

CHAPTER 4: SHEMA YISROEL AND ITS BLESSINGS □

PARAGRAPH 9

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Your having fully accepted the yoke of G-d's Kingdom upon yourself in the first paragraph of "Shema Yisroel" would naturally lead you to accept the idea of serving the King Himself (known as "accepting the yoke of His mitzvot"). And that's exactly the thrust of the second paragraph of "Shema Yisroel" (Deuteronomy 11:13-21).

The *third* paragraph (Numbers 15:37-41) harkens us back to the idea of fulfilling G-d's will when it cites the mitzvah of wearing tzitzit (the tassels tied to the ends of certain garments), since we're told to "look at (our tzitzit) in order to remember all of G-d's mitzvot and to do them" (v. 39). Curiously enough, though, the third paragraph ends by citing the exodus from Egypt.

What has that to do with all we've learned so far about the profound role that "Shema Yisroel" plays in our lives? Well, it's cited because the exodus was not only a primal, momentous episode in our people's national and spiritual history, it also affects us to this very day, as we'll see. But we'll have to backtrack again to understand how that's so.

As we discussed early on, Adam and Eve's sin changed the fundamental architecture of the universe in that wrong gained a degree of power it hadn't had till then, and it was then able to stifle goodness (see 1:3:8). So it became necessary for there to be a group of people who'd dedicate their lives to G-d and the pursuit of goodness. As we learned, Abraham's family came to serve that function (see 2:4:3), but they weren't yet able to develop into a nation both because they were too few in number and because they hadn't yet achieved their spiritual potential.

And so they had to suffer the pangs of exile and subjugation in Egypt. For by undergoing that they came to be purified the way gold is by going through a smelter, to be fully-formed the way diamonds come to full luster when crushed into formation, and to be strengthened the way oaks are by having to withstand cruel winds.

There finally came a time when G-d manifested His will and presence over the Jews (who had become a nation by then in number, too) by fending off the evil that suffused Egypt then, and by purging the Jewish Nation of it.

G-d thus elevated our ancestors from their low spiritual state and drew them close to Him. And they were therefore permanently unshackled from evil (and from Egypt itself) and were able to function

as an entire nation that would be attached to G-d and exalted by Him. This came to be a permanent state of inner rectification which all the goodness we'll eventually earn is a consequence of.

That's why we're charged to remember the exodus each and every day, and to recount it. Since by doing that we fortify the rectification of the exodus process, intensify its illumination, and see to it that its benefits are transmitted to us this every day.

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