

ונתתי את־חן העם־הזה בעיני מצרים והיה כי תלכון לא תלכו ריקם <sup>כב</sup>ושאלה אשה משכנתה ומגרת ביתה כלי־כסף וכלי זהב ושמלת ושמתם על־בניכם ועל־בנותיכם ונצלתם את־מצרים (שמות 3:22)

דבר־נא באזני העם וישאלו איש מאת רעהו ואשה מאת רעותה כלי־כסף וכלי זהב (שמות 13:3)

Gd requested twice from Moses that he ask the Jewish people to request items of silver and gold and other valuables from the Egyptians upon their departure from Egypt.

The term שאלה throughout Tanach means to request or to demand something, not simply to borrow. When Gd tells Moses that a woman should request **from** her neighbors and a man should request **from** his friend, the connotation is to demand and take something from them. When the Torah discusses the laws of a borrower (פרשת משפטים) the term מעם (from with) is used. This connotes borrowing with an obligation to repay or return the item as the original owner retains his rights to the object. Apparently Gd's intent was the objects taken by the Jewish People should be given to them without reservation or expectation to return (מתנה גמורה, see Rashbam, (שמות 11:2)).

Why was it necessary for the Jewish People to demand these things? Would not simply departing from Egypt have been enough?

Why does the Torah use different nouns, neighbors and co-residents versus friends, to describe the Egyptians from whom the Jews were to request or ask for items prior to their departure?

Why bring 10 plagues on Egypt and Pharaoh? If the intent was to simply free the Jews from Egypt, Gd could easily have forced Pharaoh to allow the Jewish People to depart Egypt much more readily and quickly?

Jewish Law stipulates that a valid transaction requires an individual to act of his own free will. Monetary and other actions such as granting a divorce requires the consent of the individuals involved. In certain situations involving a recalcitrant individual, the Rabbinical Court uses the power of כופין אותו עד שיאמר רוצה אני, coerce the individual in question to conclude on his own that he should obey the legal requirements demanded by the court. Upon realizing this, he decides to act accordingly. Gd wanted Pharaoh to recognize on his own the need to send the

Jews out of Egypt and to comply with Gd's demands. Pharaoh ultimately complied of his own volition ויקרא למשה ולאהרן לילה ויאמר קומו צאו מתוך עמי גם-אתם "Arise and leave from among my people, also you and also all of the Jewish People" (12:31 שמות). However the question remains: why did Gd prolong their stay? Surely Pharaoh could have been made to realize this in a shorter interval.

Apparently, Gd wanted more than simply to convince Pharaoh to allow the Jewish People to leave Egypt. He wanted Pharaoh and the Egyptians to respect them as well. As long as they were slaves, Pharaoh thought of them as sub-human. Chazal say on the verse of "Who is YKV'K that I shall listen to him" (Shemos 5:2) that Pharaoh searched through his archives and did not find any mention of the ineffable name of the Gd of Israel. Chazal indicated that Pharaoh did not consider the Jewish People a bona fide nation and therefore he saw fit to enslave them. The 10 plagues were intended more to show Pharaoh that the Jewish People were not simply a ragtag group of Hebrews but rather a great nation. The plagues were not so much intended to punish Pharaoh and Egypt. As the Torah says ויאמר יהוה אל-משה עוד נגע אחד אביא על-פרעה ועל-מצרים אחרי-כן ישלח אתכם מזה כשלוהו כלה גרש יגרש אל-משה עוד נגע אחד אביא על-פרעה ועל-מצרים אחרי-כן ישלח אתכם מזה "And afterwards he shall send you out" (Shemos 11:1). It does not say I will take you out, rather Pharaoh will realize that you are a great nation and a significant entity and he will send you out.

Property ownership is an extremely important and fundamental right and principle in the Torah. This is best illustrated by the law that one may defend his home and property from clandestine thieves (בא במהחתר), and to protect them even to the point of taking the life of the thief. Property, material possessions, gives a man self-esteem and self-value. It also commands respect from others. A slave owns no property of his own, for whatever he acquires belongs to his master. Gd told Moses that "When you shall leave, you shall not leave empty handed" (Shemos 3:21). Had the Jewish People left Egypt without material possessions and wealth, they would have still been looked upon as slaves. Therefore Gd asked them to demand from the Egyptians items of value as payment for their years of service. These items were to be taken from their neighbors and house mates, for they were the ones who had taken away their property and self-dignity in the first place. (When the Jews were liberated from the concentration camps after the Second World War, some returned to their town of origin to retrieve their stolen property from the local town people who so eagerly appropriated it from them.)

"And I will give the favor of this people" etc. (ibid) The Egyptians will come to see you as a nation, a people with dignity and no longer look upon you as slaves. Some might have thought that the Egyptians chased the Jews out of Egypt because they had become lepers. The Torah tells us just the opposite: they left with tremendous self-respect and dignity. One aspect of this self-respect was their departure with great material wealth. To ensure the fulfillment of the promise of רכוש גדול, the Jews are commanded וּנְצַלְתֶּם אֶת מִצְרַיִם, (Shemos 3:22): Rashi says וּנְצַלְתֶּם is derived from the verb to save. That is to say that you shall save something for yourself when you leave: you shall salvage your dignity and earn great respect in the eyes of the Egyptians. As it says that Moses gained great respect in the eyes of the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh (Shemos 11:3).

Let us examine the difference in terminology between neighbors and co-residents in one verse and friends in the other. The Talmud teaches us that the term רַעֲהוֹ applies exclusively to a Jew. A Jew living in a more affluent Egyptian neighborhood would take more wealth from his neighbors than the Jew who lived in a less affluent area. Gd wanted the Jews to distribute the wealth more equitably. This was an act of חֶסֶד, kindness and charity, that united the people and demonstrated their sense of common destiny. Similarly, the Rambam writes (10:2 הלכות מתנות עניים) "would not a brother take pity on his brother". If Jews do not look after their own brothers and take pity on them, who will? The different terms in the different verses reflects

- 1) the desire that each Jew take possessions from their Egyptian neighbors, מִגֵּרָת, ביתה ומשכנתה, and
- 2) that they in turn should redistribute the wealth among their brethren and friends, רַעֲהוֹ, so all would enjoy equivalent wealth and foster comity among the Jews.

After the Jews left Egypt, Gd asked them to give up a part of their wealth to build a Tabernacle for Gd (ויקחו לי תרומה שמות 25:2). A slave finds it extremely difficult to willingly give away any of his possessions that he might have acquired or hidden away. To show that they were truly free men and women, the Jewish People had to demonstrate their willingness to give up some of their own wealth for a higher cause. They answered this call, particularly the women, who were most eager to donate and share their finest jewelry for the sake of building the Tabernacle. As it says that the women came forward with greater zeal than the men, (ויבואו האנשים על הנשים שמות 35:22).