

FOR THE LOVE OF G-D

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

It was at the end of four hundred and thirty years, and it was on that very day that all the legions of G-d left the land of Egypt. (Shemos 12:41)

Every letter in the Torah is holy and crucial. Every word in the Torah tells its own story. Every parshah has its own important relevance as a piece of the puzzle that history has been constructing. This parshah is about REDEMPTION.

In a very true and real sense, nothing exists beyond Tanach (Torah, Prophets, and Writings) - the ultimate irony of history! Western society thinks it has moved WAY beyond the "Bible," when in fact, it will eventually find out, it is just another story within it, a big-budget version of what has already taken place well back in the past.

(Suddam Hussein considers himself to be the reincarnation of Nebuchadnetzar, king of Babylonia, where modern-day Iraq is today. It wouldn't be the first time in history that someone has prophesized without even knowing it.)

This is what the Midrash says:

When G-d made creation, He looked into the Torah [as an architect does a blueprint]. (Bereishis Rabbah 1:2)

Ben Bag Bag said, "Turn it over, turn it over, for everything is within it [Torah] . . . (Pirkei Avos 5:26)

Thus, EVERYTHING is within it, INCLUDING us, and even those yet to be born. And, if you know how, as the Vilna Gaon did, you can find out exactly where your life is hinted to within the Torah, and what your purpose is on this earth in this lifetime.

That is how the Torah can speak to us in every generation, for its values are eternal and its morals always applicable. Nothing ever really changes in history - only the externals undergo transformations from generation to generation.

Therefore, redemption from Egypt is applicable to every Jew in every generation. After all, redemption of the Jew is not about space and time, but about the relationship between G-d and His people, even down to the level of the individual. This is what G-d Himself intimated when He told Moshe:

G-d said, I have indeed seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt and I have heard its outcry because of its taskmasters, for I have known of its sufferings. I shall descend to rescue it from the hand of Egypt and to bring it up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey . . . (Shemos 3:7-8)

Redemption of a Jew is about G-d's love for His child, and about His child's love for Him. This is why on Pesach we read the song of all songs, "Shir HaShirim," by Shlomo HaMelech, written by a man who loved G-d profoundly and who was therefore inspired to write about G-d's profound love for His people.

Love of G-d, therefore, will be the theme of this week's shiur.

SHABBOS DAY:

All the Children of Israel did as G-d had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so did they do. (Shemos 12:15)

In the classic work, "The Path Of The Just," by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal), he discusses the mitzvah of Fear of G-d. There he reveals how there are really TWO levels of fear of G-d; the more common one that translates into a fear of punishment for sinning, and the far more sophisticated one, which we will discuss shortly.

In the case of "Level 1" fear of G-d, a person believes in G-d and His "threat" to punish the sinner. He does not necessarily relate to why the sin he is tempted to perform is wrong, and might otherwise do, had he not been averse to pain and suffering in this world or the next one. Childish as this level of fear of G-d may seem, it still counts for something at the end of the day.

However, there is a higher level of fear of G-d that is closer to the idea of seeing (the root of the word "fear" and "see" are the same) reality the way G-d does. On this level, one abstains from sinning because, like G-d, they see such actions as being wasteful and counterproductive. On this level, fear of G-d more closely resembles love of G-d.

For example, when the Jews of Egypt "did as G-d had commanded Moshe and Aharon," did they do it because they had been afraid of suffering the same fate as the Egyptians, or of their 12,000,000 Jewish brethren of whom had recently died in the Plague of Darkness? The later reason quite possibly, and for many, quite certainly.

However, the prophet wrote:

Thus said G-d: I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me in the Wilderness, into an unsown land. (Yirmiyahu 2:2)

This states outright that, even though the Jewish people had plenty of things to fear, the main driving force of the Jewish people at that time was their love of G-d.

As usual, a comparison can be made to a parent-child relationship.

A loving parent has to make tough decisions regarding the present and future of his children. Psychologists talk about something called "tough love," a way of describing the unpopular actions we take on behalf of our children for THEIR benefit. In other words, they kick, scream and yell, "YOU HATE ME!!" Because you have denied them something that, in the LONG run, they will be better off without.

If they are fortunate, one day they will grow up and gain the wisdom their parents had that allowed them to suffer the verbal abuse of their children while sticking to their guns. They will, more than likely, look back with LOVE and AFFECTION, as they recall the fortitude of their parents to do the right thing on their behalf, as opposed to the "easy" thing.

They might even cringe when they recall the tough time they gave their parents at the time. If only they could have gained the wisdom at the time, and have avoided the conflict altogether! But alas! They are only children, so what can be expected from them at those ages?

However, the Jewish people in Egypt were adults. And, the systematic destruction of Egypt and Egyptian culture was a direct and awesome revelation of the Creator, His plan for creation, and His willingness to get "involved" to help it along. "Yetzias Mitzrayim" had been both a physical AND a spiritual exodus that had the effect of elevating the Jewish people to a whole new vision of reality, one from which they could relate to G-d's perspective of history, and this drew out of them tremendous love for G-d, and the loyalty that comes with it.

SEUDOS SHILSHIS:

Moshe said to the people, "Remember this day on which you departed from Egypt, from the house of bondage, for with a strong hand G-d removed you from here, and therefore chometz may not be eaten. (Shemos 13:3)

Because G-d took us out of Egypt we should not eat chometz? What is the connection between this and that?

The Rambam writes:

What is the path to loving Him and fearing Him? When a person contemplates His works and His awesome and mighty creations, and sees in them incomparable and endless wisdom, IMMEDIATELY he will love, praise, glorify, and greatly desire to know his Great Name, as Dovid wrote, "My soul thirsts for G-d, the Living A'lmighty" (Tehillim 42:3). (Yad, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah, 2:1)

Interesting how the Rambam started talking about both fear of G-d and love of G-d, but ended up with only love of G-d. It is also interesting to note the use of the word "immediately" in terms of the response one has when contemplating creation, and the wisdom G-d employed to create it.

However, even more amazing is that we need a halachah from the Rambam to teach us what should be the most obvious, the most natural thing in the world for us to do! What does it take to sit down

for a couple of moments each day and contemplate the awesome beauty and gift of life? We are like people who pay to go see a good movie, and instead get caught up with local discussions in the seats around us!

Then again, that is the job of the "Sitra Achra." He was "hired" specifically to use whatever he can to distract us from the naturally beautiful and awesome world in which we have been placed. If he didn't do his job, then we'd remain focussed on creation from G-d's perspective, and love of G-d would flow from us like a mountain river running downhill.

That's what the Rambam is pointing out. Love of G-d is a "natural" response of a human being to the wondrous world in which he lives. However, like a river that has been dammed up and can no longer flow, so too does our love of G-d become "dammed up" as a result of the myriad of distractions we live with each day. Remove the dam, says the Rambam, and love of G-d flows IMMEDIATELY like unimpeded water.

That was what the redemption-experience had been for the Jewish people. It blew them away. They might have feared punishment for disobedience had they not been busy feeling love for G-d after seeing how wisely He dealt with creation, and how much love He has invested in it. Exile dams up the hearts of the Jewish people; redemption clears those "dams" away.

There is another name for the distractions of life: Chometz. Like debris that makes its way down the river, only to get stuck on the rocks and block the flow of water, our physical dependencies can block the spiritual arteries to our spiritual hearts. And, since the physical world mimics the spiritual world to teach us about that which we can't see, it is not surprising that the physical arteries and heart are affected in the same way by the "unhealthy" things we "consume."

The posuk is saying:

Your experience of leaving Egypt has cleaned away all the spiritual debris that blocked your heart from feeling love of G-d. To maintain that love, you must keep away the debris. Do not become DEPENDENT on the niceties, the "chometz" of physical life, for once you do, you will become distracted by your pursuit of them, and you'll block your flow of love for Me. They will dam up your heart, just as Egypt had done to you before I freed you.

MELAVE MALKAH:

And it shall be a sign upon your arm, and an ornament between your eyes, for with a strong hand G-d removed us from Egypt. (Shemos 13:16)

The parshah emphasizes that G-d not only redeemed us, but that He did it with a "strong hand." What difference does it make HOW G-d did it, as long as He did do it in the end? The answer to this question is similar to the one presented here:

With TEN statements G-d made creation. What does this teach, if He [G-d] could have done so with ONE

statement? It is to punish the evil for destroying a world made with ten statements, and to reward the righteous for upholding a world made with ten statements. (Pirkei Avos 5:1)

In other words, to create a world with one statement or with ten statements is the same thing for G-d, but it is something altogether different for man. Emphasis is both the stimulator and expression of sensitivity. If I am aware of the importance of something, then I will be emphatic about it. Likewise, when someone else is emphatic about something, I am made more sensitive to the importance of the idea to that person.

G-d made creation with ten statements because that sensitizes us to the importance of creation in HIS eyes, and more importantly, of man to G-d:

G-d, what is man that You recognize him; the son of a frail human that You reckon with him? (Tehillim 104:3)

G-d's answer? He is the object of My love, of My desire, of My reason for making the entire universe. Take a look at that detail - a detail so beautiful and so awesome, and so unbelievable that it leaves one breathless, with a sense of being unable to "compute" the extent to which G-d has made EVERYTHING.

It is overkill times infinity. It is not just the "hand" of G-d. It is a STRONG hand of G-d, of a G-d so phenomenally involved in the affairs of His creation that when one contemplates the depth of that involvement, says the Rambam, and said Dovid HaMelech, his soul just about pops out of his like an anxious sprinter who can't wait for the starting gun.

That is redemption. As the holiest song ever to be composed, "Shir HaShirim," revealed, the soul of man is lovesick for G-d. It is "shackled" in a body that simply does not understand what love of G-d is, or why it is important. Freedom is when the soul can find a way to break through and drink from the love G-d has for man.

It can be done in a number of ways. Torah learning can accomplish this, and the more sublime and beautiful the Torah-concept, the more this is true. It can be done experientially, as the Rambam has prescribed, and as life has shown us. And, when we enlist the help of G-d, either way becomes more readily available to us since this is really what life is all about.

And, as the Talmud says, life was made for fear of G-d (Shabbos 30b). However, as the Rambam implies, on the ultimate level of fear of G-d, there really is no difference from the ultimate expression of that fear: Love of G-d.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston

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