

THE PASSOVER ORDER

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Like the practice of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelled, you shall not do . . . (Vayikra 18:3)

It is a very sensitive topic to be sure, and therefore one that I have avoided over the years. There are a couple of issues of which to be careful, such as writing within the boundaries of what the Torah calls modest, and being careful of people's sensitivities.

In this week's parshah the Torah addresses the issue of forbidden relationships, which is the section we read on Yom Kippur at Minchah. Of all the prohibitions to have to deal with, forbidden relationships have to be one the most difficult, evident by how rampant they are in society, and have been throughout history. Even the Talmud states:

Rav Yehudah said in Rav's name: The Jewish people knew that the idols were nonentities, but they engaged in idolatry only that they might openly permit forbidden relationships. (Sanhedrin 63b)

To appreciate just how common such an approach to life is, just ask yourself, "What would society be like if the Torah hadn't provided us with a list of forbidden relationships and the punishments for committing them?" It is very doubtful that man, on his own, would know which relationships to pursue and which ones to shun. He's already acting as if he doesn't know in spite of the Torah's listing.

In fact, as society pushes the envelope of what constitutes a "good and healthy" relationship, the question has arisen: How much about what we think about forbidden relationships is "nature" and how much is "nurture," that is, Torah-induced? If it is the former, then there is what to guard against even if one does not hold of Torah from God. But if the latter, the argument goes, and forbidden relationships exist because of Torah, well, then, if one does not want to hold of Torah from Sinai, then it becomes "open season" for any relationship one fancies.

Hence, as the world has become more agnostic and atheistic it also becomes more permissive in the area of relationships to the point that what was once "wrong" is now "right." And if the forbidden relationship is not outright "okay," then it is at least something for which one need not feel any shame for having. While some (many do not) may still feel a need to be discreet when engaging in such relationships, they feel no reason to be ashamed as well.

It's a problem, just it was it was for the people of the Flood in Noach's time. They had a blast engaging in the same kind of forbidden relationships people have today and got blasted for it. Ask

the people of Sdom who were so certain about their position on forbidden relationships that they actually legalized them. They and their land were obliterated in a horrible way.

What is it about the arayos (forbidden relationships) that makes God so angry, angry enough to destroy His creation? Since God is not human He is unaffected by human relationships. Whatever He says and does is for our own good, for the Creation He built for us, to allow us to maintain it and use it to fulfill our own potential to be Godly.

It's like building a house and letting termites infest it. On one hand they are so small and quiet that you may not even know they are there. On the other hand, they are eating up the very structure that is holding up the house, and therefore, endangering its long term existence. Left alone long enough to do their own thing the house will eventually collapse and take down all of its contents with it.

The same is true of the world. It was built according to certain principles, and those principles act like the internal structure for the building. If they go, so does the world they support, and this is what the Torah conveys to us when listing the forbidden relationships and their punishments. It is telling us that when we tamper with the order of relationships, we tamper with the very structure of all of existence.

"So says a Torah-believing Jew," the argument goes. "For the rest of us," they say, "who do not believe in God, or at least Torah from Sinai, the Torah approach is politically incorrect." These people honestly see no risk in deviating from the Torah's approach to relationships and are energized to do engage in them, and, apparently, even punish those who get in their way.

Of course they make no connection between the events of history, potential disasters, and their opinions and actions. They never do. They never can. How can they if they don't believe that history is a function of Hashgochah Pratis—Divine Providence? As one website published regarding the many disasters that have occurred to America over a decade after making decisions to give Jewish land to the Arabs:

The historical accounts in this eRumor are, for the most part, accurate. What is left is the question of what do they mean? Believers in the email's message say it means that if the U.S. wants to avoid natural disasters . . . be nice to Israel. Skeptics say that going through all the events in a particular span of years and finding apparent correlations doesn't mean they were connected. (Ten Major Events, TruthOrFiction.com)

Then what is the point of the Hashgochah Pratis? Or, perhaps, more accurately, for whom is the Hashgochah Pratis? Clearly it is not for atheists or agnostics, and certainly not for the advocacy groups that push agendas that run contrary to Torah laws and philosophy.

This coming week, b"H, Jews all around the world will sit down for another Pesach Seder, most of whom will probably not even wonder why it is called that. Even people who do not speak Hebrew call it a "Seder," so it has become one of those important and instructive ideas that has been

unimportant and non-instructive.

Imagine, though, if someone asked you, "Where are you spending your Passover Order this year?"

The question would probably catch you off guard a bit and cause you to think for a moment before answering, "You mean with whom am I placing my Pesach order?"

More than likely at that point your friend will chuckle and say, "No, no. I mean where are you having your Passover Order this year?"

It will probably take a moment before it dawns on you that "order" in Hebrew is "seder," at which point you will may chuckle as well as you finally respond correctly to the question.

As you later walk away and think to yourself, "It's true, "seder" means "order," it might occur to you that not only do we make an "order," we even sing about it as well. Around the world families begin their Sedarim by singing its table of contents, "Kadesh, urchatz, karpas, yachatz, etc." You have to admit that it is a relatively odd way to begin the celebration of our redemption from slavery.

Unless that is, you come to realize that the entire reason why we were redeemed from slavery was for the sake of order, that is, for the sake of maintaining the Divine order for Creation. Mitzrayim represented tohu, the primordial chaos mentioned in the second version of the Creation Story. The Jewish People were extracted from there to be a "light unto nations," to restore Divine order to Creation and to maintain it.

Apparently though we had a tough time making the adjustment in the beginning:

"And Moshe heard the people weeping for their families . . ." (Bamidbar 11:10) i.e., because of the families [members] with whom they were forbidden to have relations. (Yoma 75a)

It was a vulnerability that the Erev Rav, the Mixed Multitude, made a point of exploiting, and continues to exploit. To the naive it seems like a simple and primordial desire to emotionally and physically connect with whomever one feels comfortable. In truth it is nothing short of attack on the Divine order of Creation, a disintegration of the very spiritual "columns" and "beams" that hold up Creation, endangering all of us.

It is ironic that, at this stage of history, Hollywood should produce a modern-day movie version of the Biblical story of Noach (ironically, in gematria kollel, "Hollywood" in Hebrew equals "Noach"). I understand that the current film is historically inaccurate, but the overall message is the same, and many people know the Biblical version of the story.

When I saw that the movie was made, I wondered to myself, "Why make such a movie in this day and age? Is anyone really interested in such a story of Divine destruction for immoral and amoral behavior?"

It really made me wonder, which is why I applied the principle, *"This is from God, that which is*

wondrous in our eyes" (Tehillim 118:23). Basically it means that if something is quite out of the ordinary you have to realize that it is not regular, covert Divine Providence but unusual and overt Divine Providence, perhaps a message from God Himself: "I did it before, I'll do it again, water or no water."

But again, for whom is the message? Good question, but one the Haggadah was designed to answer by its authors who understood history and man better than most of us ever will. It says that such messages are for us, the Jewish people, the "light unto nations," the ones entrusted with the mission to maintain the Godly order of Creation, and when necessary to repair it.

Pesach is generally a festive time of year, at least once you get past all of the cleaning. However, there have been many times in Jewish history when it has not been, especially when the arrival of the holiday itself was the reason for increased anti-Semitism and terrible brutality directed against the Jewish population. It certainly had to have been a bitter experience for those celebrating freedom from Egyptian slavery while "living" through current ones.

Thank God today most Jews aren't in such circumstances. Nevertheless, the world is in terrible moral shape and getting worse by the day, which does not bode well for the future of mankind. The people of Noach's time were also fooled by the pleasantness of daily life. Even Noach had doubts about God making good on His threat of colossal destruction until the Flood actually began.

The laws of Yom Tov require us to celebrate the holiday in a festive manner. The Haggadah Shel Pesach requires that we recall the reason why God miraculously destroyed Egypt, to free a people unworthy of being freed. A good home owner inspects his house and looks for small problems before they become bigger and destructive. When it comes to Creation, WE are the "Ba'alei Battim," as the Talmud says:

No punishment comes to the world except because of the Jewish people. (Yevamos 63a)

As we sit down to our "Passover Order," we should consider how disorderly the world has become on our watch. Then, we should resolve to do what we can to restore as much of God's seder to our world as we possibly can. And finally, as we praise God for our past victories we should pray to Him for future ones, if not with actual words, at least with the intention of our hearts to assume the role for which we were formed into nation.

Chag Pesach Kosher v'Samayach,
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