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## פרשת וארא

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פרק ז פסוק ו-ז

לָכֵן אָמַר לְבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְהוָה וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדֹתֵיכֶם וְגָאַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזֵרוּעַ נְטוּיָהּ וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים: וְלִקְחָתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהִנֵּיתִי לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וַיִּדְעוּתָם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדֹתֵיכֶם וְגָאַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהִנֵּיתִי לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים

מושג

מַנִּין לְאַרְבָּעָה כּוֹסוֹת? כְּנֶגֶד אַרְבַּע גְּאוּלוֹת... וְהוֹצֵאתִי וְהִצַּלְתִּי וְגָאַלְתִּי וְלִקְחָתִי.  
(תלמוד ירושלמי)

### Translation:

What is the source for the four cups? They are parallel to the four salvations: I will take you out, I will save you, I will redeem you and I will take you.

### Explanation:

The Rabbis mandated drinking four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder. The drinking of wine is meant to convey a feeling of being free men. Our Musag comes to explain why four cups of wine are required. The four terms of salvation mentioned in our Pasuk are given as the reason behind the requirement. The Midrash explains that the four terms of salvation actually parallel the four decrees of Pharaoh which had increased in severity, beginning with the social ostracism, leading to slavery, growing into harsh labor and eventually into an attempt to enslave their minds and spirits as well. Hashem is informing Moshe that He is undoing the decrees of Pharaoh. *וְהוֹצֵאתִי* comes to undo the harsh labor, *וְהִצַּלְתִּי* the slavery, *וְגָאַלְתִּי* the racial discrimination and *וְלִקְחָתִי* comes to uplift the mind and give direction to the spirit.

### Looking in the Pasuk:

The Pasuk teaches that there were four distinct terms of redemption. The four different words used for redemption are not redundant but rather parallel four stages of bondage. Each term is thus descriptive of the negation of a specific stage of the slavery.

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## NOTES

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There is an obligation to drink four cups of wine during the סדר. The source of the law is found in the משנה in (פרק י') מסכת פסחים which teaches:

א ערבי פסחים סמוך למנחה, לא יאכל אדם עד שתהשך. ואפלו עני שבישראל לא יאכל עד שיסב. ולא יפחתו לו מארבעה כוסות של יין, ואפלו מן התמחוי:

The fact that even a poor man must be provided with four cups of wine testifies to their importance. While the general reasoning behind the cups of wine is to arouse the feeling of בן חורין – hence they are mentioned in the above משנה together with the law of הסיבה – the questions of why 4 cups were mandated is not discussed in the משנה. Interestingly, the תלמוד בבלי does not discuss the issue at all.

Perhaps the בבלי sufficed with the fact that there are four distinct phases of the Seder that seem to mandate a cup of wine. For example, we could easily understand the need for the first and third cups, used for קידוש and ברכת המזון respectively, as they are mandated at every יום טוב. The second cup marks the end of מגיד, while the fourth is drunk at the completion of הלל. Therefore, it is possible that the בבלי saw no need to attach any special significance to the fact that there were four cups. Rather, drinking wine at the Seder was important to arouse חירות and the חכמים found four perfect opportunities in which to mandate the drinking of the wine<sup>1</sup>.

While the תלמוד בבלי does not provide reasoning for the obligation, the תלמוד ירושלמי does. In the beginning of the tenth פרק of מסכת פסחים גמרא actually provides several possibilities:

מניין לארבעה כוסות רבי יוחנן בשם ר' בנייה כנגד ארבע גאולות לכן אמור לבני ישראל אני ה' והוצאתי אתכם וגו' ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם וגומר והוצאתי והצלתי וגאלתי ולקחתי. רבי יהושע בן לוי אמר כנגד ארבעה כוסות של פרעה: וכוס פרעה בידי, ואשחט אותם אל כוס פרעה, ואתן את הכוס על כף פרעה, ונתת כוס פרעה בידו<sup>2</sup> וגו'. רבי לוי אמר כנגד ארבעה מלכיות. ורבנן אמרי כנגד ד' כוסות של פורענות שהקב"ה עתיד להשקות את אומות העולם... וכנגד עתיד הקב"ה להשקות את ישראל ארבעה כוסות של נחמות ה' מנת חלקי וכוסי, דשנת בשמן ראשי כוסי רויה, והדין כוס ישועות אשא תריין. (והפסוק כוס ישועות אשא נחשב כשתיים)

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<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, if he were to drink the four cups of wine but not do so at these specific times he would not fulfill his obligation, since the obligation is connected to the specific phase of the Seder in which he is found. This seems to be the opinion of the גמרא as it states (פסחים קה):

שתאן בבת אחת ידי יין יצא (שמחת יו"ט – רשב"ם) ידי ארבעה כוסות לא יצא.

Almost all the commentaries explain that the גמרא is referring to when one drank the four cups one immediately after the other, and does not fulfill his obligation due to the fact that he did not drink them at their prescribed times. However, Rashi himself on the above גמרא understands that we are referring to a situation where he poured all the wine found in the four cups into one cup. Rashi, it seems, would argue and conclude that if he were to drink four separate cups consecutively, he *would* fulfill his obligation. It would stand to reason that according to Rashi the obligation of four cups is not connected to the prescribed times, leaving us to seek a different explanation to understand why four cups were mandated. (The fact that Rashi in his commentary on the Mishna quotes our Musag to explain the obligation to drink four cups of wine, strengthens our contention.)

<sup>2</sup> The ירושלמי provides four different reasons which parallel the four cups to four different types of redemption. In three of the four the connection to redemption is quite clear. Although the four cups of wine in the שר המשקים's dream do not seem to refer to the Jewish people at all, the מדרש רבה clarifies that in fact the dream of the שר המשקים was specifically intended for ישראל as it foretold their redemption from Egyptian bondage. In fact, the מדרש teaches that Yosef interpreted the dream to the שר המשקים as a sign of the שר המשקים's imminent release as a reward for being the bearer of this semi-prophetic vision regarding the redemption of the Jewish people:

ויספר שר המשקים והנה גפן לפני, אלו ישראל, שנאמר (תהלים פ) גפן מצרים תסיע, ובגפן שלשה שריגים, משה אהרן ומרים, היא כפורחת, הפריחה גאולתן של ישראל, עלתה נצה, הנצה גאולתן של ישראל, הבשילו אשכולותיה ענבים, גפן שהפריחה מיד הנצה, ענבים שהנצו מיד בשלו, וכוס פרעה בידי... אמר לו את בשרתני בשורה טובה אף אני אבשרך בשורה טובה, בעוד שלשת ימים וגו' (בראשית רבה פח:ה)

Of all the reasons listed above, the most well know is the first, the connection to the four terms of redemption: והוצאתי והצלתי וגאלתי ולקחתי. Perhaps this reason is widely known because it is the reason that Rashi brings in his commentary on the משנה in פסחים:

ארבע כוסות: כנגד ארבעה לשוני<sup>3</sup> גאולה האמורים בגלות מצרים והוצאתי אתכם והצלתי וגאלתי אתכם ולקחתי אתכם בפרשת וארא.

I believe it is fairly obvious why Rashi chose this explanation above the others, as it provides the strongest connection to יציאת מצרים and is therefore the most likely reason the חכמים mandated four cups of wine.

However, what does need explanation is why the Torah used four terms of redemption. Surely, the redemption could have been described with any one of the terms used, why use all four? Additionally, why do we would use wine to represent the terms of redemption.

The מדרש רבה answers these questions:

והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלות מצרים, ד' גאולות יש כאן, והוצאתי, והצלתי, וגאלתי, ולקחתי, כנגד ד' גזירות שגזר עליהן פרעה, וכנגדן תקנו חכמים ד' כוסות בליל הפסח, לקיים מה שנא' (תהלים קטז) כוס ישועות אשא ובשם ה' אקרא (שמו"ר (ד:)

The end of the Midrash explains to us why a cup of wine represents salvation. It answers by quoting the Pasuk in Tehillim אשא כוס ישועות אשא, in which דוד המלך refers to a 'cup of salvation'. (Obviously this ties in to the fact that wine is the drink of a חורין.)

The first part of the Midrash deals with our first question: Why four terms of salvation? The Midrash teaches us that these were parallel to the four decrees of פרעה. Unfortunately, the Midrash does not tell us which four decrees it is referring to and why each term relates to a specific decree.

I would like to use the writings of the Ramban to offer a possible explanation as to the four decrees and how they relate to each term of redemption.

The Pesukim at the beginning of פרשת שמות speak of the decrees of פרעה:

יא וישִׁימוּ עָלָיו שְׂרָי מַסִּים לְמַעַן עֲזֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיִּבְּן עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפָרְעָה אֶת־פִּתְחֵם וְאֶת־רַעְמִסִּס: יב וְכֹאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנֶנּוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּקְצֹוּ מִפְּנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: יג וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֹךְ: יד וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת־חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה בְּחָמֹר וּבִלְבָנִים וּבְכָל־עֲבֹדָה בְּשֹׁדָה אֵת כָּל־עֲבֹדָתָם אֲשֶׁר־עָבְדוּ בָהֶם בְּפָרֹךְ:

The Ramban writes that these Pesukim outline increasingly harsh decrees:

1. The first stage is recorded in פסוק יא, which speaks of the Jews being forced to work for פרעה as a type of tax. They 'paid' their tax with the building of storage cities for the king.
2. When he saw that this did not break the Jews as recorded in פסוק יב, he forced the Jews to work for all and any Egyptian. This is recorded in פסוק יג, where the Pasuk tells us ויעבדו ויעבדו; telling us that all of Egypt were now their masters, not only פרעה. At this stage the work was not necessarily demeaning or even backbreaking. In fact, there is one opinion<sup>4</sup> in the גמרא (סוטה יא:) which states that the word בפרך mentioned in פסוק יג is to be understood as פה רך, meaning soft-spoken. At this stage the Egyptians coaxed the Jews into working for them, even paying them for their work<sup>5</sup>.
3. In פסוק יד, however, the attitude of the Egyptians changes. וימררו את חייהם, the Egyptians seek to embitter the life of the Jews. The above גמרא teaches that according to all opinions the בפרך mentioned at the end of this Pasuk is to be understood as backbreaking labor. The intent of the Egyptians was to torture the Jews by giving them jobs they were not trained to do (such as giving men the women's jobs and vice-versa), or demanding jobs such a digging

<sup>3</sup> Rashi calls the terms of redemption לשוני גאולה. The wording of לשוני is not found in the גמרא or in the Midrashim. The only Midrash which calls them לשונות גאולה is the שמעוני, which reads:

ר' הונא בשם ר' בנאה כנגד ארבע לשונות של גאולה שנאמרו במצרים והוצאתי והצלתי וגאלתי ולקחתי

However the Yalkut's source for this wording is not known.

<sup>4</sup> בפרך, רבי אלעזר אמר בפה רך

<sup>5</sup> בפה רך: משכום בדברים ובשכר עד שהרגילום לעבודה (רש"י).

ditches in the fields or removing the animal dung. In the end result these decrees would allow בני ישראל to at first demean and eventually to dehumanize פרעה.

It is possible that the above three stages were three of the decrees mentioned in the Midrash, leaving us to wonder regarding the fourth. I would propose that the fourth decree was when the people were denied straw to make the bricks<sup>6</sup>:

פרק ה: ו ויצו פרעה ביום ההוא את־הנגשים בָּעֵם וְאֶת־שֹׁטְרֵיוֹ לֵאמֹר: ז לא תאספון לַתַּת תִּבְּן לָעֵם לְלֶבֶן הַלְּבָנִים כְּתָמוּל שְׁלֵשִׁים הֵם יִלְכוּ וְקִשְׁשׁוּ לָהֶם תִּבְּן: ח וְאֶת־מִתְּכַנֵּת הַלְּבָנִים אֲשֶׁר הֵם עֹשִׂים תָּמוּל שְׁלֵשִׁים תְּשִׂימוּ עֲלֵיהֶם לֹא תִגְרְעוּ מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי־נִרְפִים הֵם עַל־כֵּן הֵם צִעְקִים לֵאמֹר נִלְכָּה נִזְבַּחַה לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ: ט תִּכְבַּד הָעֶבֶדָה עַל־הָאֲנָשִׁים וְיַעֲשׂוּ־בָהּ וְאֵל־יִשְׁעוּ בְּדַבְרֵי־שָׂקָר:

If the above is correct, the first decree singled out the Jews and marked them as racially different than the rest of the population, by making them and only them pay the ‘work tax’ to Pharaoh<sup>7</sup>. The second made them into slaves to the entire Egyptian people, while the third decree caused the slavery to become demeaning and painful. We can easily parallel these three stages with Hashem’s words to אברהם at ברית בין הבתרים:

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדַע תְּדַע כִּי־גֵר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעֲבָדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:

The first stage is גרות, being made into foreigners, followed by the second stage וועבדום, being made into slaves, and finally the third stage ענוי, the bitter intensification of the slavery.

The fourth and final decree did not necessarily make the work harder – gathering straw is not particularly difficult – rather it made the work unceasing. They could never take their minds off the work as the task of finding straw never left their attention. The fourth decree sought to not only enslave their bodies but their hearts and minds as well, thus Pharaoh says תִּכְבַּד הָעֶבֶדָה, not תקשה העבודה. His intent was to make sure that they could never find the mental freedom to dream of freedom – ואל ישעו בדברי שקר<sup>8</sup> –

I believe that with the above we can begin to match the four stages of slavery with the four terms of redemption. (The stages of redemption will be in inverse order of the decrees. Hashem will undo the decrees one by one, peeling away the layers of עבדות, first by taking away the harsh labor, then by removing the slavery altogether and finally by correcting the racial bias which allowed for the slavery in the first place.)

The first stage is והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלות מצרים. This parallels the third decree of פרעה in which the people are forced into back breaking labor: וימררו את חייהם בעבודה קשה. The second stage is והצילתי ויעבדו מצרים, which parallels the second decree of פרעה. At this stage the slavery is undone allowing for the term והצילתי – the שרש נ.צ.ל meaning to clear out or completely free, such as וינצלו בני ישראל – to describe the status of בני ישראל.

<sup>6</sup> One might claim that the decrees regarding casting children into the Nile were certainly more severe and should be included in the four decrees. I would argue that they are not included in the Midrash. The logic would be in that the four terms of redemption refer to redemption from existing decrees, not to decrees which no longer exist. The Midrash explains that the decree to throw the Jewish boys into the Nile was made in order to kill the מושיע של ישראל whom the astrologers had correctly forecasted had been conceived that day (according to this Midrash the Pasuk that tells of the decree, takes place after עמרם and יוכבד remarry). Once 9 months had passed the decree was annulled. (At the end of this essay I will attach a short explanation regarding the decrees to kill the Jewish children.) Thus, the decree regarding the boys voided itself after time and did not require Divine intervention.

<sup>7</sup> The concept behind this initial stage of slavery will be developed further later in the essay.

<sup>8</sup> This idea is explained in the מְסִילַת יִשְׂרָאֵל who writes:

והרי זו מעין עצת פרעה הרשע שאמר תכבד העבודה על האנשים וגו', שהיה מתכוון שלא להניח להם ריוח כלל לבלתי יתנו לב או ישימו עצה נגדו, אלא היה משתדל להפריע לכם מכל התבוננות בכח התמדת העבודה הבלתי מפסקת...

The third stage of redemption, וגאולתי, undoes the first decree of Pharaoh in which the Jews are singled out to be different, the גרים. R.S.R. Hirsch explains:

Later on in the Torah (במדבר ה:ה) “the stranger” is described as איך לאיש גואל. גואל is the relative who takes the need of his relation as his own, and stands up for him. The stranger in ordinary countries has no one to take such a place. In any wrong done to the very lowest inhabitant, every other inhabitant sees an injury done to his own rights. He sees in this wrong a threat to his own claim for justice, and to his own feelings of security. But the alien “has no real right to be here at all”, and so finds none amongst those who “rightfully belong here” to champion his cause... Out of this condition, that they were גרים in Egypt, all the succeeding miseries grew quite naturally. Because they were גרים they were made into עבדים, and into עניים מעונים.

Hashem thus becomes the גואל of ישראל בני ישראל. He stands up for their rights thus attesting to their unique status, shattering the perception of the Jew as the lowly outcast.

Once both the active slavery and the legal/racial basis which provided its justification had been eradicated, Hashem turns His attention to the final decree of Pharaoh. Pharaoh had sought to busy the Jews to the extent they could no longer think beyond the physical needs that demanded their ongoing attention. Against the decree of ואל ישעו בדברי שקר, Pharaoh’s attempt to subdue the spiritual yearning within their hearts, comes the final term of redemption: ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם. To counteract the fourth decree, in which Pharaoh sought to enslave the spirit of the Jew as well, Hashem takes us to Him, ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם. It was not sufficient to only remove the enslaving force, but the Jew had to be uplifted so that his spirit could be renewed.

We now fully understand the blessing we make at the Seder, על גאולתנו ועל פדות נפשנו. The גאולה we thank Hashem for is related to the first three terms of redemption, while the פדות נפשנו, the uplifting of our spirit, is promised in the final term ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם. Only after these four phases have been completed are we ready to fully become Hashem’s chosen people, as the פסוק concludes: והייתי לכם לאלקים.

### Questions for Further Thought:

- a. Of the four decrees which do you think was most destructive to the Jews as a people?
- b. Can you find parallels between Pharaoh’s decrees and those of the Nazis?

## The Decrees against the Jewish boys:

The גמרא in (יב.) teaches that there were actually three different decrees regarding the killing of the Jewish boys:

שלוש גזירות גזר: בתחילה אם בן הוא והמתן אותו, ולבסוף כל הבן הילוד היאורה תשליכוהו, ולבסוף אף על עמו גזר.

The first was for the midwives to kill them at birth, which the midwives managed to circumvent.

We also read of Pharaoh demanding that all boys be cast into the Nile. While the Pasuk does not mention that these were two separate decrees, the above גמרא teaches that there were actually two decrees, the first to cast the boys into the Nile and later decreeing even on his own people. Why would there be two separate decrees?

Regarding the command to cast the boys into the Nile we find two Midrashim.

The first is the מדרש רבה which teaches:

ויצו פרעה לכל עמו, א"ר יוסי ב"ר חנינא אף על עמו גזר, ולמה עשה כן שהיו אסטרולוגין אומרים לו גואל ישראל נתעברה ממנו אמו ואין אנו יודעין אם ישראל הוא או מצרים הוא, באותה שעה כנס פרעה כל המצרים ואמר להם השאילו לי את בניכם ט' חדשים שאשליכם ליאור, היינו הא דכתיב כל הבן הילוד היאורה וגו', כל הבן של ישראל אין כתיב כאן, אלא כל הבן, בין יהודי בין מצרי, ולא רצו לקבל ממנו שאמרו בן מצרי לא יגאל אותן לעולם אלא מן העבריות (שמו"ר פרשה א:יח)

The second is the מדרש תנחומא (ויקהל פרק ד) which teaches:

ולמה היו עושין כן. אלא שאמרו לו אסטרולוגין שלו, ביום הזה גואל ישראל נולד, ואין אנו יודעים אם מצרי הוא אם ישראל. באותה שעה כנס את כל המצריים, אמר להם, השאילו לי בניכם יום אחד, שנאמר, כל הבן הילוד (שם שם כב). מישראל אין כתיב כאן, אלא כל הבן הילוד, בין מצרי בין ישראל, היאורה תשליכוהו.

The two Midrashim tell two different stories. Together they clarify the intent of the above גמרא.

It is clear that the reason for the last two decrees was to kill the soon to be born savior of the Jewish people. At first the astrologers had seen that Moshe was conceived as the מדרש רבה says: נתעברה ממנו אמו. However, they did not know if he was Jewish or not. Thus, continues the מדרש רבה, Pharaoh wanted to kill all children who would be born in the next 9 months. However, his people did not agree to sacrifice their children for the next 9 months, and only Jewish babies were killed. The מדרש תנחומא teaches that on the day Moshe was born the astrologers reported that the savior had been born. Pharaoh again comes to his people and asks that at least for this one day all children born should be killed. The Midrash does not say that the people refused this request.