

ALL ALONE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Metzorah

All Alone

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Sponsored by
Mr. and Mrs. Moshe Cohen,
in memory of his father
R' Chaim ben R' Zvi Hakohen a"h

The Katz family on the yahrzeits of
Chaya bat Yisroel Hakohen Katz a"h
and Yitzchak ben Yisroel Hakohen Katz a"h

Yitzchok and Barbie Lehmann Siegel
on the engagement of their son Jackie
to Bruria Neuburger of Teaneck, NJ

Today's Learning:
Terumot 4:13-5:1
O.C. 334:3-5
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Berachot 47
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shevuot 11

In this week's parashah (and last week's), we read that a metzora must leave the camp or city for seven (or more) days and sit alone. Chazal say that this is a punishment for the antisocial behavior of speaking lashon hara.

R' Yaakov Emden z"l (died 1776) points out the many benefits which man can attain only when he is part of society. Indeed, Chazal say, "Give me a friend or give me death," and the Torah says, "It is not good for man to be alone."

All alone, man could not obtain all of his physical needs, including proper food, drink, clothing, and shelter. A person also could not fulfill the Torah if he were alone. For example, he could not carry out the laws of property, the laws of marriage, and the laws of child-rearing.

A person who is all alone can never pray with a minyan or have his Torah questions resolved by scholars, and thus he can not properly practice a single one of the six pillars on which the world stands (as listed in Pirkei Avot): justice, truth, peace, Torah, prayer, and acts of kindness. Also, how can man emulate Hashem if he is all alone? For example, just as Hashem is merciful, man must be merciful to his fellow men.

Of course, there are times for being alone, but even in those times, man should not roam too far from home. To the contrary, man is capable of achieving the concentration that comes from solitude while he is surrounded by people. (Migdal Oz: Perek Aliyat Habedidut)

The Mishnah (Nega'im 2:5) states: "A person sees all nega'im-- tzara'at wounds--except his own." Literally, this means that a person, even a kohen, may not be the judge of whether he himself has tzara'at. Rather, he must go to another kohen.

Figuratively, however, this statement is frequently interpreted as referring to the fact that people are rarely objective about their own faults. A person sees everyone else's faults, but not his own.

If so, asks R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; Hungarian rabbi and rosh yeshiva), how can a person assess where he stands? The answer is found in another Mishnah: "One does not search [for chametz] by the light of the sun and by the light of the moon, but only by the light of a candle." Kabbalists and mussar works teach that chametz represents the yetzer hara. The strong "light of the sun" represents wealth, and the weak "light of the moon" represents lack of success. Wealth is not an accurate indicator that a person has conquered his yetzer hara and therefore Hashem is happy with him, and lack of success is not an indicator of the opposite. Only the "light of a candle," an allusion to the verse, "Ki ner mitzvah" / "A mitzvah is a candle," is an accurate indicator.

What does this mean? If a person wants to know where he stands in his service of Hashem, he should look at his attitude towards mitzvot. If he or she considers mitzvot to be a burden, then he or she has a long way to go. However, if a person enjoys performing mitzvot, then that person is on the right track.

(Haggadah Shel Pesach Chasdei David)

Pesach

Our Sages teach that if Bnei Yisrael had remained in Egypt a moment longer than they did, they

would have become mired in the "Fiftieth Gate of Tumah / Ritual Impurity," from which there is no escape.

R' Gedalia Schorr z"l (1911-1979; Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn) asks: What does it mean that there is no escape from the Fiftieth Gate of Tumah? Chazal's statement implies that even Hashem could not have removed them from there, but surely there is nothing that is impossible for Hashem to do!

R' Schorr explains: Hashem promised Avraham that his (Avraham's) descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land for 400 years and then redeemed. But not all of Avraham's descendants were enslaved in Egypt, only those who both carried Avraham's physical DNA and were his spiritual heirs. Had Bnei Yisrael sunk down to the fiftieth level of ritual impurity, the spiritual link with the Patriarchs would have been severed. Of course Hashem could still have saved them, but He would not have been saving the spiritual descendants of Avraham. Rather, it would have been a new people that He was taking out of Egypt. That could not be permitted to happen.

(Ohr Gedalyahu)

The leaders of the town of Radin complained to R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen (1839-1933; the Chafetz Chaim) that donations to the town's Ma'ot Chittim / Pesach charity fund were inadequate to feed the town's poor. The Chafetz Chaim acceded to the leaders' request that he address the townsfolk.

"I am an old man," the Chafetz Chaim said in his speech. "Soon I will be called to give an accounting in the World-to-Come, and, since I am an influential person in this town, I will be asked whether the people of my town of Radin gave generously to charity. I will then be faced with a dilemma. If I say that they did, I will be telling a lie, something I have never done. On the other hand, if I say that the people of Radin did not give generously, I will be speaking lashon hara, which I also have never done.

"There is only one solution to my dilemma - for each of you to give generously to the Ma'ot Chittim campaign."

(A Word of Wisdom, A Word of Wit)

Perhaps one of the most perplexing parts of the Haggadah is the song known as "Dayenu," in which we say that if G-d had taken us out of Egypt but had not judged the Egyptians, that would have been enough for us. Or, if He had judged the Egyptians, but had not destroyed their idols, that, too, would have been enough for us. Or, if He had destroyed their idols, but had not killed their firstborns, that, too, would have been enough. Or . . . What does this song mean?

R' Eliyahu Hakohen Ha'itamari z"l of Izmir (died 1729; the "Ba'al Shevet Hamussar") explains that for each of the Divine gifts or miracles listed in this song, one could make an argument that G-d should have acted otherwise. Our praise of G-d is that He considered all these arguments and acted in the way that was best for us and for the glory of His Name.

For example, one could argue that if G-d had taken us out of Egypt but had not judged the Egyptians so harshly as to practically destroy them, His name would have been magnified even more because the Egyptians would live to remember, and to tell others, how He had humbled them. On the other hand, one could argue that they would not feel humbled in that event. Rather, they would say, "He won this battle, and we will win the next battle."

G-d considered these arguments and decided to judge the Egyptians harshly. However, one could argue that if G-d had judged the Egyptians harshly but had not destroyed their idols, those idols would have served as constant reminders of G-d's power to anyone who saw them. On the other hand, some people would say that G-d was not strong enough to destroy the Egyptians' idols.

G-d considered these arguments and decided to destroy the Egyptians' idols. However, one could argue that if G-d had destroyed their idols, but had not killed their firstborns, then those firstborns would have had a special reason to tell others of G-d's greatness. It was customary at that time to devote one's firstborn to the service of the idol; with all the idols destroyed, the Egyptian firstborn, who were no longer performing that service, would be a testament to G-d's power. On the other hand, Pharaoh was a firstborn; if the firstborns had not been smitten, people would say that it was Pharaoh's merit or power which saved him and those like him.

G-d considered these arguments and decided to kill the firstborn. . .

(Minchat Eliyahu ch.32)

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