

FREE OF SPIRITUAL BONDS

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And I will remember for them the Covenant of the early ones, whom I took out from the Land of Egypt before the eyes of the nations to be their L-rd; I, HaShem." [26:45]

What is the purpose of this remembrance? Just a few verses earlier, G-d promised to remember the Covenants that he made with our Patriarchs. We rely upon the merits of our Holy Forefathers, and the Covenant which G-d made with Avraham -- but until G-d took our forefathers out of Egypt, they had descended through "49 of the 50 Gates of Impurity," in the words of the Medrash. Why is the Covenant made with them so important to us?

The Kedushas Levi says -- this is exactly the point. As he expresses it, the Jews in Egypt were no better than we are today. This is what King David said in Psalm 74:2: "Remember Your congregation, which You acquired at the beginning, You redeemed the tribe of Your inheritance."

When someone enters into a business partnership, and only after committing himself to the partnership does he learn that the other party is impoverished and hopelessly in debt -- in that case, he has the right to be angry, and to have complaints about the other party. If, however, he knew from the beginning that he was partnering with a pauper, then he has no right to complain afterwards.

This, says the Kedushas Levi, is the meaning of "remember Your congregation, which You acquired at the beginning." Remember what circumstances we were in when You took us out of the Land of Egypt and made us Your nation -- we were lowly, empty of Mitzvos and good deeds, and nonetheless "You redeemed the tribe of Your inheritance." How can You complain now, even if we are once again in a similar state?

Interestingly enough, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch of the German community takes a similar approach to the Chasidic Kedushas Levi. Even though the Jews in Egypt needed the purifying effect of the Egyptian exile, I, G-d, nevertheless considered them worthy of redemption before the eyes of the entire world. I am that same G-d; I will fulfill my promise, and will be with them in exile as I was with their forefathers in exile, and will redeem them as I redeemed their forefathers, and remain their G-d, as I did to their forefathers.

It is only too natural for us to look at our impoverished spiritual state, and despair. How can we overcome the bad deeds which we have done? How can we hope to warrant G-d's attention and kindness?

Both the Kedushas Levi and Rav Hirsch point to this verse: "I will remember for them the Covenant of the early ones." Other Jews before us were in a terrible spiritual state, were struggling with spiritual withdrawal, and nonetheless G-d was with them and took them out to be his own. We, too, must struggle to free ourselves of spiritual bonds and restraints, and look for the day when G-d will end our own exile, speedily and soon!

Good Shabbos,

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