

# FATHER-ON-LOAN

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Nisan. Pesach. A time of redemption. "Just as they (we) were redeemed in Nisan (from Egypt), so too in Nisan they will again be redeemed." (Rosh HaShanah 11a) The ge'ulah ha-asidah (future redemption) is likened to our redemption from Egypt. In what ways will they be similar?

Hashem (G-d) appeared to Moshe in the form of a burning bush. He had a message for the Jews: *"Behold, I have seen your affliction in Mitzrayim (Egypt) and I have heard your cries... I shall descend to rescue you from the hand of Egypt."* Moshe replied to Hashem: *"Who am I... that I shall take the Children of Israel out of Egypt?"* Hashem answered, *"For I shall be (Eh-yeh) with you. And this is your sign that I have sent you: When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve [Me] upon this mountain."* (Shemos 3:7-12)

Rashi explains this cryptic passage. Moshe asked Hashem: In what merit are the Jews leaving Mitzrayim? What have they done to deserve this special treatment? Hashem answered: Although they have done nothing **yet**, they will in the future be doing a very great thing - they will soon stand upon this mountain (Mount Sinai) and accept My Torah.

R' Elazar, the son of the illustrious Rebbe R' Elimelech of Lizensk zt"l once spent Shabbos at the court of the famous Rebbe R' Pinchas of Koritz zt"l. After davening (prayers), as is the custom in Chassidic courts, R' Pinchas held a Tisch (a communal Shabbos meal led by the Rebbe). Being the son of a great tzaddik (righteous person), R' Elazar was given a seat next to the Rebbe. At one point, R' Elazar, caught up in his own holy thoughts, sighed to himself, "Oy - Tatte," (O Father - a reference to G-d). R' Pinchas, who was renowned for his cutting truthfulness and abhorrence of lip-service, overheard his krectz (sigh). He turned to him and whispered, "Who says?" [i.e. Who says that you in fact are so close to Hashem as to refer to Him as your Father?]

R' Elazar was crushed. What hurt him the most, he reckoned, was that R' Pinchas was absolutely right! Was he really so close to Hashem? Was his whole avodah (service of G-d) no more than lip-service?

He returned home dejected. His father, R' Elimelech, noticed right away that something was amiss. He asked his son, and R' Elazar told him what had happened, and how broken-hearted he felt. "What?!" R' Elimelech exclaimed. "And if one doesn't have a Father - must he remain an orphan? The pasuk says: 'Sh'al Avicha - You have to borrow a Father!' [This is a play-on-words of the passage (Devarim 32:7) which reads, "Sh'al avicha ve- yagedcha, Ask your father, he will tell you." The word

sh'al, to ask, can also mean to borrow.] Sometimes, when we feel very far away, we have to take Hashem as our Father - on loan."

This insight provides the answer to one of the prime catch-22's in life. We constantly ask Hashem to give us all our needs - sustenance, health, peace-of-mind, etc. Yet if we reflect on our past deeds, we are often left with an empty feeling in our stomachs. Why? Why should He? What have I really done with my life that I now brazenly stand before Hashem and ask that He sustain me like a father to a son? Have I really lived up to even a small percentage of the potential which He has given me?

Yet were He to forsake us now, if Hashem would say, so to speak - enough is enough - then we would certainly be lost. For how could we even begin to correct our ways, to fix that which is wrong, if Hashem will not continue to sustain us and provide us with our needs? So we ask that Hashem give us \*on credit\*. True, our avodas Hashem (service of G-d) has been lacking to this point. Our sacks - which should be overflowing with Torah and mitzvos - are woefully empty. We have nothing with which to "pay" for the good which we ask. But, we beseech Hashem, please give us anyway. We will surely repay You in the future. What was, was. But from now on, we will resolve to undertake our avodas Hashem with renewed zest, with energy and vitality and excitement. We will learn more, daven better, and treat others with more respect. We "borrow" from the Father that we have scorned. And though our behaviour as His children may be wanting, He extends us credit and continues to provide for us. Because He trusts us - we will repay Him.

This, explains the Choizeh (Seer) of Lublin, is the merit with which the Jews were taken out of Mitzrayim. Hashem answered Moshe, "Eh-yeh - for I shall be with you." The word Eh-yeh alludes to this concept. Eh-yeh is in the future tense, "For I shall be." What I am now is not what is important. I will be good. \*I will be something great\*. This is why Hashem, in the context of the Exodus, refers to Himself as "Eh-yeh asher Eh-yeh, I Will Be As I Shall Be." (3:14) His special treatment of the Jews has no justification based on the present context. But, "When you take the people out of Egypt, they will serve [Me] upon this mountain..." Though it is not apparent, they will one day be a great nation. A nation of righteous individuals, who will serve Me and accept My holy Torah upon this mountain.

As the final redemption draws closer and closer, one is sometimes thrown into despair. Are we really worthy of redemption? Aren't we straying further and further from the way of the Torah? But we must be strong. We must remind ourselves that the Jews of Mitzrayim were not redeemed until they reached the absolute bottom. The point at which they no longer had any merits of their own. All they could do is cry out to Hashem, "Tatte!" They were redeemed not because of what they were, but because of what the future held. They were redeemed because they promised Hashem: If You take us out of bondage, then we will serve You with all our hearts and all our souls. We too must be ready. Ready to do what we can now - ready to grasp at the promise that the future holds.

*"In Nisan they were redeemed from Egypt and in Nisan they will again be redeemed." "As in the days of your Exodus from the land of Egypt, I will [again] show you wonders." (Michah 7:15) Avinu She-ba-*

shamayim, Father-in-Heaven, may we once again experience the redemption and salvation that our forefathers in Egypt felt when You removed them from slavery and made them Your nation!

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