

WE ARE TODDLERS BEFORE HASHEM

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Today's Learning:

Pesachim 1:3-4

Orach Chaim 271:5-7

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 2

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nedarim 38

We read in this week's parashah that two of Aharon's sons died in the prime of their lives and on the day that should have been the happiest day of Aharon's life. What was their father's response? "And Aharon was silent" (10:3).

Naturally, writes R' Dov Meir Rubman (Rosh Yeshiva in Haifa; died 1967), we are amazed at Aharon's strength. Incredibly, though, the Midrash appears to belittle Aharon's silence by asking, "What might Aharon have said?" How are we to understand this?

The purpose of this Midrash, explains R' Rubman, is to drive home the foolishness of questioning Hashem. Why was Aharon silent? Because he understood very well that there was nothing to say. No matter how intelligent, how understanding, a person may be, his intelligence is nothing

compared to G-d's. As Kohelet (5:1) said, "For G-d is in the Heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." (Zichron Meir)

How can one train himself to accept G-d's Will? The Maggid of Warsaw suggested that we reflect on the following: It is obvious to any adult that a toddler cannot understand his parents' thoughts, actions, or plans. What we must realize is that we are but toddlers before Hashem. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Sha'arei Armon p. 145)

"I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me." (10:3)

R' Aharon Kotler (Lakewood Rosh Yeshiva; died 1962) writes: This is an illustration of an inadvertent Kiddush Hashem / sanctification of G-d's Name. Although Nadav and Avihu never intended to sanctify Hashem's Name by dying as they did, nevertheless, G-d's Name was sanctified when Bnei Yisrael witnessed His judgment at work. And, because Nadav and Avihu played a role in this Kiddush Hashem, even unwittingly, it is mentioned to their credit.

This idea answers a famous Pesach-question. The Gemara (Megillah 10b) says that Hashem would not permit the angels to sing a song of praise as the Egyptians were drowning in the Yam Suf / Red Sea. Yet, we know that Bnei Yisrael did sing. Why?

R' Kotler explains that there is a difference between the angels' song and Bnei Yisrael's song. Angels are called "Omdim" / "Those who stand," because angels can never grow spiritually. Thus, when they praise G-d, it is an honor to G-d, but it has no effect on the angels' own spiritual condition. In contrast, when man praises Hashem, man himself grows. G-d did not want to be honored for drowning the Egyptians, so He did not allow the angels to sing. However, when Bnei Yisrael sang, they honored Hashem and, at the very same time, grew spiritually by recognizing His great powers. And, the Egyptians themselves received credit in Heaven for aiding in Bnei Yisrael's growth because the Egyptians unwittingly played a role in that growth (just as Nadav and Avihu unwittingly caused a Kiddush Hashem). Since it was a benefit to the Egyptians themselves, Bnei Yisrael could sing. (Mishnat Aharon III p. 4)

"You are to sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy."
(11:44)

The Torah requires certain foods, e.g., terumah and sacrifices, to be eaten in a state of taharah / ritual purity. The Midrash Tanna D'vei Eliyahu states: from the above verse, Rabban Gamliel learned that, ideally, even food which the Torah does not require to be eaten in a state of taharah, nevertheless should be eaten in such a state ("Ochel chullin be'taharah").

R' Yaakov Zvi Mecklenburg z"l (East Prussia; 1785-1865) writes that in light of this stringency we can

understand another verse in our parashah. We read (11:8, regarding non-kosher animals), "You shall not eat of their flesh nor shall you touch their carcasses." It appears from this verse that one is prohibited from making himself tamei, i.e., bringing ritual impurity upon himself, by touching the carcass of an animal that was not "shechted" / ritually-slaughtered. In reality, however, there is no such prohibition year-round; rather, the Gemara says that this prohibition applies only on the festivals, when one is obligated to visit the Bet Hamikdash and will be precluded from doing so if he is tamei.

Why then is the pasuk phrased so generally? Because, answers R' Mecklenburg, the verse is alluding to Rabban Gamliel's stringency, i.e., that ideally a person should remain tahor / pure all of the time. (Ha'ketav Ve'hakabbalah)

Pesach

"The more that one relates about the Exodus, the more praiseworthy it is." (From the Pesach Haggadah) R' Avraham ben Ha'gra (died 1808; son of the Vilna Gaon) writes: the mitzvah of Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim / relating the story of the Exodus is virtually unique in that it has no upper limit. In contrast, most mitzvot are subject to the prohibition of "bal tosif" / "You shall not add." [For example, one may not keep nine days of Pesach or place an additional Torah-portion on the parchment in his tefilin.]

R' Avraham continues: the story in the Haggadah about Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah and his colleagues who sat all night speaking about the Exodus, until their students came and told them that the hour had arrived to recite the morning Shema, is meant to answer the first of the Four Questions - "Why on all nights may we eat chametz and matzah, and, on this night, only matzah?" How so?

The Zohar says that the purpose of the mitzvah to study Torah day and night ("You shall contemplate it day and night" - Yehoshua 1:8) is to destroy one's "chametz." What does this mean? Chametz is a metaphor for the Yetzer Hara, and the Gemara says, as if quoting Hashem, "I created the Yetzer Hara and I created the Torah as an antidote."

Thus, on all other nights, when a person has time to study Torah, he may eat chametz, for the Torah he studies will destroy the "chametz." However, on this night, one has no time for Torah study; one must occupy himself all night with the mitzvah of Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim. Therefore, one must not eat any chametz on this night.

How far does the obligation of Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim go? R' Avraham notes that the Sages' students did not say, "The time has come to pray," but rather, "The time has come to recite Shema." They knew that their teachers would stop their "story-telling" to recite Shema at the earliest possible time, because Shema also mentions the Exodus. However, they assumed that their teachers would not pray until the latest possible hour so that they could continue their Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim as

long as possible. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ge'ulat Avraham)

Why is even the wisest sage obligated to retell even the basics of the Exodus story every year? R' Nosson Zvi Finkel z"l (the "Alter of Slobodka"; died 1926) explains: No matter how wise one has become, no matter how old one is or how many times one retells the story, one still retains the incorrect images of the Exodus that he formed as a child. The story must be retold and retold until these images are uprooted. (Quoted in Haggadat Roshei Yeshivat Chevron p. 78)

A Pesach Parable

The mitzvah of Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim / relating the story of the Exodus requires more than just reading the story. One's recitation of the Haggadah must be from the heart and also must penetrate one's heart, so that the story of the Exodus will serve as the basis for strengthening one's emunah/faith. Indeed, R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (the "Alter of Kelm"; died 1898) used to observe that the statement in the Haggadah, "The more that one relates about the Exodus, the more praiseworthy it is," also can be translated, "The more that one relates about the Exodus, the more improved he is."

R' Yaakov Levitt z"l (Bialystok) illustrated with a parable the difference between the right way to tell the story of the Exodus and the wrong way:

A villager once took seriously ill. The doctor was called, and the doctor recognized that the villager's illness was fully curable if treated properly. He wrote out a prescription and he told the villager's wife, "Give your husband this prescription with water three times a day until it is finished, and he will be cured."

The family did as it was told. Every day, the simple village wife tore a small piece off the prescription, dissolved it in water and gave it to her husband to drink. Needless to say, his condition did not improve.

The doctor was called, but he was very perplexed. "I know that this prescription works," he said. "I have prescribed it for this illness before."

"Let me see the prescription," he requested finally. "Perhaps I made a mistake." The villager's wife explained, however, that she could not show him the prescription because she had given it to her husband as instructed.

"Fools," he shouted. "Can a piece of paper cure your husband's illness? It's not the paper that makes the difference, but what's written on the paper that would have cured him."

So it is with the Haggadah. It is not the book of the Haggadah nor simply reading the Haggadah which illuminates one's soul. Rather, one must absorb the contents of the story. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Sha'arei Armon p. 150)

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