

An Essay Concerning the Nullification of Noach's Curse

"A Servant of Servants Shall He Be to His Brothers"

The Question of Noach's Curse

Immediately after Noach emerged from the Ark, built his altar, and offered his sacrifices, our Holy Torah relates (Bereishis, Chapter 9):

"The sons of Noach who emerged from the Ark were Shem, Chom, and Yefes; and Chom was the father of Kena'an. These three were the sons of Noach, and from these the entire earth was populated. Noach, a man of the soil, began planting a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became intoxicated, and he uncovered himself inside his tent. Chom, the father of Kena'an, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. Shem and Yefes took a garment, placed it upon both their shoulders, walked backward, and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. Noach awoke from his wine and knew what his younger son had done to him. He said: 'Cursed is Kena'an; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.' And he said: 'Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Shem, and let Kena'an be a servant to them. May G-d grant beauty to Yefes, and may He dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Kena'an be a servant to them.'"

Here, for the first time, the Torah and Noach addressed the future organization of human civilization. It was as though the roles of Noach's sons in the world were now being divided. Kena'an was designated to become the servant of the other inhabitants of the world.

Now, from the time of the Flood, in the year 1656 from Creation, until approximately 180 years ago, around the year 5600 (1840 CE), Noach's curse continued to affect the descendants of Chom, who were enslaved to the peoples of the world.

This raises an extremely difficult question: Why did this curse cease to operate?

The question is not whether they had already suffered enough throughout all those years. Rather, if we are believing Jews, descendants of believers, and we see in our Holy Torah that Noach, a righteous man, cursed his son to become a servant, and that Hashem agreed to this curse and included it in His Holy Torah as something destined to be fulfilled—and indeed we saw it fulfilled throughout that long period—then, since the Eternal One of Israel does not lie, it would seemingly have been appropriate for the curse to continue. This is therefore a very great difficulty for believing Jews who contemplate all the words of Hashem and strive to understand their deeper meaning.

When this question is raised among learned people, the first answer generally offered is that these people are, in reality, still slaves. Their emancipation accomplished nothing, and, on the contrary, it brought harm to themselves and to the world, and so forth.

However, this is like confusing Kabbalah with the revealed Torah, or mixing homiletical interpretation, allusion, and Chassidic teaching into one undifferentiated whole. Such an approach blurs important distinctions. We are not discussing thousands of different spiritual interpretations. The Torah records Noach's curse: "A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers."

The straightforward understanding is the one presented by the Rambam, Rashi, and the great Torah authorities before the curse ceased to apply: actual, literal slavery. This institution has been abolished in the civilized world, and the question remains: Why?

To explain further, when the Torah commanded that a thief who lacks the means to repay his theft be sold into servitude, it did not mean that a Beis Din could fulfill its obligation merely by humiliating the thief or employing him for some symbolic service. Likewise, when the Torah promises that one who fulfills the mitzvah of tzitzis will merit thousands of servants, we do not consider some figurative form of servitude in a free person with a lowly spirit sufficient.

When the Torah promises wealth, we do not satisfy ourselves with some symbolic kind of wealth. And when the Torah promises that we will leave exile and return to Eretz Yisrael, we do not accept a merely symbolic fulfillment. Rather, we expect these promises to be fulfilled in their plain, literal sense. Sometimes there may be an equivalent substitute, but it must pass the test of genuinely being equivalent.

The same applies here. Kena'an was cursed to become an actual servant. Although the biblical commentators also explained that this curse included an inherent state of lowliness and degradation, nevertheless its simple meaning was actual slavery, not merely some abstract aspect of servitude.

Therefore, any thoughtful person who regards the words of the Living G-d as precious, believes that the Torah is eternal, contemplates its judgments, and deeply studies it in order to know Hashem and understand its secrets, should find this question profoundly troubling: How could Noach's curse, explicitly recorded in the Torah, cease to exist? It is an extraordinarily difficult question.

The true explanation, however, is at once very profound and remarkably simple. To understand it, we must examine the structure of human civilization in earlier times, extending until only the last few centuries.

The End of a Hierarchical World

Throughout the world, from the greatest king to the simplest person, human society operated through a system of masters and servants, rulers and subjects. At the top stood a mighty king who ruled over other kings. Beneath him were lesser kings subject to his authority. Under each king were ministers and officials, arranged in descending levels of power. Each higher official exercised authority over those beneath him, almost as a king would.

Below them were the rulers of cities and provinces. These officials possessed enormous power and could do practically whatever they wished with the inhabitants of their territories. They behaved almost like kings. Finally, within his own household, every man exercised authority over the members of his family in a manner resembling the control of a master over his servants. A wife occupied a position resembling that of a maidservant.

Such was the culture of the ancient world. Within this overall system there also existed literal slavery. But slavery was simply an extension of the broader social structure. There were many levels of mastery and subordination, and at each level one person exercised tremendous control over another. In many respects these relationships closely resembled that between a master and a slave. A person in authority could order the death of his subordinate and do whatever he wished to him.

When we consider the nullification of Noach's curse, "A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers," we must not view it as an isolated development concerning slaves alone. Rather, it was part of the abolition of the entire system in which one person ruled over another. It was part of the dismantling of the world's monarchical structure and, more particularly, the elimination of the idea that one human being is inherently superior to another. This is what we today call equality of rights, a principle that developed during the period known as the Emancipation.

For approximately 5,500 years, the world operated through a hierarchy of authority, beginning with kings and ending with slaves. Now, during the last two hundred years, as the world approaches the conclusion of its historical purpose, that entire structure has been—and continues to be—dismantled. For there is only one true King in the world. As the verse declares: "And Hashem shall be King over all the earth; on that day Hashem shall be One and His Name One." No person will exalt himself over another. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb," and "the lion shall eat straw like the ox."¹

We can now understand why Noach's curse was nullified. Noach's curse applied only within the historical era in which a worldwide system of servitude existed. In reality, the curse did not introduce an entirely new institution. Rather, because a system similar to slavery already existed throughout the world, there was a framework in which Noach's curse could take effect upon the descendants of Chom. As that broader system gradually disappeared, the framework within which the curse had operated—and which was necessary for its continued fulfillment—disappeared as well.

In fact, this understanding should inspire us to appreciate something remarkable. Noach's curse was fulfilled throughout all those generations. Such was the extraordinary power of this righteous man's words that his curse continued in full force for as long as the conditions necessary for its fulfillment existed. From this we can learn how much greater still was the power of our holy forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, through their prayers and merits.

The Connection to Shivas Tzion — the Return to Zion

1. The lion will remain a lion, and the ox will remain an ox; only the relationship of domination will disappear. Likewise, servants may exist in the future, but their servitude will be voluntary, motivated by a desire to become obligated in mitzvos, since converts will no longer be accepted, or for similar reasons. However, as long as the present system prevents the realization of the original ideal, it must first be dismantled and only afterward rebuilt according to its original purpose.

We can proceed to another important principle that emerges from this explanation. An especially valuable application concerns understanding the return to Zion in our times. Before examining the return to Zion, we must first understand the abolition of Noach's curse as part of the abolition of the world's general system of servitude. This development marks the beginning of the transformation described by Chazal: "There is no difference between this world and the days of Mashiach except subjugation to foreign kingdoms." It represents the second stage, following the earlier removal of restrictions upon knowledge during the Renaissance, when the first rays began to shine in preparation for the prophecy: "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of Hashem."²

Emancipation and the Return to Zion

Anyone who is astonished that the return to Zion in our times was brought about through people who did not believe in Torah is astonished because he fails to recognize that the entire world had already begun moving toward its ultimate purpose.

But one who recognizes that, for many generations, the structure of the world has been advancing toward its intended destination, and that the light of the future has already begun influencing the world in preparation for the great revelation, will understand that the world is being prepared to receive all the promised consolations and the ultimate purpose of Creation. From this perspective, there is nothing inherently surprising about the return to Zion. On the contrary, it is an entirely natural development within a worldwide process that began long before the modern movement for the return to Zion.

Those involved in the movement simply recognized and seized an opportunity within a process that was already unfolding. They boarded a train that was already moving toward the return to Zion. Everything had already been prepared. The historical conditions were naturally calling for such a development. Many of the necessary preparations had already been made before these individuals appeared, indeed before they had even conceived of such an idea. When they arrived, they found a world already prepared for this movement and took hold of the opportunity. They merely participated in a process that had begun many years earlier, and which would have continued even without their actions.

The Charedim, meanwhile, still retained deeply ingrained attitudes formed during the exile. Because they had distanced themselves so completely from the modern world—for good and legitimate reasons—they lacked the confidence and ability to take hold of these developments themselves.

2. It may not be unreasonable to add the date of the Emancipation, when equal rights were granted to Jews, to the dates that great Torah authorities have associated with the nullification of the Three Oaths. Because emancipation occurred gradually, in one country after another, it may be appropriate to associate this process with the agreement of the nations, expressed through the French declaration, to grant Eretz Yisrael to the Jews. Napoleon had already entertained such an idea. As explained, this was a natural consequence of the equal rights granted to other nations, each of which eventually received independent sovereignty.

Although we must still explain why events unfolded specifically in this manner, the main difficulty generally arises from the question of how such dramatic changes in the world could have been brought about by people who were religiously wicked. But with the preceding explanation, the difficulty is greatly reduced. The transformation of the world's structure had begun long before these individuals appeared. The entire world was already moving in this direction. This included the fact that the G-d-fearing had already begun certain aspects of this process before them. This matter deserves further explanation and expansion, with Hashem's help. Let us begin with the proposition that the abolition of slavery, the establishment of equal rights, and the Emancipation naturally paved the way for the return to Zion and the establishment of the State of Israel in Eretz Yisrael.³

In Shiurei Historia (Acharis HaYamim, page 21), Rav Yoel Schwartz writes:

"One of the great events of modern history was the French Revolution in the year 5549 (1789). This revolution proclaimed that all human beings possess equal rights, that they are not subject to the Church, nor to the king or the nobility, who lost the special privileges of their social standing. Every person is a citizen of his country, and all are equal without distinction of race or religion. From that time onward, monarchical government began to collapse throughout the world, eventually giving way to democratic government, which today is the principal form of government in most countries, unless power has been seized by a dictator. Several kings feared that the success of the revolution would threaten their own thrones. They therefore formed a military alliance and went to war against France. They were defeated by the French army led by Napoleon. Following his victory, Napoleon appointed himself ruler of France, granted equal rights to the Jews, and undertook military campaigns throughout Europe to spread the principles of the revolution to the other European countries."

The author refers the reader to the opinions of the great Torah authorities regarding these events. He continues:

"The Russian winter, which was particularly severe that year, ultimately defeated the French army. Nevertheless, despite Napoleon's defeat, the equal rights he had granted to Jews eventually led most civilized nations to follow France's example and grant Jews citizenship as well. This enabled the leaders of Zionism to come forward and demand Eretz Yisrael for the Jewish people, just as other nations previously ruled by the Ottoman Empire had achieved national independence, particularly in the Balkans."

Technology and the Rebuilding of Eretz Yisrael

Yet these developments alone were insufficient. Other major changes were absolutely necessary before a Jewish state could be established. Chief among them was the tremendous technological progress that occurred during that period. Without those advances, the establishment of a substantial Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael might have required several additional centuries.

3. This subject truly deserves an independent essay preceding the present one. However, I have elaborated here on the abolition of slavery because of the great difficulty presented by Noah's curse, through which, in my humble opinion, the underlying principle becomes particularly clear.

Concerning this progress in knowledge and technology, Rav Yaakov Lifshitz, the principal assistant and right-hand man of Rav Yitzchak Elchanan, wrote:

“Beginning with the year 5600 (1840), a new era commenced for our people, both materially and spiritually. Those who calculated the End of Days had already attached special significance to this year. This year had already been mentioned with extraordinary distinction, almost prophetically, in the Holy Zohar.”

He quotes the Zohar on Parshas Vayeira, concerning the verse “And Hashem remembered Sarah”:

“In the six-hundredth year of the sixth millennium, the gates of heavenly wisdom will open, together with the springs of wisdom below, and the world will prepare to enter the seventh millennium, just as a person prepares on the sixth day, as sunset approaches, to enter the seventh day.”

Rav Lifshitz continues:

“Indeed, most modern inventions began developing during that period. From the year 5600 onward, the vision of the Holy Zohar was fulfilled, that at that time the gates of wisdom would open. Railways and steamships began multiplying throughout the world. The development of matches, the telegraph, gas lighting, electricity, and later the telephone, phonograph, and the other inventions in every branch of technology, manufacturing, and knowledge—all these became widespread. The younger generation can hardly imagine how the world could once have functioned without them. Even in our own country, which at that time was in a primitive condition, the government began constructing the first stone-paved highway, known as a *chaussée*, from Petersburg to Warsaw. Many applied to it the verse, ‘Prepare, prepare the highway.’ To many people, the construction of this road seemed an extraordinary wonder: How could separate stones and earth be joined together into a continuous road?”

(Zichron Yaakov, Volume I, pages 84-86.)

Rav Yitzchak Tzvi Rivlin on the Rebuilding of Eretz Yisrael

In connection with technological progress and the rebuilding of Eretz Yisrael, there is a remarkable letter from Rav Yitzchak Tzvi Rivlin (around 1886), published by the well-known researcher Rav Yechiel Goldhaber. Because of its length, only selections are reproduced here.

“Our help is in the Name of Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth. Who is wise and will understand these things, discerning and will recognize them? For the ways of Hashem are straight; the righteous walk in them, while sinners stumble in them. When we now look and contemplate the condition of our people, our land, and our holy city, we behold astonishing wonders. For many years, the Beis HaMikdash has lain destroyed, and our cherished land has remained desolate. Yet in our generation, the spirit of Hashem has begun to stir within the camp of the Hebrews, and their faces have turned toward the desirable land. The city of G-d, until now bereaved and desolate, has begun to change its appearance. A large Jewish population now lives within it and in its surroundings. The new settlements rise upon the holy soil like precious stones in a crown. Every thoughtful person understands that these are truly the works of Hashem. Just as the morning star appears in the eastern sky, these developments announce to us that the dawn of our hope has begun breaking over the mountains of Israel. Soon the darkness of night will pass, the sun of our righteousness will shine upon the land, and those who hope in Hashem will renew their strength. They will go forth to bring salvation to our people and our land, preparing the highway and clearing the way for the return to Zion. For they will see eye to eye and believe that their salvation is drawing near. Hashem has created something new in the land, something not witnessed since our exile from our homeland.”

The letter then describes the hardships and oppression of the exile over more than a thousand years. It continues:

“Until, near the beginning of the seventh century of the sixth millennium, people began awakening and gathering. Those living in the northern lands stirred themselves to ascend, one by one, to Jerusalem, even at great personal risk. At their head were Torah giants who established the foundations for the return to Zion and laid the cornerstone for the restoration of Hashem’s people. With Hashem’s help, they multiplied and achieved great things, as our eyes now witness. Even though the first builders established these foundations through charity and assistance from their brethren in the Diaspora, the builders of our own generation have rejected that cornerstone. Yet the discerning observer understands that this very stone is the cornerstone, a precious foundation stone upon which the entire structure will be built.”

The Divine Hand Behind Historical Change

The letter continues:

“Upon this foundation, the entire House of Israel will rise and be elevated, from the foundations to the highest levels. Without this foundation, the Jewish settlement could never have been established properly. Without those elderly and physically weakened pioneers who went before the camp, there would now be no place for the younger, vigorous newcomers. One may ask: Why did such developments not occur in earlier generations? The answer is that the Almighty, great in counsel and mighty in deed, Who conceals Himself in His place of strength and governs His world with wisdom, stands behind all these events. He has brought everything about. Neither coincidence nor nature alone accomplished these things; rather, the hand of Hashem brought them about.”

The letter then addresses those who dismiss these developments as entirely natural:

“Even now, there remains room for those who err and harden their hearts. They observe all these events with cold indifference and see nothing remarkable. Considering themselves wise, they declare that these developments are no miracle. In former times, they argue, there were no steam locomotives, travelers endured enormous hardships, and steamships did not sail the seas. Terrible dangers threatened the roads, pirates controlled the seas, and many people were captured and sold into slavery. Traveling was so difficult and exhausting that a journey sometimes lasted an entire year. Today, however, a person can travel from his home to the coast by steam railway in a day or two, and then continue by steamship, reaching his destination in approximately two weeks without danger or harm. The present era is entirely different from the past. Even the farthest corners of the earth are no longer distant, and the whole world has become like a single interconnected city.”

But these people fail to realize that their argument is equivalent to claiming that the flowers of the field grow not through the power of Hashem, but only because rain causes them to grow. Do they not understand Who sends rain upon the earth? The new machines and inventions are indeed the practical instruments through which these developments occur. But why were these sources of knowledge hidden and inaccessible until this particular period? Surely this, too, demonstrates the hand of Hashem.

The letter concludes:

“Now that we see with our own eyes that the present era is unlike previous generations, our Holy Land will no longer accommodate merely a small group of people arriving to spend their remaining years here and find a burial place.”

At this point, a section of the original letter is torn and missing. The surviving text continues:

“Rather, our land will begin shaking off its dust and gathering its children into its embrace—vigorous young people with strength in their bodies. The desolate land will be cultivated and prepared to become like the Garden of Hashem.”

Thus concludes this remarkable letter.

The Role of the Zionist Movement

All these developments occurred many years before the appearance of the Zionist movement. The Zionists did not initiate these fundamental changes. They did not create the transformation. Rather, they came and utilized developments that Hashem had already arranged through natural processes in preparation for the return to Zion. These preparations existed before the idea had even entered their minds.

Even without their activities, the rebuilding of Eretz Yisrael would naturally have continued developing, ultimately reaching the establishment of the State of Israel. Hashem has revealed His will to us through His actions. His deeds are themselves expressions of His word, as the verse declares:

“The heavens declare the glory of G-d, and the firmament proclaims the work of His hands. Day after day pours forth speech, and night after night conveys knowledge. There is no speech and there are no words; their voice is not heard. Yet their line goes out throughout the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” (Tehillim 19)

Now we wish, with Hashem's help, to examine the Divine conduct underlying these developments more deeply.

Two Systems Governing the World

There are two systems in the world. There is the universal system governing humanity as a whole, and there is the particular system governing the Jewish people. There is the system of the seventy nations and the system of the Chosen People.

There is the system described by the verse, "Everyone who is called by My Name, whom I created for My glory," and there is the system expressed by Chazal's teaching that the world was created for the sake of Israel, who are called Reishis—the beginning. There is a natural order and a miraculous order. There is the system of the Ten Divine Statements of Creation through which the world was created, and there is the system of the Ten Commandments. See the Pachad Yitzchak, where this distinction is discussed at length.

One who studies world history and observes how the entire world is progressing toward its ultimate purpose will recognize that the principal system currently operating is the universal system of the Ten Divine Statements of Creation—the natural order of Creation.

Israel's Revival Within the Universal Order

The progress of the world, including the advancement of the Jewish people in their own land, is taking place primarily within this universal system. Throughout history, even during the long exile, the Jewish people were recognized as possessing exceptional wisdom among the nations. Because of the exile, however, this distinction was generally visible through outstanding individuals rather than through the nation as a whole.

Now that the Jewish people have returned to their land, their abilities are developing and becoming increasingly apparent, both materially and spiritually. All this is taking place within their natural capacities. As the Chosen People, their essential character has never disappeared. Now that they dwell in their land, their natural powers are awakening and flourishing. Nevertheless, this remains part of the universal system shared with the seventy nations.

The Rebuilding of Israel in the Context of World History

From the perspective of contemporary events alone, the rebuilding of Eretz Yisrael is not so extraordinary. Of course, from a much broader historical perspective, it is an even greater miracle than the Exodus from Egypt, as the Yaavetz states.

But when viewed only in the context of developments in the modern world, many nations have experienced similar material transformations. Numerous "new" nations have risen in places that were previously desolate or devastated. One who examines the Arab countries as they existed one or two hundred years ago will find vast, barren deserts. Today, many of those places have been transformed into magnificent and wealthy countries. Enormous oil reserves and other natural resources were discovered, and these countries rose to positions of great importance in the world.

Indeed, the entire world has undergone an extraordinary transformation. If earlier generations could return to life and see the world as it appears today, they might recite the words of the prophet: “For as the new heavens and the new earth...” (Yeshayahu 66:22)

There is, however, one essential difference between Israel and the other nations. Among the nations, new peoples and states have arisen, while many ancient nations disappeared from history. With Israel, by contrast, an ancient nation has returned to life. It is a resurrection of the dry bones.

After centuries during which the yeshivos of Bavel wandered through the lands of exile, gradually preparing the road back to the land from which they had been exiled, the Torah itself is returning to its original home. As the Chazon Ish expressed in his well-known and remarkable words:

“This Torah, which is now returning from the desolate wilderness of the Western lands to the desirable land, the Holy Land given to our forefathers as an eternal inheritance, where it found its dwelling when it came from Sinai to illuminate Israel with its rays of light.”

Nevertheless, we are still waiting for the elevation of the righteous, the elevation of Israel, and the elevation of the Shechinah through the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Chazal teach: “And where is their honor elevated? In Jerusalem, as it says: ‘Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; may those who love you prosper.’” This blessing also includes the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash, as Rashi explains. See Tehillim 122:3 and Rashi there.

The Reversal of the Historical Order

The progress taking place during the last few centuries follows the opposite order from the one that existed when the Jewish people originally entered Eretz Yisrael. At that time, the primary task was to establish the system of the Ten Commandments—the particular spiritual system of the Jewish people.

Only afterward, gradually, did the light of holiness radiate outward from the resting place of the Shechinah. First this occurred through the Mishkan and later through the Beis HaMikdash. During the reign of Shlomo HaMelech, the broader structure of the world reached a state of correction.

But now Hashem is conducting events in the opposite order. First, Hashem is preparing and correcting the world at large. Because this improvement does not yet emerge from the revelation of the Shechinah in the Holy Place, it is presently limited to the external framework. Once the external vessel has been repaired, the Shechinah will again rest in the place of the Beis HaMikdash, and the entire world will be elevated together with it.

This also explains more fully why Hashem did not prevent those who failed to observe Torah and mitzvos from playing the principal role in establishing and rebuilding the Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael. Within the system of the Ten Divine Statements of Creation, the Jewish people appear as part of the broader system of the seventy nations. Their unique spiritual identity, expressed in the verse “A nation that dwells alone,” is not yet the dominant feature of this stage.

In this context, the principle applies: “See the difference between My children and the children of My father-in-law.” Even the sinners of Israel are filled with mitzvos like a pomegranate (Chagigah 27a). Similarly, Chazal interpret the verse concerning the fragrance of his garments as referring to the fragrance of those who have betrayed Him (Sanhedrin 37a). Chazal also contrast the sinners of Israel with the prophets of the nations who worship idols (Gittin 57a).

Already in the year 5673 (1913), during the famous rabbinic journey among the secular Jewish settlements before the First World War, the great Torah authorities publicly expressed the understanding that, despite the secular attitudes of some of the settlers, the deeper aspirations of the Jewish people remained connected to Torah.

Freedom and the Future Redemption

They wrote that the ideal aspiration of most inhabitants of the settlement was to see the life of future generations continue developing in strength according to the spirit of their forefathers, adorned with Torah and mitzvos, in accordance with the religion of Moshe and the religious traditions of Israel.

They further stated:

“The religious inclination of the Jewish public was always present on our side. Were it not for the opposing external influence, which always originated with particular individuals, all the various expressions and manifestations of opinion would have conformed in character and appearance to the inner agreement of faith in the heart, with a genuine desire to elevate the honor of Torah and strengthen religion.”

Consequently, there is no basis for raising the accusation against these individuals: Why should they merit such an accomplishment? After all, many lowly nations have arisen and been reborn. If so, why should these individuals, who are more refined than those nations, not also merit such success? ⁴

Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch on Human Freedom

We shall conclude with the words of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch in his commentary on the Haggadah of Pesach, discussing the second cup. He writes:

4. Perhaps Hashem was not concerned that certain individuals would depart from the path of Torah because there was a broader national calculation involved. We find a similar principle regarding the promise of the continued existence of the Jewish nation. The great Torah authorities have explained that this promise was not necessarily made to every individual, but to the nation as a whole. Similarly, when the time arrives for the world to approach its ultimate correction, Hashem does not necessarily prevent every individual from stumbling. Concerning such circumstances, the verse states: “The righteous shall walk in them, but sinners shall stumble in them.” And Chazal express the principle: Should My world be destroyed because of these individuals? The Torah also records Hashem’s declaration, “Let us make man.” From our own perspective, we must certainly do everything within our power to prevent any individual from declining spiritually. This is why the great Torah authorities were distressed by emancipation and various other developments. But from the Divine perspective: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways.”

"At the great festive gathering, Jews everywhere dedicate the cup to the One Who delivered them from slavery. But far beyond the borders of Israel, the song of gratitude will be heard from all free people throughout the world. All who thirst for liberty, all who struggle for freedom and seek human dignity, will join the blessing of Israel and participate in the joy of its song. For at the moment when the freedom of Israel was born, their freedom was also born. Those who departed Egypt restored to humanity an awareness that had been lost from its heart: that all people have one Father, that they possess equal rights, that all were created in the image of G-d, and that all are children of the Almighty. From those who left Egypt, humanity received the Book that affirms the rights of every human being, that proclaims and establishes human freedom and the Divine dignity of every soul. Now a new light is shining in the thoughts of mankind and in the hearts of leaders and nations. A sincere recognition is gradually emerging that denying the rights of even the poorest individual undermines the foundations of public peace. Humanity is coming to understand that there can be no hope and no salvation for human society without freedom and independence for all its members. Society awaits the redemption of the future. Its eyes look forward to the days when the Father in Heaven will bless all His children, when all will unite as one community, and dwell upon the earth in freedom and peace. Indeed, faith in future redemption is what raises mankind to its full stature and provides the vision for its aspirations and reflections. But those who departed Egypt were the ones who brought these thoughts, ideas, and hopes to humanity. They advanced before humanity with courage and unwavering faith. The Torah and history of those who departed Egypt provide an equal foundation for the hopes and expectations of the Black slave on the plantation and the European thinker in his academic chair."

Appendix — Additional Notes on the Curses in the Torah

I found the following written under the title “A Summary of the Curses in the Torah.”

A. “By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread”; “Cursed is the ground because of you”; “In hardship you shall eat of it.”

Today, bread has become extremely inexpensive. A portion of bread for one meal costs no more than approximately two shekels per person. If the minimum wage is approximately 35 shekels per hour, that means eight minutes of daily labor is sufficient to provide bread for two meals and dessert.

How many Charedi Jews actually work hard merely to provide for themselves? If they only had to support themselves, they could live quite comfortably with far less work. Most people work hard and experience financial pressure because they must support their wives and children. This constitutes an exceptionally worthy form of kindness and charity. For someone whose substantial portion of his earnings goes toward tuition, as commonly occurs outside Eretz Yisrael, there is also the mitzvah of supporting Torah study.

B. “In pain you shall give birth to children.”

Epidurals, anesthesia, Caesarean sections, and other advances in childbirth have greatly reduced the suffering traditionally associated with childbirth.

C. “And he shall rule over you.”

This situation has changed dramatically over the last generation. Women now possess equal rights, sometimes attain higher levels of education than men, and, in the Charedi community, may earn more than their husbands. Women also manage their households no less than their husbands do.

D. “Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for you, and you shall eat the grass of the field.”

This curse ceased in Noach’s time.

E. “And Kena’an shall be a servant to them.”

The legal institution of slavery has been abolished.

F. The Verse States

“And it shall be that just as you were a curse among the nations, O House of Judah and House of Israel, so shall I save you, and you shall become a blessing. Do not fear; let your hands be strong.”

But wait a moment. All these solutions and changes have come about specifically through human action, rather than through a complete reversal of the curse by the One Who originally pronounced it!

Naturally, none of this is intended to suggest changing any halachos or commandments that the Jewish people were instructed to observe on the basis of these curses. Nevertheless, reality demonstrates that the nature of the world has changed.⁵

5. I will also include the following remarks written by one of my friends. He writes: "I heard of a Black man who published an entire book in which he elaborated on the claim that the curse of 'a servant of servants' had never ended. On the contrary, he argued, their condition today is far worse than before, and the worst part is that they do not even realize it. He went on to explain how the United States Congress was a house of heretics for passing legislation to free slaves. Therefore, according to his argument, one must not vote for Congress. He insisted that the decree of servitude could never be abolished, that one must renew his acceptance of the yoke of slavery every day, and that one must fight with all one's strength against the wicked white people who seek to free them. In his view, such an act could not truly be called liberation. After five thousand years of slavery, could everything simply end because a few people declared it finished? Was that all? There had been no miracles! And who are we to believe ourselves worthy of receiving the curse of Chom? Do we consider ourselves to be on the same spiritual level as our earliest Black ancestors? Heaven forbid!" The friend concludes with the verse in Amos (9:7): "Are you not like the children of the Cushites to Me, O children of Israel? says Hashem. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and Aram from Kir?" And the author ends: Thus concludes his statement. Words of wisdom indeed—and those who understand will understand.