

# LEAVING EGYPT

*by Miriam Adahan*

*"Each and every day, every person is obligated to see himself as having personally left Egypt." (Talmud - Pesachim)*

Egypt -- in Hebrew, Mitzrayim -- literally means a "place of narrowness." It was a place where people were enthralled by flashy materialism, were fascinated with death, and were lacking in reverence for life. It was a society which believed that only those people in the most exalted positions were deserving of honor, and that they were justified in their arrogant disregard of and cruelty toward those who were beneath them. It was a place in which we lived in physical slavery and bondage. Within each of us there is also a spiritual Mitzrayim, from which we must extricate ourselves daily. This coming out of Mitzrayim is accomplished by breaking out of our narrow boundaries and demonstrating our reverence for God, for the Godliness within man, and for the lasting values of Torah. As we will see, this is a difficult transition.

Our Mitzrayim begins during childhood, in which our view of life is distorted by the limitations of our mental capabilities. For example, young children often perceive love in terms of how much they get, both emotionally and materially. In reality, mature love is based on a desire to give, not receive, as hinted at in the Hebrew word for love, ahavah, whose root means "give" (see Genesis 30:1).

Children also misunderstand the meaning of power. They think it means simply having control over others, not realizing that true power is the ability to master and control our own impulses (Talmud - Pirkei Avot 4:1).

Because children are dependent on others for their sense of worth and security, they try to control the people and events around them. Yet they often feel deprived and afraid, since they are dependent on people whom they cannot really control. They often blame others (usually their parents) for their unhappiness, and try to coerce them into giving them what they want by acting mad, sad, bad, sick or crazy. They scream, cry, beg, criticize, cling, sulk, act helpless, withdraw, complain, overfunction or underfunction, and use a whole arsenal of other tactics to manipulate their

parents into being and doing what they want -- because they think that the source of their own happiness lies with others.

Thus, children grow up alternating between what may be called a "Pharaoh-mode" and a "slave-mode" type of thinking. There are times when they feel enormously powerful, almost omnipotent, as they exercise their ability to manipulate their parents in order to get what they want. There are other times, though, when they feel inferior and powerless, like resentful slaves forced to submit to oppressive forces beyond their control.

In order to reach emotional maturity, a child must leave this Mitzrayim -- mentality. He must learn to look within himself for his sense of worth and joy, must develop tolerance and respect for his fellowmen, not just those at the top or those who agree with him, and must stop using manipulative control tactics to force others to change.

Many people never make the transition. They remain enslaved in a spiritual Mitzrayim, constantly condemning those who don't measure up or compulsively seeking approval to make themselves feel loved and successful, while feeling like losers deep inside. They alternate between an angry Pharaoh-mode (i.e. oppressing others in an attempt to feel superior) and a depressed slave-mode (i.e. allowing themselves to be oppressed and stifled, because they feel helpless, hopeless and inferior).

## **LOVE AND POWER**

What we choose to love, value and control determines whether or not we leave Mitzrayim. This transition requires that we:

- (1) recognize that all people deserve love and respect, regardless of their status or accomplishments, by virtue of having been created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27),
- (2) give up the attempt to control people out of a desire to feel worthwhile or powerful, and
- (3) rid ourselves of the winner-loser mentality which is based on an attachment to things which have no real value and which provide only an illusion of love and power.

Those who remain in a spiritual Mitzrayim can never be truly loving, because their love is conditional

and is restricted to those people who are in complete agreement with them and are exceptionally brilliant, wealthy or powerful. They can never be truly content because they are constantly running after external signs of love, status and success. Their view of people is epitomized by a kind of [totalitarian] mentality expressed in the belief that, "You deserve to live and be treated with respect only if you come from the 'right' family, have the right looks and agree with me."

Only by forming lasting bonds of love for God, man and Torah -- will one be able to bring oneself out of this darkness.

## THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

The transition from a materialistic value system to a spiritual one is not accomplished without great effort. This is why the concept of spiritual growth is often depicted as a journey in which one is painfully wrenched away from one's old attachments. For example, when Abraham was commanded to break his ties with his past, God said:

"Go away from your country, your kindred and your father's house to a land that I will show you."  
(Genesis 12:1)

A spiritual journey requires awareness and separation: To become aware of our Godly essence, we must separate from all that is false, in particular our selfish, personal desires. "Country," in Hebrew, is *aretz*, which hints at the word *ratzeh*, meaning "desire." [We must also separate from] our inborn tendencies to various extremes. "Kindred," in Hebrew, is *molad*, which denotes that which one was born with. And [we must also separate from] the erroneous beliefs which we acquired during our formative years -- i.e. in "our father's house".

To leave our childlike view of the world is as difficult -- and as joyous -- as the original Exodus. As we develop the wellspring of love, joy and faith from within ourselves, we free ourselves from our need for status and approval, from our illusory sense of ourselves as winners or failures, from our craving for material possessions, and [from] the need to control those around us.

---

*Reprinted from "LIVING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE (INCLUDING YOURSELF)"*

With permission of Feldheim Publishers

In Israel: POB 35002, Jersualem

In the USA: 200 Airport Executive Park, Spring Valley NY 10977

<http://www.feldheim.com>

Presented in cooperation with Heritage House, Jerusalem. Visit  
[www.innernet.org.il](http://www.innernet.org.il).