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# DAF KESHER

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## DVAR TORAH COUNTING THE UNCOUNTABLE

Why does the Book of Shemot open with the listing and counting of the Children of Israel even though it listed them and counted them near the end of the Book of Bereishit? Rashi, in his opening words on Shemot, explains: "Out of His love for them he counts them all the time, for they are compared to stars, which He takes out and brings in by name and number, for it says, 'He takes out their hosts by number; He calls all of them by name' (Yishayah 40:26)." This verse is echoed by King David's words in Tehillim: "מוֹנֵה מִסְפָּר לְכוֹכְבֵימַי לְכֻלָּם שְׁמוֹת יִקְרָא" – He counts the number of the stars; he calls them all by name" (Tehillim 147:4).

The author of the Sfat Emet finds these verses puzzling: Why is Hashem especially praised for being able to count the stars? Hashem created them; surely He knows how many of them there are.

He gives a surprising answer. When Avraham Avinu was told by Hashem that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars, Hashem said, "Look towards the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them" (Bereishit 15:5). The author of the Sfat Emet understands "if you are able to count them" as indicating that the stars are **impossible** to count – not only that there are too many stars for Avraham to count. Even though the stars cannot be counted, Hashem counts them. This is the wonder of מוֹנֵה מִסְפָּר לְכוֹכְבֵימַי – that Hashem counts the uncountable.

This wonder is part of the ultimate wonder, that Hashem created the world out of nothing (as we are taught in the mystical work Sefer Yetzirah [2:9]: "וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת שְׂאִינוֹ יִשְׁנוֹ" – And He made what was non-existent existent"). Just as Hashem made the non-existence existent, He can make the uncountable countable.

This is not only a theological wonder, but part of the nature of the Jewish People and their mission on earth. The Jewish People are compared, as a nation and as individuals, to the stars.

Every Jew's soul emanates from above nature yet is clothed within a physical body in the natural world. Because of its loftiness, the Jewish soul brings light to the darkness of this world, much as the stars light up the night.

In the verses near the closing of the Book of Daniel, Israel is compared to the stars: "וּמִצְדִּיקֵי הָרַבִּים כְּכוֹכְבֵימַי לְעוֹלָם" – Those who bring the multitudes to righteousness [will shine] like the stars forever" (Daniel 12:3). The Jews' mission for coming into this world – and for then going into exile – says the author of the Sfat Emet, is "לְתַקֵּן עוֹלְמוֹת הַנִּפְרָדִים שֶׁעַל יְדֵיהֶם מִתְקַשֵּׁר הַכֹּל לְשֵׁרשׁ הָאֶחָדוּת" – to rectify and restore the fragmented worlds and through them to connect everything to the root of unity."

Hashem created the world out of nothingness. He counts the uncountable stars. He created the Jewish People who combine a lofty soul with the physical body in the natural world. The Jew's connection to infinity enables him to bring light into darkness, to shine from the infinite Divine Light into the finite world.

Also in this week's Daf Kesher: Source Guide – "Willing not to Will" · "Ground Zero and the Black Box," by Rabbi Fyvel Shuster

## SOURCE GUIDE: WILLING NOT TO WILL

Does Hashem ever remove a person's free will? The discussions about this topic usually center on Hashem "hardening Pharaoh's heart" during the Ten Plagues. But the author of the Meshech Chochmah (Harav Meir Simchah of Dvinsk, זצ"ל, 1843–1926), in his introduction to the Book of Shemot, brings out another important instance of Hashem removing a person's free will. It has important ramifications for properly understanding one of the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith. This source guide is based on that passage in the Meshech Chochmah.

### A. Moshe Rabbeinu vs. Other Prophets

His starting point (setting the stage for his question – see below) is the contrast between our belief in the truthfulness of Moshe's prophecy as opposed to that of the other prophets (based on the Rambam's Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah 7:7):

<p><b>1. Meshech Chochmah Introduction to the Book of Shemot</b>          Moshe's prophecy is above the level of all of the rest of the prophets' prophecy. For [our trust in] all of their prophecies are based on [miraculous] signs and wonders. Anyone who believes based on signs is left with some doubt in his mind. This is also the case for a prophet whose prophecy was verified by an established prophet, like Elisha was verified by Elishu. [And even though there might be room for doubt] the Torah said to trust the prophet who shows signs and wonders similar to the way the Torah said to believe witnesses [in a court case] even though it is not necessary that they will always testify the truth.</p>	<p><b>משך חכמה הקדמה לספר שמות</b>          נבואת משה הוא למעלה מנבואת כל הנביאים. שנבואת כולם הוא עפ"י אות ומופת. וכל המאמין באותות יש בלבו דופי – או שמוסמך עפ"י נביא מוחזק לנביא כמו אלישע ע"י אליהו. רק שהתורה אמרה להאמין לנביא שמראה אות ומופת כמו שצותה להאמין לעדים אעפ"י שאינו מן ההכרח שתמיד יעידו אמת.</p>
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One of the other prophets might initially show signs of true prophecy but later prophecy falsely:

<p><b>2. Meshech Chochmah Introduction to the Book of Shemot</b>          And Chananyah son of Azur is a proof, for he began as a true prophet and in the end became a false prophet – as the Sages said in the chapter "Hanechnakin" (Sanhedrin 89a).</p>	<p><b>משך חכמה הקדמה לספר שמות</b>          ורחניה בן עזור יוכיח שהיה נביא אמת ולסוף נעשה נביא שקר כמו שאמרו פרק הנחנקין (סנהדרין פט.).</p>
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Not only was Moshe's prophecy of a higher order than that of other prophets (in Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah 7:6 the Rambam lists four ways Moshe's prophecy was superior), but our belief in the truthfulness of Moshe's prophecy was also different than that of all the other prophets:

<p><b>3. Meshech Chochmah Introduction to the Book of Shemot</b>          This is not the case for Moshe Rabbeinu. For all of Israel heard that the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke to Moshe "face-to-face." And all of them reached the level of prophecy and saw how the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke with him. Therefore He said, "Behold I will come to you in the thick of the cloud so the nation should hear ... and they will also trust you (your prophecy) forever" (Shemot 19:9). For as long as they trusted [in Moshe] because of the signs he did in Egypt it could easily be negated by another prophet who would [also] show signs and wonders. This is not the case now [at Mount Sinai]. For even if a thousand ten thousands of prophets would come with signs and wonders saying in Hashem's Name to change even one "point on the edge of the Yud" of Torat Moshe we would not listen to them. It would also be a mitzvah to put them to death, since we are ourselves witnesses to Moshe's prophecy. This is what is meant by "and</p>	<p><b>משך חכמה הקדמה לספר שמות</b>          לא כן משה רבינו. שכל ישראל שמעו שהקב"ה מדבר למשה פנים אל פנים וכולם הגיעו למעלת הנבואה וראו איך הקב"ה מדבר עמו. לכן אמר "הנני בא אליך בעב הענן בעבור ישמע כו' וגם כך יאמינו לעולם" (שמות יט:ט). שכל זמן שהאמינו מצד האותות כמו במצרים היה קל הביטול ע"י נביא אחר שיראה אותות ומופתים. לא כן עכשיו אף אם יבואו אלף רבבות נביאים באותות ומופתים לאמר בשם ד' לשנות קוצו של יו"ד מתורת משה לא נשמע לו. ומצוה להמיתם כדין נביאי שקר, כיון שעל נבואת משה אנו עדים בעצמינו. וזה שאמר "וגם כך יאמינו לעולם." ודו"ק בכל דברי רבינו בהלכות יסודי התורה פרק ז' וח' כי כל דבריו קדושים וברוח נבואה אמרן בלי ספק.</p>
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they will also trust you (your prophecy) forever.” Look carefully into all of the words of our Rabbi (the Rambam) in the 7th and 8th chapters of Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah, for all of his words are holy and he undoubtedly said them with the spirit of prophecy.

### B. Trust Moshe Rabbeinu Forever?

This raises a serious difficulty:

**4. Meshech Chochmah Introduction to the Book of Shemot**  
 If so, how did Hashem command that they should trust Moshe (his prophecy) forever? Don't we say "Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven" (Berachot 33b – that man has free will to do good or evil) and that G-d's knowledge of future actions does not impinge on man's free choice? If so, maybe Moshe will, afterwards (after giving the Torah on Mount Sinai) – G-d forbid – add something of his own (against his previous prophecy).

**משך חכמה הקדמה לספר שמות**  
 וא"כ איך צוה השם שיאמינו לעולם במשה הא "הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים" (ברכות לג:)? ואין הידיעה מכרחת הבהירה ושמא יבחר משה אחר זה חלילה להוסיף מדעתו?

Didn't Moshe have free will? If so, how could Hashem say that Israel will and must trust in Moshe's prophecy forever? Wasn't Moshe open to later in his life saying (G-d forbid) false prophecy? Rav Meir Simchah answers:

**5. Meshech Chochmah Introduction to the Book of Shemot**  
 We are forced to say that Hashem, may He be blessed, **completely removed Moshe's free will** and he remained bound to act, as the angels are.

**משך חכמה הקדמה לספר שמות**  
 ועל כרחין שהשי"ת שלל ממנו הבהירה לגמרי ונשאר מוכרח כמלאכים.

He elaborates: Even though mankind's free will is his advantage over the rest of creation, including the angels, Moshe Rabbeinu so successfully exercised his free will for good, spirituality, and purity, that he merited entering an angelic state. Hashem removed his free will and Moshe reached the human ideal:

**6. Meshech Chochmah Introduction to the Book of Shemot**  
 This is the main goal of creation, to purify physicality until the flesh becomes spiritual and a vessel for a vision of the glory of G-d, as it is written, "From my flesh I will see G-d" (Iyov 19:26).

**משך חכמה הקדמה לספר שמות**  
 זה עיקר תכלית הבריאה לזכך החומר עד שישוב בשרו גם לרוחני ולכלי חזיון בכבוד אלקים וכמו שכתוב, ומבשרי אחזה אלקה, (איוב יט:כו).

## GROUND ZERO AND THE BLACK BOX BY RABBI FYVEL SHUSTER

Remembering the Exodus from Egypt is an all-pervasive mitzvah: we are obligated to do it twice a day in Shema; Pesach night is devoted to it; every time we say Kiddush we add "זכר ליציאת מצרים" – evoking the memory of the Exodus from Egypt"; and the same theme appears in a number of other mitzvos and prayers. Why do we have such a tremendous obligation to remember Yetzias Mitzrayim? It doesn't look like any Jew would forget the simple facts of Yetzias Mitzrayim. We were enslaved in Mitzrayim and Hashem took us out. There must be more to remembering Yetzias Mitzrayim.

The answer we find in many of the sifrei Chassidus and other sifrei avodah is that all of us constantly go through the process of going down to and coming out of Mitzrayim. The word מצרים comes from the word מצר, meaning a constricted place. We go into dark personal and national exiles and need to find the ways to get out. We must know that the Holy One, blessed be He, can and will take us out. We can learn about our personal struggles by examining what happened in Yetzias Mitzrayim.

The story of Yetzias Mitzrayim is two-fold; it is both physical and spiritual. The story of Yetzias Mitzrayim is the story of kedushah, holiness, going into the world of tumah, impurity. It tells how the our ancestors, the holy Yaakov Avinu and his descendants, went into the most impure place on earth, Mitzrayim, whose leader, Pharaoh, represented all that is negative in the world. We went to a place that grates against everything we stand for and

almost lost our identity. We got to the point where we almost had no independent existence. Physically, we were almost totally ruled over by others. And spiritually, we descended to what Chazal refer to as the 49th of the **מ"ט שערי טומאה**, the 49 gates of impurity. That is the lowest point a person can go and still spiritually exist. Entirely enveloped in Mitzrayim we were at Ground Zero of the Jewish People.

The fact that the Jewish People started that way and Hakadosh Baruch Hu took us out teaches us some very important things that every Jew needs to know every day. The following is based on a passage in the Sfas Emes (authored by Harav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, **דצ"ל**, the Gerrer Rebbe, 1847-1905) on Shemos (5640).

Through Yetzias Mitzrayim we discover what a Jew still has when he is at a Jewish person's Ground Zero. The Jewish soul has a certain baseline. There is a Black Box inside all of us that will always survive. There is a **נקודה פנימית**, a central point inside the Jewish soul – a point of purity and connection to Hashem – that is never corrupted. It is alive and activated. It may be covered over. It may be hidden, but it is inside of every Jew. Remembering the Exodus from Egypt means internalizing this truth about the Jewish soul.

While the Jews were in exile in Mitzrayim, even Moshe Rabbeinu, historically the Jewish People's greatest defender, did not yet recognize Israel's true level. When Israel was in Mitzrayim and Hashem asked Moshe to lead them out, Moshe expressed his doubts about whether the People of Israel was worthy of redemption. Moshe asked, "With what merit can they come out of Mitzrayim?" Hashem gave Moshe a sign: "**תעבדון את האלקים** – על ההר הזה – You will serve G-d on this mountain" (Shemos 3:12). Hashem told Moshe: Even though Israel is now almost indistinct from Mitzrayim, and even though they are now on the 49th level of impurity, you will see that 49 days after the Exodus they will do the most significant spiritual action since the creation of the world, receiving the Torah. Each and every one of them will say "**נעשה ונשמע** – We will do and we will listen [to Hashem's Word]" (Shemos 24:7). This is a sign that "**עומק לבם של בני ישראל לטוב** – the depth of the Jewish heart is good." You don't see it now because they're in Mitzrayim; they're covered over and have become absorbed in Mitzrayim. But immediately when they come out of Mitzrayim and they are free to be themselves you will see who these people really are.

We sometimes think that the world is a battle between good and evil and we are parve, neutral – and that if the forces of good win we'll be good and if the forces of evil win we'll be evil. That is also not true. Good and evil within the Jew are not evenly matched. The Jew is, in his essence, good. **עומק לבם של בני ישראל לטוב**. It can be covered over by forces that oppose us, but it can never be quenched; it can never be erased; and it is always there.

We must know this about ourselves and about every other Jew. No matter what we've done, we must know that deep inside we are good. We want good and we have the potential to do tremendous good. Yetzias Mitzrayim teaches us that even though we descended to the **מ"ט שערי טומאה** we still came out, merited the miracles of Yetzias Mitzrayim, and received the Torah. We have never gone too far and it is never too late. Yetzias Mitzrayim teaches that a Jew is someone who has within a Jewish neshamah that wants to do good and is capable of doing it.

### שבת שלום ומבורך

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The following digital Torah resources have been extremely helpful in researching and preparing the Shapell's Daf Keshet:  
DBS – Hataklitor Hatorani, Otzar Hachochmah, the Bar Ilan Responsa Project, Hebrewbooks.org, and the Tanach section of Chabad.org.

**We continue to pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.**