of personalistic *shelichus*. Man unites with God, cleaves to God, and loves God with a great passion. He feels the hot breath of eternity upon his cold face. He feels the Almighty; he experiences the great sweetness and exaltedness engendered by the touch of infinity.

That is why God says *בא אל-פרעה*. It is not the formal *shelichus* wherein I absent myself and you do whatever I told you to do. It is the personalistic *shelichus*, where there is union between Me and

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10¹ The Lord said to Moses: “Come to Pharaoh,* for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, in order that I may place these signs of Mine in his midst. ² and in order that you recount into the ears of your son and your son’s son* how I made a mockery of the Egyptians, and [that you tell of] My signs that I placed in them, and

you. My thoughts will become your thoughts, My speech will break through you; therefore, Moses, you are qualified because I am qualified. בא אל־פְּרֹעה, come with Me, I will walk with you, I will be there when you enter the palace, and I will not leave you on your own. You are the *shaliach tzibbur*, I am the *tzibbur*. I am united with you. We will walk together arm in arm, so to speak. Man can come so close to the Almighty that he and the Almighty are united—one voice, one feeling, one experience, finitude somehow embraced by infinity and yet not disappearing. (*Festival of Freedom*, pp. 149-152)

וּלְמַעַן תִּסְפֹּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֶךָ וּבֶן־בְּנֶךָ - and in order that you recount into the ears of your son and your son’s son. The word *sippur* (story), as in *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, the story of the Exodus from Egypt, is rooted in the verb *saper*, to recount. The word is also related to the noun *sofer*, a scribe. The common etymological root of these words suggests that a story can be transmitted orally, as well as through the written word.

Megillas Esther is referred to as both an *igeres* (letter) and a *sefer* (book). The difference between an *igeres* and a *sefer* is that an *igeres* is written to less exacting standards than a *sefer*. A letter connotes something that is not crafted with care since it is routinely discarded after being read. A *sefer*, on the other hand, must be written on parchment and must be permanent. It contains no superfluous words or letters. A *sofer* writes a *sefer* for his generation as well as for succeeding generations.

Chazal maintain that at twilight of the sixth day, the groundwork was established for some of the greatest Biblical miracles (*Avos* 5:8). Included within that group of miracles, God also created *kesav vehamichtav*, the ability to write. That the seemingly prosaic writing skill appears in this list of otherwise supernatural items suggests that there is something extraordinary in the ability to record an idea or event and preserve it thousands of years into the future.

The written word allows us to delve into man’s thoughts and identify with them. When we study *Chumash*, we are not merely learning of events that took place thousands of years ago. Through the skill of *kesav vehamichtav* we become contemporaries of the protagonists. As a child in *cheder*, I studied the *parashah* of *Lech Lecha* towards the beginning of the school year, during the raw Polish autumn. As I trudged through the muddy streets to school, I imagined how Abraham traveled to Canaan under similar circumstances. As a young boy, I lived with the drama of the *Akeidah* and the tragedy of Sarah’s death. My heart would pound in fear that perhaps Esau would return early from the hunt before Isaac completed his blessing and Jacob would be caught red-handed.

Today, we experience what is popularly referred to as a generation gap. Children can find no meaning in their parents’ experiences. They have difficulty identifying with people and events that took place only twenty years earlier. Yet, the ability to transport us into the past, to span generations, is the sublime idea behind *kesav vehamichtav*. Through *kesav vehamichtav*, one can relive events that happened even thousands of years ago.

This miracle of *kesav vehamichtav* is most evident on the Seder night. A key directive in the Haggadah is the statement, *In every generation, one is obligated to see himself as if he personally left*

בהון וַתִּדְעוּן אֲרֵי אֲנִי יי: ג וְאַתָּה מֹשֶׁה וְאַחֲרָיו לֹת פְּרַעַה וְאָמְרוּ לִיָּה פְדוּנוּ אָמַר יי אֱלֹהֵי דִיְהוּדָי עַד אֲמַתִּי מִסְרַב אֶת לֹאֲתַכְנֶנְעָא מִן קַדְמֵי שְׁלַח עֲמִי וַיִּפְלְחוּן קַדְמֵי: ד אֲרֵי אִם סָרִיב אֶתְּ לִשְׁלֹחָא יֵת עֲמִי הָא אֲנִי מוֹתִי מִחַר גּוֹבָא בְּתַחֲוּמָךְ: ה וְחָפָא יֵת עֵין שְׁמִישָׁא דְאַרְעָא וְלֹא יָכֹול לְמַחֲוִי יֵת אַרְעָא וְיִכֹול יֵת שְׁאָר שׁוֹבְתָא דְאַשְׁתָּאָר לְכוּן מִן בְּרַדָּא וְיִכֹול יֵת כָּל אֵילָנָא דְאַצְמַח לְכוּן מִן חִקְלָא: ו וַיִּמְלוּן בְּתִיד וּבְתִי כָל עֲבָדֶיךָ וּבְתִי כָל מִצְרַיִם דִּי לֹא חֲזוּ אֲבָהֶתְךָ וְאֲבָהֶתְךָ אֲבָהֶתְךָ מִיּוֹמָא דְמַהוּוּחִיון עַל אַרְעָא עַד יּוֹמָא דְדִיו וְאַתְּפִנִי וּנְפַק מִן קַדְמֵי פְרַעַה: ז וְאָמְרוּ עֲבָדֵי פְרַעַה לִיָּה עַד אֲמַתִּי יְהִי דִין לְנָא לְתַקְלָא שְׁלַח יֵת גְּבַרְיָא וַיִּפְלְחוּן קַדְמֵי יי אֱלֹהֵהוּן תַּעֲד כַּעֲדָן לֹא יִדְעַת אֲרֵי אֲבָדַת מִצְרַיִם: ח וְאַתּוֹתֵב יֵת מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּת אַחֲרָיו לֹת פְּרַעַה וְאָמַר לְהוּן אֲזִילוּ פְלַחוּ קַדְמֵי יי אֱלֹהֵכֹון מִן וּמִן דְּאֲזִילוּ: ט וְאָמַר מֹשֶׁה בְּעוֹלְמָנָא וּבִסְבָּנָא גִזִּיל בְּבָנָא וּבְבָנָתָא בְּעָנְנָא וּבְתוֹרָנָא גִזִּיל אֲרֵי חָגָא קַדְמֵי יי לְנָא: י וְאָמַר לְהוּן יְהִי כֹן מִימְרָא דִּי בְּסַעֲדָכֹון פִּד אֲשַׁלַּח יִתְכוּן וַיֵּת טַפְלִכֹון חֲזוּ אֲרֵי בִישָׁא דְאַתּוּן סְבִירִין לְמַעֲבַד לְקַבֵּל אֲפִיכֹון לְאַסְתְּחִירָא:

בָּם וַיִּדְעֹתֶם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה: ג וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה וְאַחֲרָיו אֶל־פְּרַעֲה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים עַד־מַתִּי מֵאַנַּת לַעֲנַת מִפְּנֵי שְׁלַח עֲמִי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי: ד כִּי אִם־מָאֵן אַתָּה לְשַׁלַּח אֶת־עֲמִי הַנִּנְנִי מִבְּיַד מִחַר אַרְבָּה בַּגְּבֻלָּךְ: ה וְכִסְפָּה אֶת־עֵין הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא יוּכַל לְרֹאת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְאָכַל | אֶת־יֵתֵר הַפְּלִטָּה הַנִּשְׁאַרְתָּ לָכֶם מִן־הַבְּרֶד וְאָכַל אֶת־פְּלִי־הָעֵץ הַצִּמַּח לָכֶם מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה: ו וּמְלֹאוּ בְּתִיד וּבְתִי כָל־עֲבָדֶיךָ וּבְתִי כָל־מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְאַבּוֹת אֲבֹתֶיךָ מִיּוֹם הָיִיתֶם עַל־הָאֲדָמָה עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּפְּן וַיֵּצֵא מֵעַם פְּרַעַה: ז וַיֹּאמְרוּ עֲבָדֵי פְרַעֲה אֵלָיו עַד־מַתִּי יְהִיָּה זֶה לָנוּ לְמוֹקֵשׁ שְׁלַח אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּעֲבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם הַטֶּרֶם תִּדְעֵ כִּי אֲבָדָה מִצְרַיִם: ח וַיּוֹשֵׁב אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת־אַחֲרָיו אֶל־פְּרַעֲה וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְכוּ עֲבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִי וּמִי הַהֲלֹכִים: ט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּנַעַרְיָנוּ וּבְזַקְנֵינוּ נִלְדָּה בְּבָלְיָנוּ וּבְבָנוּתָנוּ בְּצִאֲנוּנוּ וּבְבַקְרָנוּ נִלְדָּה כִּי חָגִי־הוּדָה לָנוּ: י וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי כֹן יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר אֲשַׁלַּח אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת־טַפְּכֶם רָאוּ כִּי רָעָה נִגַּד פְּנִיכֶם: יא לֹא

פרעה, רואה אני צאִיטוגנינות שלי אותם כוכב עולה לקראתכם במדבר והוא סימן דם והריגה. וכשחטאו ישראל בעגל וצקש הקדוש צרוך הוא להרגם, אמר משה בתפלתו (להלן לז, יג) למה יאמרו מצרים לאמר פְּרַעֲה הַזֵּי־אִס, זו היא שאמר להם ראו כי רעה נגד פניכם, מיד וַיִּקַּס ה' עַל הָרַעַה (שם פסוק יד), והפך את הדם לדם מילה שמל יהושע אותם. וזהו שנאמר (יהושע ה, ט) הַיּוֹם גִּלּוֹתִי אֶת תְּרַפַּת מִצְרַיִם מֵעַלְיָכֶם, שהיו אומרים לכם דם אנו רואין עליכם במדבר:

(ג) לענת. כתרומתו לאתכנעא, והוא מגורת עני. מאנת להיות עני ושפל מפני: (ד) את עין הארץ. את מראה הארץ: ולא יוכל וגו'. הרואה לראות את הארץ, ולשון קצרה דבר: (ה) הטרם תדע. העוד לא ידעת כי אבדה מצרים: (ו) ויושב. הושבו על ידי שליח, ששלחו אחריהם והשיבו אל פרעה: (ז) כאשר אשלח אתכם וגו'. אף כי אשלח גם את הנאן ואת הבקר כאשר אמרתם: ראו כי רעה נגד פניכם. כתרומתו. ומדרש אגדה שמעתי, כוכב אחד יש ששמו רעה, אמר להם

Egypt. How can we relive an event that happened 3,500 years ago? Through Torah shebe'al peh, a tradition that unites us with previous generations and enables us to experience events simultaneously with them.

you will know that I am the Lord.” 3 So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said to him, “So said the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, and they will worship Me. 4 For if you refuse to let [them] go, behold, tomorrow I am going to bring locusts into your borders. 5 And they will obscure the view of the earth, and no one will be able to see the earth, and they will eat the surviving remnant, which remains for you from the hail, and they will eat all your trees that grow out of the field. 6 And your houses and the houses of all your servants and the houses of all the Egyptians will be filled, which your fathers and your fathers’ fathers did not see since the day they were on the earth until this day.’ “ [Therewith,] he turned and left Pharaoh. 7 Pharaoh’s servants said to him, * “How long will this one be a stumbling block to us? Let the people go and they will worship their God. Don’t you yet know that Egypt is lost?” 8 [Thereupon,] Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, worship the Lord your God. Who and who are going?” 9 Moses said, “With our youth and with our elders we will go, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our cattle we will go, for it is a festival of the Lord to us.” 10 So he [Pharaoh] said to them, “So may the Lord be with you, just as I will let you and your young children out. See that evil is before your faces.*

Recounting *yetzias Mitzrayim* is not merely telling a story. The imperative of *and you shall tell your son* (13:8) has a deeper meaning. It means that the son should be the *sefer* upon which the father writes. The foremost task of a father is to be a *sofer*, to transform his son into a book upon which he writes indelibly, a book that will survive him and be imparted to succeeding generations.

The appellation “the people of the book” does not signify a nation that reads books; it is a nation whose very being is a book. The *mitzvah* of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* means inscribing one’s entire religious consciousness upon the next generation until that generation is ready to perform the same task of *sippur* at the *Seder* table with their own children. (*Derashot Harav*, pp. 141-148)

וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַבְדֵי פַרְעֹה אֵלָיו - *Pharaoh’s servants said to him.* The term עַבְדֵי פַרְעֹה suggests that these people were “slaves of Pharaoh”—their very identity was based on their allegiance to Pharaoh. In contrast, Israel’s servitude is described as עַבְדִּים הָיִינוּ לַפַּרְעֹה, *we were slaves to Pharaoh* (*Deut.* 6:21)—although we were in servitude to Pharaoh, we never identified with our taskmaster. The Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 5:62) indicates that every Shabbos, the enslaved Israelites would read from scrolls which foretold that they would be redeemed. Even during their servitude, they believed in their ultimate redemption. (*Harrerei Kedem* Vol. 2, p. 213)

רְאוּ כִּי רָעָה נֹגֵד פְּנֵיכֶם - *See that evil is before your faces.* Rashi explains that Pharaoh’s astrologers saw a star beginning to rise whose name was רָעָה, *evil*. They predicted that bloodshed awaited the Israelites in the desert. Pharaoh therefore warned Moses that his plan to take the Israelites into the desert would result in catastrophe for them.

Pharaoh understood the implications of the word Hebrews, *Ivrim*—*the entire world on one side, while the Jews were on the other* (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 42:8). The Jews wanted to be singular, unique. Moses and Aaron wanted to establish a solitary society, a spiritually different community. Pharaoh