

TO LOVE ME IS TO HATE ME

by Rabbi Dovid Green

In this weeks Parsha we learn of the reunion of Yaakov Avinu with his beloved son Yoseif. Yoseif had become elevated to a position of rulership second only to Pharaoh. When his brothers emigrated from the land of Canaan with their father, Yoseif knew that Pharaoh would call for them. He advised them how to answer Pharaoh who would ask them what their occupation was. What was his advise? He told them to say that they were herdsman. This would insure that they would be given the good grazing land of Goshen to live on. Good grazing land for herdsman? This sounds as if they were being given deferential treatment in their new host country. In actual fact the sons of Yaakov were being separated from the local population. They would be despised as herdsman since the Egyptians worshipped sheep as gods and would not consider using sheep as a commodity or a food. In what way then, was Yoseif's advise beneficial to his brothers?

Dr. Asher Wade tells a very interesting story which sheds light on our question. Dr. Wade's extensive Holocaust studies have made him a key lecturer at Yad V'shem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. He notes that he finds it intriguing to note the reactions many people have to his mode of dress which is that of a Chasidic Jew. In his story he describes how a young woman paused as she made her way past him. She looked at him with tremendous disdain and jadedly accused him saying "it's people like YOU who caused the Holocaust to happen". She based her statement on the premise that being different makes others hate you. That of course makes assimilation the best defense against antisemitism. He simply asked her in return, "tell me, where did the Nazi hatred start? In Eastern Europe where so many Jews were still strongly identifiable as Jews, or in Austria and Germany where the Jews were largely assimilated?" She stood there, taking a moment longer to think than she had the first time she spoke. She then quickly continued down the aisle saying "well, you just leave me alone and I'll do the same for you," which sounds very much like: "don't confuse me with the facts, I've made up my mind!"

We learn that when the time for the exodus from Egypt came, 210 years after Yaakov arrived, the Children of Israel had become barely recognizable as a separate nation. Slavery and oppression had taken its toll. The only aspects which had been retained to distinguish them from their Egyptian neighbors were their uniquely Jewish style of dress, their Hebrew language, and their continued use of Jewish names. All other aspects of Egyptian life, among them idol worship and the laxity in performing Bris Milah, circumcision, had slowly washed away their Jewish identity.

Though the family of Yaakov came to Egypt to escape the raging famine which was then

devastating Canaan and the surrounding area, the Egyptian society was not theirs. Through the advise to his brothers, Yoseif was actually insuring the continuity of all future Jewish generations until today.

If the original tiny settlement of 70 Jews had been welcomed and settled in the heart of Egyptian culture and norms from day one, how long would it have taken for them to have assimilated completely, disappearing as Jews altogether? Yoseif, with his foresight and caring for the future of G-d's nation, saw what steps to take and followed through. Yes, his family would be separate and distinct. Yes, they would be hated. They would also make it to the end of the Egyptian exile with the last vestiges of their identity intact, namely their Jewish names and mode of dress. The existence of a last tiny flame of Jewish identity insured that there was a nation left to be taken out of bondage. That tiny flame would later be ignited into a glorious torch through the giving of the Torah. It may have appeared at the time that Yoseif was the hater. In actuality he had expressed the greatest love through his seemingly strange advise. Without Yoseif having arranged that they would be distinct, they would surely have been loved...to death through assimilation!

May we also merit to arrive at the time of our redemption from exile with our identity intact. May we all assist eachother, with love, to attain that goal!

Good Shabbos!

We thank Mrs. Miriam Green for contributing this week's Dvar Torah.

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