

GAINING CLARITY

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. Spiritual Genetics

There are three opinions stated in Tractate Nidarim concerning why the Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt for 210 years. All of these explanations involve some failing on the part of Avraham our Patriarch. One of the reasons for the Jewish bondage in Egypt was that Avraham inappropriately questioned Hashem when he was told, "Your children will inherit the Land of Israel..." Avraham asked Hashem, "How do I know that they will inherit it? (How will I know they will be worthy?)" Immediately following Avraham's question, the Torah tells us that Hashem said to him, "Your children will be strangers in a land that is not theirs..."

Another explanation offered by Chazal for the enslavement of the Jews is that Avraham interrupted the Torah study of his students in order to go to war to save Lot from captivity. A third reason mentioned in the Gemara for the exile was that Avraham missed the opportunity to convert a group of people to monotheism. After Avraham's victory over the four mightiest kings who had taken the Sodomites captive, the King of Sodom approached Avraham and said, "Give me the people and you take the possessions." Avraham's response to the King of Sodom was, "I will not take from you as much as a thread or a bootstrap." At this moment, Avraham had an opportunity (as the victor) to take the people of Sodom to convert them from paganism to monotheism, but he did not. Hashem said to Avraham, "Just as you have allowed these people to remain pagans, and not bring them under the Divine Presence your children in the future will be put in a position to exposed to paganism." (Measure for measure).

All of these reasons given for the enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt center on Avraham's failings and not on any of the shortcomings of our Patriarchs Yitzchak or Yaakov. One would think that the shortcomings of the other Patriarchs would have contributed to the Jewish exile in Egypt. Yet we see that only Avraham is singled out. Why should Avraham's decedents need to be punished for his failings? In addition, the Torah tells us that each person is culpable for his own sins- as it states in the verse, "Each person will be killed for his own sin..." Why should the Jewish people spend 210 years in Egypt to atone for Avraham's shortcomings?

The Gemara Tractate Yievamos tells us that the Jewish people possess certain unique characteristics such as shame, mercy, and the need to perform acts of kindness. All of these characteristics are part of the Jewish spiritual "gene pool" because they are inherited from Avraham.

Avraham was the progenitor of the spiritual "gene pool" of the Jewish people. He is the Founding Father and the root of all the generations that follow.

The principle stated in the Torah that "Each person will be killed for his own sin..." applies only to a situation that is relevant to a single individual. However, in the case of Avraham our Patriarch, who was the "root" and foundation of the Jewish people his level of purity was crucial and vital for the evolvment and development of the Jewish people until the end of time. If the root of a tree is diseased, this disease will impact on the growth and development of the tree and its fruit. Similarly, as a result of his failings, Avraham's impurity needed to be purged so that the Jewish people would be an eternal, spiritual people. Therefore the imperfection that was caused by Avraham needed to be rectified by our sojourn in Egypt for 210 years.

2. Activating the Attribute of Mercy

In this week's parsha, the Torah states, "This is the law of the olah-offering (the burnt offering)..." Rashi cites the Gemara, which explains that this verse is teaching us that the burning of the limbs and the fats of the offerings can even be done at night.

The Gemara states that the sacrificial process from the slaughtering of the animal to the sprinkling of the blood on the altar must be performed during the day. If the blood was received but was not yet sprinkled by sundown the offering is not valid. The Gemara states that atonement comes about only through the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice. Thus, if the blood was sprinkled during the day and subsequently the limbs and/or the fats of the sacrifice became contaminated or invalid, the person has fully atoned. This is because the sprinkling of the blood was done during the proper time period at a time when the limbs and fats were still qualified to be burnt. The fact that the limbs and fats became invalid after the sprinkling is not relevant to the person's atonement. The question is why does the atonement process that involves the blood of the sacrifice need to occur during the daytime?

The Torah refers to sacrifices as "Korban Lashem (Sacrifice to Hashem)" which means that the concept of sacrifice, which is a means of atonement, is only possible as a result of the Attribute of Mercy (Midas HaRachamim). Within the context of the Attribute of Justice, there is no forgiveness. Thus there is no place for sacrifices. The Attribute of Justice (Midas HaDin) dictates that when one sins he should be punished immediately.

The possibility of atonement can only take place during the daytime because the day is a time of Rachamim; however, night time is associated with Din (Judgment). For example, in the closing blessing of the Amidah (Sim Shalom) Hashem is referred to as Avi, Father, which is synonymous with Mercy. However the Amidah of the night concludes with the reference of Hashem as Adon (Master) which is synonymous with Judgement. The relationship between a Father and his child is one that reflects Mercy, while the relationship of Master and his servant is one of Justice. Therefore the blood ritual of the sacrifice, through which atonement is brought about, can only be sprinkled during the

daytime because it has relevance to the Midas HaRachamim (Attribute of Mercy).

The status of the prayer of the closing prayer of the evening (Tefilla Shal Arvis) is "Rishus" (non-obligatory) while the morning and afternoon prayers are obligatory. The Gemara explains that each one of the three silent prayers (Shmonei Esrei) that we recite correspond to the offerings brought in the Bais HaMikdash. Shachris (Morning Service) corresponds to the Tamid Shal Shachar (Morning Communal Offering), Mincha (Afternoon Prayer) corresponds to the Tamid Shal Bein Ha'Arbaayim (Communal offering of the afternoon), and the Arvis (Evening prayer) corresponds to the burning of the limbs and the fats of the offerings that took place at night. The night time was used for the burning of the limbs and fats only if they were not burnt during the day; however, if all of the limbs and fats of the daytime offerings were burned during the day then the altar would remain vacant during the night. However, the morning and afternoon communal offerings were always brought. Just as the burning of the limbs and fats was based on circumstance so too is the recitation of the Arvis. Why is the prayer service of the day obligatory and (relative to the morning services) the evening is not?

The answer is that without Midas HaRachamim one would not be able to withstand the Attribute of Justice. The Morning and Afternoon offerings, as the two daytime prayer services, are at a time when the Midas HaRachamim is in full effect in order to appeal to Hashem's Attribute of Mercy. The Gemara cites the verse in Prophets (Novie)," We will bring oxen with our lips..." which means when one recites the portion of a particular offering that is stated in the Torah (and has proper understanding of what he is saying) Hashem values that recitation to be the equivalent of the oxen (the sacrifice).

Since our prayers directly correspond to the communal offerings of the Bais HaMikdash, which are a means to draw on Midas HaRachamim, it is imperative that we pray with the appropriate level of concentration and intent to draw upon the Attribute of Mercy. This is especially in our times of difficulty so that we may merit the highest level of Mercy.

3. The Miracle of Free Choice

The Torah tells us that there had to be a fire continuous fire on the Altar (Mizbeiach) and it was forbidden to extinguish it. The Torah repeats the commandment to not extinguish the fire twice. Rashi cites Chazal who state that if one were to extinguish the fire one would be in violation of two Negative Commandments. Why is the Torah so adamant about not extinguishing the fire on the Mizbeiach? The Chinuch offers an explanation.

The Gemara says that during the First Temple Period (Bais HaMikdash) there was a heavenly fire on the Altar that consumed the offerings. This was in addition to the human fire that was brought every day. This heavenly fire was the same fire that consumed the offering that Aaron had brought when he began officiating (Parsha Shmini.) This fire signified the Shechina (the Divine Presence) entering into the Mishkan.

The Gemara in Tractate Zvachim tells us that when Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) inaugurated the Bais HaMikdash there were 25000 offerings that were brought in one day and the fires on the Mizbeiach consumed them all. It was not possible that an earthly fire could consume this number of offerings in such a short period of time and with that level of intensity. It was only possible because the fire was a heavenly one and therefore it was able to consume on a supernatural level.

There is a Positive Commandment to add firewood to the Altar a number of times on a daily basis in order for the fire to burn continuously. The man-made fire that was brought by the Kohen could be extinguished. However, the heavenly fire, because its origin was spiritual, could not be physically extinguished. The Chinuch explains that the reason why the Torah insisted that the fire on the Mizbeiach not be extinguished was to conceal the miracle of the heavenly fire that burnt continuously on the Altar. Because if one were to witness the heavenly fire (which was Hashem's Presence) in such an obvious manner one's power of free choice would be taken away. Since the purpose of man's existence is to maintain a state of free choice to enable mankind the opportunity to grow spiritually, then revealing Hashem's Presence through extinguishing the man-made fire would be contrary to that objective.

The Chinuch points out that we find similar circumstances at the Splitting of the Sea. The Torah tells us that before Hashem split the Sea, there was a strong Easterly wind that blew throughout the night, which concluded with the splitting of the Sea at daybreak. The Chinuch explains that the prelude of the Easterly wind that precedes the splitting of the Sea was necessary to maintain a state of free choice. If one was to choose to deny Hashem's involvement in the splitting of the Sea one could attribute this miracle to the natural phenomenon of the strong wind. If one chooses to be irrational, Hashem provides him with the setting to express that irrationality. This is for the sake of maintaining one's free choice.

The Mishna in Perkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) tells us that there were ten revealed miracles that could be witnessed every day in the First Basis HaMikdash. For example there was a tree that grew gold fruit. The question to ask, according to the Chinuch's explanation of not extinguishing the fire, is why did these revealed miracles not impact on our free choice? These miracles were even more revealed than the fire that burned on the Mizbeiach because all Jews witnessed these miracles; whereas the fire on the Mizbeiach was seen only by the Kohen (the Priest). The non-Kohen was not permitted to enter the sanctuary beyond the point of eleven cubits. Why should witnessing the fire have a greater impact than any of the other miracles vis-à-vis free choice?

When the Jewish people stood at Sinai and said "Naaseh V'nishma (we shall do and we shall listen)," regarding the Torah, Hashem brought heaven to earth and all Jews witnessed Hashem's presence in this existence. Why were we privileged to this level of revelation? The answer is that Klal Yisroel was at such a high level of spirituality when we said "Naaseh V'nishmah (we shall do and we shall listen)" which made us worthy of this special level of revelation. However, after the Sin of the Golden Calf (Chet HaAigil), Klal Yisroel was no longer worthy of being able to witness Hashem's presence, the

fire of Sinai. Therefore the extinguishing of the fire on the Altar was not an issue of witnessing a revealed miracle but rather it was not being at a spiritual level where we were worthy of witnessing the presence of Hashem.

After becoming unworthy as a result of the Chet HaAigle, Klal Yisroel was no longer able to directly witness Hashem's presence, but rather, the Mishkan had to be built to accommodate the Shechina. Thus the heavenly fire in the Mishkan was concealed not because it would undermine our free choice but rather because we were no longer worthy to witness it directly.

After the destruction of the First Bais HaMikdash, Klal Yisroel became even less worthy; therefore Hashem's presence was no longer there even in concealment. Because of our current spiritual level we no longer perceive revealed miracles nor do we see miracles in nature. We must therefore increase our Torah study and observance in order to merit perceiving Hashem within the state of concealment.

4. How to become Free

The Maharal in his work Givuras Hashem cites the Midrash which states that after Moshe had returned to Egypt as the Redeemer of Israel he performed a number of miracles before the Jews to establish himself as the agent of G-d. The Torah tells us that after Moshe performed the miracles, "Va Yaamain Haam (And the people believed)." The Midrash says that the moment the Jews believed the bondage ceased. The Egyptians were no longer able to subjugate the Jews after assuming their belief in Hashem.

The Maharal asks - what is the connection between the Jews believing in G-d and the immediate cessation of their bondage? The Maharal explains that a slave is a person who is completely affected and controlled by his master's wishes and whims at all times; while in contrast, according to Jewish Law an employee must have the right to terminate his relationship with the employer at any time he chooses so that he does not assume the posture of a slave.

As human beings we are controlled and bound by the influences of the world around us. For example, if the world-view was paganism and we allow ourselves to be subject to this world-view then we would be establishing ourselves as people who allow themselves to be influenced by others. Thus, such as person can be subject to slavery, which is a more extreme level of external influence. If, however, one goes against the grain of one's environment and does not allow himself to be subject to the influences and beliefs of the world he is establishing himself as a being that is not subject to external influence. Thus, he cannot be subject to bondage.

With this profound concept, we can understand why the moment the Jews believed that Moshe was the agent of G-d, the Omnipotent Power (The all encompassing Universal Being) despite the beliefs of their pagan masters, the Egyptians, they were no longer bound. Because of their newly assumed spiritual posture, not allowing themselves to be affected, they were able to rise above the physical constraints imposed upon them by their masters.

Although the Jewish people reject the paganistic beliefs of the world we are nevertheless subject to a great degree by outside influences. For example, we are concerned how people perceive us and how they will affect us. Rather than being unconcerned and not allowing this to deter us from living our lives as the Torah dictates.

The Gemara tells us that nothing can affect a person unless Hashem wants it to. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhen zt'l explains that if a person truly believes that nothing in this world can affect him unless it is the Will of Hashem, then he cannot be harmed by anyone because of this belief. If however a person endears himself to others in an attempt to gain favor in their eyes he establishes himself as a person who is subject to other influences. Thus he can be affected by other people's choices. This is similar to the concepts presented by the Maharal of Prague we had stated earlier.

Today we are living in very grave times in which Jews are being killed and maimed every day in Israel. Since World War II we have not seen such perilous times. How do we arouse the Attribute of Mercy of Hashem in order to protect us?

If we delude ourselves into thinking that we will be protected by our political allies or because of the superiority of the Israeli defense forces then we are relying on something other than Hashem to protect us. We are not of the belief that nothing can happen to us unless deems it so.

The Ramban says that the Jewish people always maintained a standing army not because the army itself was our only protection but rather because of the principle that we do not rely on miracles. We must take the initiative; however, the ultimate victory only comes about with the help of Hashem.

We will soon be sitting at the Seder, G-d Willing, and we will recount how in every generation our enemies rose up against us and tried to annihilate the Jewish people without success. Did our enemies fail to destroy us because of our armies or political allies? Have we survived history against all odds because of strategy or superior firepower? We survive because Hashem wills our survival. It is not enough to understand this conceptually- we must internalize this concept as our reality. The more we are able to internalize the fact that Hashem is our only ally and savior the more we will not be subject to the bondage and the constraints of the world.

With this we can now understand the Mishna in Tractate Sotah that speaks about the events surrounding the coming of Moshiach. The Mishna states that at the time just before Moshiach, arrogance and brazenness will be out of control - "The Young will not respect their elders and all we have is our Father in Heaven to rely on." The meaning of this is that when we realize that we can only rely on Hashem and no one else but Him, then our ultimate redemption will take place.

5. The True Meaning of Freedom

The Men of the High Assembly, who composed the text of all the various prayer services, chose the appropriate references for each of the festivals and holidays. For example, Pesach (Passover) is referred to in the Amidah (Silent Prayer) as Chag HaMatzos Zman Charusaiynu (The Festival of

Matzos the Time of our Freedom). The simple meaning of Zman Charusaiynu (the Time of Our Freedom) is that we were freed from our bondage in Egypt. But what is the meaning of "freedom"? and What was the purpose of this freedom? Was it not to be subject to a master? Or was it something of greater purpose?

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato in his work Derech Hashem (The Way of G-d) explains that despite the fact that Egypt was decimated as a result of the Ten Plagues that were brought upon them, the Jews were not free from the true bondage until we actually left Egypt. The Jewish people were so infected and permeated by the intense spiritual contamination of Egypt that in order for them to be relieved of that contamination it was necessary to be extracted by G-d from that location. While in Egypt the reality of spiritual growth was not relevant to the Jewish people. It was only as a result of the exodus from of Egypt that the spiritual cleansing and rehabilitation process could begin. When we refer to Zman Charusaiynu our rabbis were referring not only to our physical freedom but even more so to our spiritual freedom that gave us the capacity to appreciate spirituality. The leaving Egypt was the preparatory stage to allow us to approach Sinai.

The Ramchal says that if we have in mind when we recite (the third paragraph of the Shema) "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out from the land Egypt", we have in mind that Hashem gave us the capacity to appreciate spirituality then at that moment we will become more receptive and sensitive to spirituality.

Before the Jewish people left Egypt, they needed to fulfill the pre-requisites of circumcision and bringing the Korban Pesach (The Pascal Offering). Why was circumcision a pre-requisite to leaving Egypt? The Olalas Ephraim explains that when we remove the external covering orlah (covering) (the foreskin) through circumcision Hashem removes the internal covering on our hearts (Orlas HaLev). The internal covering on our heart does not allow us to have any capacity for spiritual growth, - we are totally blocked. This is why circumcision was a prerequisite to leaving Egypt and ultimately the receiving of the Torah at Sinai.

When we recount that Pesach is Zman Charusaiynu it does not mean that we are free to do as we please. Zman Charusaiynu means that this is a time when we have spiritual freedom and clarity to make the choice between good and evil. But if one does not have this sense of freedom then that person is not truly free. How does one become free and retain that freedom? Chazal tell that the only true free person is the one who engages in Torah study. Therefore during Pesach, the time of our freedom, we should understand and appreciate that we were not freed from Egypt simply to end our bondage but rather to receive the Torah at Sinai and attain true spiritual freedom.

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