

STAY CALM, COOL, AND COLLECTED

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha, Bo, is replete with many fascinating events. It begins with the last three plagues (which, incidentally, is the numeric value of the word 'bo', beis and aleph, 2+1). It also discusses the preparations for the Korban Pesach and its accompanying mitzvos, the holiday of Pesach and our actual exit from Mitzraim.

Reb Yerucham Levovitz, in his classic work, Daas Torah, discusses how this parsha teaches us to properly view events.

The possuk (13:8) commands us to tell our children that for the sake of 'this', Hashem took us out of Mitzraim. What is 'this' referring to? Rashi explains that we were taken out of Mitzraim, in order that we would fulfill those pesach mitzvos such as, pesach, matzo and marror. In other words, Reb Yerucham writes, we don't perform those mitzvos because we were taken out of Mitzraim. Rather, the whole scenario of Mitzraim was created, in order that we would be presented with these mitzvos!

Perhaps this would be more easily understood with a parable. The Chafetz Chaim compares our earthly existence to a king who sent away his beloved son to a distant land. There, it was necessary for the son to wear very coarse clothing, eat extremely crude foods and deal with a rather unrefined clientele. How could a loving father send his son to such an environment? Clearly, the son's experiences there could afford him opportunities of growth and development which were unavailable to him while back in the palace with his father. Upon his return home, he will be able to assume new responsibilities and positions which would have been beyond his reach had he never been sent away.

The same applies to our stint here in this world. The Father, the King of kings, sends His children to a distant land. Being that in the spiritual realm there is no concept of space, distance represents dissimilarity. The existence that the neshama faces in this world is really the epitome of dissimilarity. It is clothed with the very coarse 'garment' of our physical body. The food needed by the body is hardly true 'soul food'! The clientele, I'm sure our New York readers will agree, are not necessarily the most spiritually aspiring!

The question then shouts, why were we sent here? Clearly the explanation is, that there was no opportunity for real growth when we were tucked under Hashem's Throne of Glory. Hashem's presence was so awe inspiring that no free will decisions could be made. Only by being in an

environment of concealment, are decisions and subsequently growth possible. If we are to adhere, under these circumstances, to the G-d given directives, then the relationship will be established and will carry through to our return 'back home'.

At this point it becomes very clear that our mitzvos do not arise from circumstances such as leaving Mitzraim. Rather, in order to present us with these mitzvos in a meaningful way, the scenario of Mitzraim needed to have been created. These mitzvos afford us the opportunity of growth and thereby help us form a bond with our Creator.

Let's take matzo as an example. In this week's parsha (13:6) we are commanded to eat matzo. On a simple level we think that we ate matzo because, being in a rush, there wasn't enough time for our dough to rise. However, we must understand that Hashem certainly could have had us start baking 18 minutes earlier! Clearly, we left in a rush in order that we would be eating matzo. Now, why would a benevolent G-d want His beloved children to be eating baked cardboard?! There must be a necessary and crucial lesson to be learned and internalized from the matzo.

After 210 years of brutal slavery we are being freed. It would be natural for us to breathe a sigh of relief and to anticipate an easier future. Right at that crucial moment Hashem has us eat matzo. You weren't placed in Mitzraim and then taken out in order to have an easy and relaxing life. You are leaving from an oppressive bondage under a selfish king, to an incredibly rewarding servitude under a magnanimous King. At times the environment will be comfortable and conducive to this service. At times it will be harsh and difficult to serve. Know clearly from the very outset and leave with the understanding that at times the relationship will be forged through hardship. The food of those first lightheaded moments of freedom must be matzo!

We can view the mitzvah of honoring one's parents in a similar way. On a simple level, parents have given life and sustenance to their children. The children, therefore, must show their appreciation. Once again, that is a rather reversed view of the situation. Hashem felt it necessary that in order for us to be able to relate to Him properly, we must experience a relationship where we have an obligation of gratitude. He, therefore, created a world where we have parents.

This perspective can have a tremendous effect on the way that we perceive common everyday events. Situations arise causing difficulties in performing certain mitzvos. We often feel that it's just too much and we therefore neglect the mitzvah. Perhaps we need to realize that the whole circumstance was created only in order to challenge us! When dealing with an annoying person or situation we often find ourselves losing our cool. We need to pause for a moment and realize that this situation is being served to us for the express purpose of seeing if we will lose our cool! With such a realization, one can smile up toward the heavens, say, "I know what you are trying to do!", and proceed to stay cool, calm and collected!

It is the sum total of such experiences, over the course of a lifetime, which allows a person to realize all of his latent potential. As the Chovos Halevovos writes, we don't want to be like the baby who

cries and fights every time the parent tries to change their dirty diaper. At times, we too would choose to remain sitting in our 'dirty diaper', and it's those G-d-sent situations which jolt us out of our stupor! May Hashem grant us the wisdom and perspective to properly view the events and challenges of our lives, and may we be all that we can be!

Good Shabbos.

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