

LEAVING EGYPT, TAKE 2

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d said, "I have seen the suffering of My people in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sorrows; I have come to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey..." (Shemot 3:7-8)

As we approach the end of history, the beginning of Jewish history becomes even more relevant. For the most part, references to the leaving of Egypt are commemorative: you can't know where you are going if you don't remember from whence you came. However, at this point we are talking about more than commemoration, as the posuk says:

It was taught in a brisa: Rebi Simai said, "It says, 'I will take you to Me for a people' (Shemot 6:7), and it is also said, 'I will bring you in [unto the land...]' (Ibid.). Thus, their leaving Egypt is compared to their entry into the land: just as at their entry into the land there were only two out of six-hundred thousand (i.e., Yehoshua and Caleiv), likewise at the time of their leaving Egypt there were only two out of six-hundred thousand." Rava said, "It will likewise in Yemot HaMoshiach, for it is said, '...she will dwell there as in the days of her youth, and as on the day of her ascent from the land of Egypt' (Hoshea 2:17)." (Sanhedrin 111a) Thus, we learn, there is a historical connection between the first redemption of the Jewish people and the last one, because in truth, they are one and the same thing. Or, perhaps more accurately, two sides of the same coin. Or better yet, two halves of the same whole, for the last redemption picks up where the first one left off and completes it, finally, at long last. Surprise!

Aside from the fact that most Jews consider the redemption from Egypt to have been completed in the same moment it occurred, most Jews also have difficulty superimposing the two realities, the present one with the Jews who left Egypt under the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu, periods of time which are separated by over 3,000 years and much technological advancement. But then, how many of us really understand the dynamics of Jewish history from a Torah perspective?

For example, we all know that Amalek attacked the Jewish people just before they received the Torah. From the Torah, it seems as if Amalek was simply one of those anti-Semitic nations that just had to attack the Jewish people, but Rashi informs us otherwise:

Then came Amalek and went to war with Israel in Refidim. (Shemot 17:5) THEN CAME AMALEK: The

Torah placed this section close to this verse to say, "I am always amongst you and ready to take care of your needs, and you ask, 'Is G-d amongst us or not?' (Shemot 17:4). By your life! The dog (Amalek) will come and bite you and make you call out to Me, and then you will know where I am!" (Rashi)

The analogy that Rashi presents is of a boy being carried on his father's shoulders for so long that he forgets that his father is there, and questions a passer-by, "Have you seen my father?" Outraged, the father puts the boy on the ground to teach him a lesson, and a dog comes along and bites him. After "carrying" the Jewish people on eagles' wings for so long, how could we question G-d's unwavering support? But we did, so Amalek attacked to teach us a lesson about trust and faith in G-d.

The question is, in Rashi's analogy, was the dog always there? Because, if the dog had already been circling the father's legs the entire time, trying to get at the son, would the boy have forgotten where he was? Obviously not, and therefore we must assume that the dog had NOT been there until, that is, the father (G-d) put his son (the Jewish people) down on the ground in a position to be attacked by Amalek.

If so, then Amalek the "dog" came into being only because we created him by asking our question, "Is G-d amongst us or not?" Not being one of the seven nations of Canaan, we were destined to conquer. He really had no reason to go to war against us, and only did so because somehow our lack of faith pushed him to do it. It was as if he was possessed by some negative energy that we created through our own doubt in Hashgachah Pratit that came back to haunt us, and because of a doubt that became embodied in a people that was very fitting to receive it.

It was not the first time this happened in history, and the point is, it was not the last time either.

Shabbat Day:

The serpent was the most cunning of all the animals of the field which G-d had made. He said to the woman... (Bereishit 3:1)

Indeed, the first such example was back in the Garden of Eden right at the beginning of history, and is perhaps the most important one of all. Pshat teaches us that prior to the sin there was Adam, Chava, and the Snake. And then, all of a sudden, Adam HaRishon disappears and suddenly Chava finds herself alone with the terribly beguiling snake. They talk to each other about the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the rest is history, and the beginning of exile for that matter.

Sod fills in some important gaps:

From all this we see that the evil did not ascend to man and draw him from his place and level, for that was not possible at all, G-d forbid. Rather, man went down to the place of evil and was drawn in after them. Evil lacked the ability to ascend to man since it resided on the lowest of levels, separated from the worlds by fourteen sefirot. However, after he descended and stumbled, Adam HaRishon immediately fell tremendously from his level, as did all the worlds, until they reached the levels of where they are today... As a result of this, the Sitra Achra descended and became encloded in the

snake and approached Chava to cause her to sin, as it says in the Zohar HaKodesh (Bereishit 35b; 36a), and Pirkei d'Rebi Eliezer (13)...All the things the snake did and said were the result of the Sitra Achra, because of the evil spirit that came upon man, G-d should have mercy upon us. All that he did and said was because of the spirit that was within him; because the Sitra Achra was enclothed in the snake it did all of his bidding. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 344)

In other words, contrary to popular belief, the Snake had not always been evil. Rather, it had been quite innocent at one point, until Adam HaRishon transformed himself and the world around him by touching the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. At that point, the Sitra Achra, the angel responsible for obstructing the path of man and creating the potential for sin and evil, descended from Heaven and entered the Snake, to use it as a vehicle to draw Chava to eat from the forbidden fruit and initiate the fall of man. (Kabbalah explains why the snake was the most fitting vehicle for this.)

So, in effect, it was man himself who created the Snake that drew Chava down the wrong garden path. Not the physical Snake itself, but the final version of it that we know from the Torah. It was Adam who took the first step and transformed the world, giving the Sitra Achra his opening to enter the reality of man and wreak damage upon the world.

Thus, when the Talmud states:

All punishment comes to the world because of the Jewish people. (Yevamot 63a)

This means that what we, the Jewish people do, say, or think, is what directs the mood of the world, just as it created Amalek. Not Amalek the people; they were already there just like the Snake was before Adam sinned, but Amalek the attacker. Our doubt in Hashgachah Pratit went up to Heaven and back down into the heart of Amalek, whose name equals "doubt", and literally came back to haunt us in the form of a lethal attack.

In fact, if you consider some of the main evil themes associated with the Holocaust, they sound eerily similar to some of the holy themes that are supposed to be associated with the Jewish people: order, unity, Jewish identity. The Nazis, y"s, were notoriously orderly about their extermination of the Jewish people, they ingathered and unified us from all over Europe (but not Eretz Yisroel), to the work and death camps. And, they reminded countless Jews that to be born a Jew means that you are Jew just like any other, no matter how hard you try to assimilate and hide that fact.

If we only knew how much we, tiny little Israel (the nation), have such an impact on the world and the direction history takes. And, we're about to find out just how much.

Seudat Shelishit:

Yosef, his brothers, and that entire generation died. The Children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty. The land was filled with them. (Shemot 1:6-7)

It says in the Haggadah:

Learn what Lavan the Armenian wanted to do to our father Ya'akov. Pharaoh had issued a decree against the male children only, but Lavan wanted to uproot everyone, as it says: "The Armenian wished to destroy my father; and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great and mighty and numerous". "And he went down to Egypt", forced by Divine decree. "And he sojourned there", this teaches that our father Ya'akov did not go down to Egypt to settle, but only to live there temporarily. Thus it says, "They said to Pharaoh, 'We have come to sojourn in the land...'"

We were in Egypt for 210 years, but we had only come down there to sojourn for a while, until the famine ended and it became possible once again to survive in Eretz Canaan. But, somewhere along the line something went drastically wrong, and rather than be free to leave Egypt, we were enslaved by them instead. Even when we finally left at the end of the 210 years, only 20 percent of the population survived to go out! ONLY 20 PERCENT! A Staggering loss... and all because they didn't want to leave Egypt — the Egypt of THEIR time.

So what went wrong that changed everything, especially the mood of the Egyptian people towards the Jewish people? The Haggadah says that too: "Few in number" as it is said: "Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now, the L-rd, your G-d, has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven". "And he became there a nation." This teaches that Israel was distinctive there. "Great, mighty," as it is said: "And the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, and multiplied and became very, very mighty, and the land became filled with them"... What went wrong? We succeeded there. We prospered there. We moved in there, permanently. We became "slaves" to life in exile, and that rejection of Jewish independence to serve G-d in our own land ascended and stood before the Heavenly Court, and then descended once again into the hearts of the Egyptian people, who then became inspired to turn against us, and turn against us they did in a BIG way:

"The Egyptians treated us badly and they made us suffer, and they put hard work upon us."

They enslaved us, but WE empowered them to do it. And, we're empowering them to do it all over again.

Ever wonder why we always get caught in some foreign country in exile, aside from the fact that it is so difficult to pack up and leave? Ever wonder why we, such a smart people in so many ways, always seem to get duped by our host nations, over-and-over-again?

It's simple, but very deep. We look at the natures of the people amongst whom we live, and we judge their behavior towards us until they turn against us. And we say to ourselves, these people do not seem like the type who would take away our property, our rights, our freedom.

Furthermore, we estimate that they will, more than likely, protect us against the elements of their

society that would, so "why fix that which isn't broke"?

We might be right, in a world that is natural. We might be safe with such a belief, if there wasn't such thing as a Brit between us and G-d, and the need for our eventual redemption. But that is not the case, and it is our own misguided attitudes with respect to that which matters most to Judaism that overtakes the nations amongst whom we have lived securely, and turns them against us.

The attitude has been in our hearts for decades. The impact on the people on whom we rely is beginning to emerge out in the open:

U.S. BLOCKS ARMS, TECHNOLOGY TO ISRAEL TEL AVIV: The Bush administration has blocked arms and technology transfers to Israel. Israeli and U.S. sources said the State Department has blocked the transfer of weapons and technology to the Jewish state over the last three months. The sources said the halt reflected deteriorating relations between the two countries since the end of the war in Lebanon in August 2006. "Nobody will say openly that there is a problem," a government source said. "But there is a serious problem that reflects the marginalization of Israel in U.S. strategy."

The redemption from Egypt was never completed because we never really chose to leave the Egypt of that time and make aliyah on our own. We will complete it in our time when we choose to leave the Egypt of our time and make aliyah on our own. Don't take my word for it; take our history's track record.

Melaveh Malkeh:

Nefesh HaChaim, Ch. 17

Now we will explain the interconnection of the three souls, Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah, which is the foundation of doing teshuvah. It is this that makes possible the removal of transgression from the Nefesh of the transgressor, and purification from the malady of spiritual impurity. A person should contemplate on how much he needs to focus on and think about all aspects of his service to his Creator, in order that it should be perfect, complete, holy, and pure. He should always examine his actions, words, and thoughts, which correspond to the three levels, Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah. Perhaps he has yet to satisfy the will of G- d, according to the root of his soul and his ability to understand? All of his days he must increase in tenacity in Torah and mitzvot, in order to perfect his Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah in purity, as they were given to him. He should understand that G-d, in His great kindness, in the end only wishes to give him good. He should diligently seek to rectify the Nefesh used to transgress, because even if he has sunken to lowest depths he can still restore it to its place and source, so that "the banished one should not be banished forever".

It is well known that the different worlds are joined to each other, the lowest level of the upper world to the upper level of the lower world, as it says in the Zohar:

Each of the worlds are connected, this one to that one, like links in a chain. (Vayikra 10b)

And, as it is found in the writings of the Arizal:

The Malchut of each world and partzuf becomes the internal Keter of the world or partzuf below it. (This means that when a person accepts the Kingdom of G-d and elevates all of his actions, words, and thoughts to a higher level through Torah and mitzvot, then it becomes his innermost will to subjugate his mind, words, and actions to Torah and mitzvot). This is the idea behind the Keter-Malchut.

It is the same for the three levels Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah. Every holy thing contains ten specific parts, which is its ten sefirot. Thus, the uppermost level of Nefesh is attached to the tenth and lowest level of Ruach, whose uppermost level attaches to the lowermost level of Neshamah, which in turn is attached to the root of Neshamah, which is the sod of K'nesset Yisroel, the hidden root of the unified Jewish soul. That level of soul is then connected to the level above it, and so on, all the way up to the Ain Sof, May He be Blessed.

[It's a lot of Kabbalistic language to describe the spiritual "chain of command" — hishtalshalut in Hebrew, that connects our lowest level of soul with G-d. It's like an apartment building in which the ceiling of the lower level is the floor of the level above it, or like a chain whose links connect up with each into a unified whole between two end-points. In this way, the upper sefirah can receive light from the one above it, and pass that light on to the one below it, allowing Creation to exist, and mankind to have free-will and make a difference to the ultimate purpose of existence.]

It is to this that Avigayil referred when she told Dovid:

"My master's soul is bound up with the Bundle of Life, G-d your G-d." (Shmuel 1:25:29)

What she was saying was: Even your Nefesh is joined up with G-d.

With respect to this, the Zohar teaches:

When that Ruach goes up and is crowned... that Nefesh becomes bound up with this Ruach and receives light from it... Ruach then becomes bound up with that Neshamah, and that Neshamah within the End of All Thought, which is mysterious. That Nefesh becomes tied to the Ruach above it, and the latter to the Neshamah above it; the Neshamah is bound up with the Ain Sof, which becomes the resting place of all of them, and which unifies them all — upper and lower, into one secret... Thus it is the resting place of the Nefesh below... (Terumah 142b)

Elsewhere it states:

The verse teaches us, "My master's soul (Nefesh adonie) is bound up." It should have said, "Nishmat adonie". Rather, it is as we have said, that happy is the portion of the righteous for whom everything is connected, the Nefesh to the Ruach, the Ruach to the Neshamah, and the Neshamah to G- d, which means the Nefesh is bound up with the Bundle of Life...

This is also what it means when it says, "The portion of G-d is His people, Ya'akov, the lot (chevel) of His inheritance" (Devarim 27:9), that is, [G-d is our portion] through the interconnection of the three

levels, as mentioned above, [which is] like a rope (chevel) that is tied above, and which hangs down below.

Have a great Shabbat,

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Text

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