

LEAVING MITZRAYIM FOR GOOD

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Moshe said to the people, "Don't be afraid! Stand firm and see the Lord's salvation that He will wreak for you today, for the way you have seen the Egyptians is [only] today, [but] you shall no longer continue to see them for eternity." (Shemos 14:13)

Though many of the following points were made last week, I added some more detail and organized it better.

Though Egypt is specifically a North African nation, "Mitzrayim" is any society that constricts the knowledge and lifestyle of Torah. It can be through physical means, as happened in the Egypt of Moshe Rabbeinu's time, or it can happen through lifestyle, as is occurring in current times. Material comfort can be more enslaving than physical oppression.

In fact, the Jewish people experienced both kinds of slavery in Egypt, one after the other. For 116 years they were physically enslaved by the Egyptians, until Rosh Hashanah of the year of redemption. With the end of the seventh plague of hail, the Jewish people no longer had to report for duty.

Over the last six months just prior to leaving Egypt however, four-fifths of the Jewish population became materially enslaved. Consequently, they chose to remain in the comfort of Egypt rather than face the harshness of the desert after redemption, and paid the price:

The four-fifths that died in the Plague of Darkness did so because they were those who did not believe in the redemption and those who acquired riches or held high positions in Egypt and did not want to leave. (Shemos Rabbah 14:3)

Therefore, the redemption from Egypt is first and foremost a redemption from the Klipos—spiritual impurity. It turns out that when this happens on a personal level, an individual automatically achieves personal redemption. When enough individuals have left the Klipos, national redemption becomes fait a complit.

This transforms the story of the exodus from Egypt into a playbook for personal rectification and national redemption. A person should pay attention to its details as if their life depended upon it—it does.

One. Point of No-Return

The Jewish people were supposed to have been in exile for 400 years, as per the prophecy given to

Avraham Avinu in the Bris Ben HaBesarim. Extenuating circumstances pushed the date of departure up by 190 years.

Essentially, the commentators explain, the Jewish people had been influenced in Egypt to the point of spiritual oblivion. Had God not stepped into history at that time by sending Moshe Rabbeinu to redeem them, the commentators point out, the Jewish people would have assimilated into the Klipos beyond return. God was not prepared to let that happen. God is NEVER prepared to let that happen. A person can fall deep into the Klipos, but God always leaves a way out, and will help the person who is prepared to help himself. A person should never spiritually give up on himself so that God won't have to.

Two. Ask God For Help

It is amazing how bad the situation became in Egypt before the Jewish people finally called out to God for help. Until that point, they just adapted themselves to the situation until they could adapt no more. That's when they called out to God and He "heard" their screams and set the redemption in motion.

It is also amazing how bad a person's situation has to become before he will turn to God for help. Some people do not believe God helps, some people want to save themselves, and some people do not want to "involve" God for fear they will "owe Him one."

Whatever the reason, it is not worth leaving God out of personal salvation. First of all, He does help, whether a person knows it or not. Secondly, ego never really saved anyone. It just usually makes the situation worse. Thirdly, it is God who saves us whether we ask Him to or not. Not owning up to THAT fact can leave a person in spiritual debt and vulnerable to an untimely payback.

Three. Return the Aleph

Then came the plagues. The first one of blood tells the whole story, acting as the script for all that follows along the path to Jewish redemption. It may seem as if it was just a way to contaminate the water supply in Egypt, but it was really a message about redemption for Jews throughout the ages.

Man is a composite of two parts, body and soul. Even his name, "Adam," indicates this, being comprised of the letters Aleph, Dalet, and Mem. The letter Aleph, which has the gematria of one, alludes to God, and therefore man's spiritual component, his soul. The letters Dalet and Mem spell "dumm," or "blood," the symbol of the body.

If a person is overly spiritual, it's as if the Aleph overshadows the Dalet-Mem, negating the existence of the body. If however a person is overly material, it is the Dalet-Mem that have become dominant, so-to-speak, greatly reducing the influence of the Aleph.

Tikun is about becoming an "Adam Shalaim," or a "Complete Person." Literally, this refers to becoming a complete "Adam," one in which all three letters are together and in perfect balance.

Then the total gematria of the word is 45, the same as the word "geulah," which means "redemption."

When a person becomes overly spiritual, he disappears, in a manner of speaking, to the world around him. When a person becomes overly material, he becomes enslaved by his lifestyle. Addicted to physical pleasure, he is compelled by his yetzer hara to sacrifice spiritual growth to maintain his addiction. That is the reality of "Mitzrayim."

The Plague of Blood made it clear in which direction the Jewish people had erred. After being in Mitzrayim for 209 years, they had assimilated to the point that the Aleph had gone beyond recognition. They ceased to live in the "image of God," the essence of human dignity.

The Plague of Blood was a stark reminder of what they had become, and of what they were supposed to be. It was "Lesson One" on the road to spiritual recovery, made possible since each plague increased the amount of Divine light entering the world. The greater the revelation of God, the larger a Jew's Aleph became.

Thus, each subsequent plague served to revive and rebuild the Aleph. This continued until the last plague, the death of the firstborn at which point the process of recovery had become completed, and redemption became a de facto reality.

Tikun and redemption, therefore, start with realizing how much dignity is lost by being overly material, and just how Godly a person can become. This is what motivates and enables a person to leave the Klipos for good.

Four. Take Charge

When God sent Moshe to warn Pharaoh about the last three plagues, He said, "Come to Pharaoh," as if God was already there, waiting for Moshe. This is different than being told, "Go to Pharaoh," which sounds as if God was sending Moshe on his own.

Does it really make a difference if God is everywhere at all times? Certainly. As the Torah warns, and history proves, God can act as if He is absent even though, by definition, He can't be. It's called "Hester Panim," the "Hiding of [God's] Face," but not the removal of it.

"Gilui Panim," or the "Revelation of [God's] Face" has very positive "side effects." First of all, it empowers a person to accomplish more than they otherwise might have. There is something about FEELING in the presence of God that is VERY encouraging. Secondly, no longer so hidden, God will do more obvious miracles for the person. He always does miracles, but these days most of them happen in ways that people can't notice. It is the way God gets things done while preserving man's free will.

The point of free will though, is to choose to do that which results in a clearer vision of God's involvement in human history. If a person has already succeeded at this to some degree, God can "afford" to act more openly on behalf of the person. For such a person, overt Divine Providence will

encourage free will, not reduce it. This is when a person is able to take charge over his or her yetzer hara. Feeling God by their side, they are emboldened to try. Seeing God helping out, they feel the ability to succeed.

Don't just "go" to the yetzer hara, as an outsider unfamiliar with the territory. "Come" to it, as an insider, as a "ba'al habayis," as a partner with God in a holy and personally fulfilling life venture.

Five. Make the Sacrifice

The last part of leaving Mitzrayim was the offering of the Korban Pesach. It could have been any kind of kosher animal, but God made it the one that the Egyptians worshipped, a sheep. Redemption was only possible if a person was willing to sacrifice their "Mitzrayim past."

Through the Korban Pesach, God was saying that He understood that leaving Mitzrayim was also a sacrifice. It had to be one made with a complete heart though, if a person was going to cross the threshold into a holy and far more spiritually productive lifestyle.

It wasn't a sacrifice that was completely consumed by the fire of the altar, however. It was mostly consumed by the owners of the sacrifice. Perhaps this represents the need to give to God what interferes with one's connection to Him, and to integrate what facilitates that relationship.

The part that is consumed by the owners cannot be eaten raw, or even cooked. It must be completely roasted over an open fire. Perhaps this means that whatever a person is going to keep from his previous lifestyle must completely fit into a Torah lifestyle. It can't remain in its "raw" state, or simply be a "cooked" version of it. Otherwise, what is carried over into the future might draw the person back, over time, to past bad habits.

Six. Chometz-Free

An important detail of the Korban Pesach is that it cannot be offered or eaten while a person still possesses chometz. Chometz, symbolizing an attachment to the material world represents the opposite of the Korban Pesach. Therefore, it cannot be present when the Korban Pesach is offered.

Physical pleasure is an automatic and necessary part of everyday life. It is also something to which one is easily addicted, at which time it becomes hard to do the right thing when doing so is physically unpleasurable. As complex as life is, it boils down to making sacrifices to do the moral thing when the moral thing is not the physically pleasurable thing to do.