

YESTERDAY - SLAVES, AND TODAY?

by Shlomo Katz

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Bo

The midrash relates a parable regarding a princess who was rummaging amongst the stalks in the

field in search of food until, one day, a king saw her and took her to his palace. Thereafter, the other women said to her in wonder, "Yesterday you were rummaging amongst the stalks, and today you are sitting in a royal carriage?!"

She replied, "Just as you are amazed, so we are amazed." Similarly, the midrash says, the nations of the world said to the Bnei Yisrael, "Yesterday you were slaves in Egypt and today you are the chosen people?!"

Bnei Yisrael replied, "Just as you are amazed, so I am amazed." R' Yedayah Ha'penini z"l (died 1315 - see page 4) explains this midrash as follows:

The amazement of the gentiles and of Bnei Yisrael was for different reasons. To the idolatrous nations who did not know Hashem and who attributed events to the stars or to nature, the ascent of Bnei Yisrael was truly beyond their understanding. A nation's rise from slavery, such a Bnei Yisrael experienced, was unnatural and unprecedented.

To Bnei Yisrael, who were aware of Hashem's abilities and who had learned from their ancestors that Hashem watches over Bnei Yisrael, the source of their amazement was different. Bnei Yisrael in Egypt were idolators, and they expected G-d to punish them for it. They were doubly amazed - not only did Hashem not punish them, He made them His chosen nation!

What is the answer to that which caused such wonder in Bnei Yisrael? R' Yedayah writes that Bnei Yisrael failed to realize that the Exodus took place in the merit of the Patriarchs and because of Hashem's promise to the Patriarchs. Bnei Yisrael themselves really did not deserve to be redeemed.

Also, while Bnei Yisrael did not merit the redemption at that moment, G-d had great plans for them. Hashem redeemed them from Egypt so they could be the means of revealing His Name in this world.

(Peirush Tehilim, Ch.21)

"Please speak in the ears of the people; Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels." (11:2)

The gemara (Berachot 9a) teaches: Why did Hashem say "Please"? He wanted Moshe to request of Bnei Yisrael to be sure to ask the Egyptians for gifts, lest Avraham Avinu say, "You did not keep Your promise that they would leave with great wealth." (See Bereishit 15:14)

R' Chaim Berlin z"l (died 1905) explains this as follows: Hashem told Avraham that Bnei Yisrael would leave Egypt with great wealth, but surely He did not mean material wealth. Why would a tzaddik

such as Avraham care whether his descendants had material wealth? Rather, Hashem meant the "riches" of good character.

Had Bnei Yisrael been so inclined, they could have helped themselves to the Egyptians' belongings during the plague of darkness. Therefore, Hashem said, "Please be sure that they **ask** for gifts, rather than taking on their own" [even though they were entitled to be paid for their hundreds of years of servitude]. Why? Because one who must ask will (hopefully) ask modestly and accept even a small gift. That is the type of good character trait that Hashem promised Avraham his descendants would have.

(Haggadah Shel Pesach Imrei Chaim, p.4)

"This month shall be for you the beginning of months . . ." (12:2)

[This verse refers to the mitzvah of kiddush ha'chodesh / sanctifying the new moon. When the Sanhedrin still existed, Jews did not have a written calendar. Rather, when two kosher witnesses saw the new moon, the Sanhedrin would sanctify it and declare the new month begun.] Rashi writes that Moshe had trouble understanding how big the moon must be for the new month to be sanctified, until Hashem showed him, "This month" - the moon should be like "this" when you sanctify it.

R' Velvel Soloveitchik z"l (The "Brisker Rav"; died 1959) asks: Is there a minimum shiur/size at which the moon can be sanctified? The halachah is that as soon as it can be seen, it may be sanctified!

He answers: That is the shiur - when the new moon is visible to the naked eye it may be sanctified. The gemara states that this occurs about six hours after the time which one would calculate mathematically to be the moment of the new moon. Earlier, however, even if it can be seen through a telescope, it cannot be sanctified.

(Chiddushei Ha'Griz)

"You shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Egypt'." (13:8)

Rashi comments: "'Because of this' - i.e., in order that I could keep the mitzvot such as Korban Pesach, matzah and maror."

R' Yerucham Halevi of Mir z"l (died 1936) taught: We are used to thinking that the purpose of the Exodus miracles was to ingrain in us belief in G-d and His greatness. Indeed, many verses support

this interpretation of events. However, Rashi is teaching us another aspect of the Exodus - the purpose of the Exodus miracles was to obligate us in the mitzvot associated with those events.

A similar interpretation is given by R' Yosef Yaavetz z"l (known as "The Chassid Yaavetz"; 1435-1507) in his commentary to the mishnah, "If there were no Torah, there would not be derech erez/the way of the world; If there were no derech erez, there would not be Torah." He explains: Derech erez means our daily activities such as planting, harvesting, lying down, getting up, building a house, eating, etc. Hashem created all of these activities only so that mitzvot could revolve around them.

We are used to thinking that because we have a father and mother, we have a mitzvah to honor them. This is not so; rather, because there is a mitzvah to honor our parents, Hashem "had" to give us parents. Similarly, Hashem told Moshe (Shmot 16:4) that Bnei Yisrael would be given the mahn "so that I can test them whether they will follow My teachings or not." The purpose of the mahn was not to feed Bnei Yisrael, it was to be an object with which mitzvot could be performed (for example, saying blessings).

(Yalkut Lekach Tov)

"An Astonishing Midrash"

"Hashem gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians and they loaned to them - so they emptied Egypt." (12:36) - "favor" refers to nothing other than ruach ha'kodesh/Divine inspiration.

At the time of the Exodus, Moshe commanded Bnei Yisrael to ask their Egyptian neighbors for gifts. As for Bnei Yisrael themselves, they would have been happy just to escape with their lives; they had no desire for gold and silver at that moment.