

IN LAMB

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

The Baal Haggadah cites the prophet Yechezkel to describe Bnei Yisroel's state of spiritual bankruptcy in Egypt as "eirom ve'erya" - "naked and bare".[1] What is being emphasized by stating that Bnei Yisroel were both naked and bare, an apparent redundancy? According to most texts, the Baal Haggadah continues to quote Yechezkel, saying that when Hashem found Bnei Yisroel in such a downtrodden state, He said to them "You shall live through your blood, live through your blood." [2] The Midrash explains that the two mentions of blood refer to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Korban Pesach. These two mitzvos gave Bnei Yisroel the merit necessary to depart from Egypt.[3] How are circumcision and Korban Pesach the antidote for "naked and bare"?

"Eirom" - "naked" refers to a level of nakedness in which the person feels the embarrassment and humiliation of being naked. When Adam and Chava ate from the Tree of Knowledge, they became aware of their nakedness and hid. Hashem asked Adam "Who told you 'that you are naked'" - "ki eirom atah?".[4] Hashem was asking Adam who told him that his nakedness should cause him embarrassment. "Erya" is derived from the word "erva" which alludes to licentiousness and immorality. This is a level at which a person loses his G-dly image and no longer senses shame or humiliation when he is naked. This type of person is no different than an animal. The desensitization of a human being's basic sense of shame comes about through consistent involvement in immoral behavior. In a similar fashion, man can desist from following Hashem's directives, yet still sense the shame in not fulfilling the word of G-d. However, if man becomes completely comfortable with his actions and desensitized to this shame, he can lose touch with what is required of him as a human being.

Prior to the Exodus, Bnei Yisroel had fallen to the forty-ninth gate of impurity. The Navi Yechezkel is teaching us that they did not even feel the shame of being "naked", devoid of any spirituality, for their servitude to Pharaoh coupled with their involvement in idol worship had so dehumanized them that they were unable to feel the shame of their condition.

The Talmud teaches that idol worship is the medium a person uses to indulge in licentiousness.[5] As long as a person feels the shame and embarrassment of immoral behavior he cannot fully enjoy the licentiousness. Therefore, such a person has to divest himself of his Divine image and his responsibility to his Creator. Idol worship is the manner by which he accomplishes both.

A slave is the prototype of a person who has no responsibility for himself - "eved behefkeira nicha lei", and as such is also involved in licentious behavior.[6] These two mitzvos were given to undo the

process which led from idol worship to licentiousness. The Rambam explains that circumcision is a symbol of morality and is specifically performed on the organ for procreation to teach us to sublimate our desires and energies for the service of our Creator.[7] This counteracts the animal-like behavior which caused Bnei Yisroel to lose touch with their spirituality.

The sacrificing of the Pascal lamb is explained by the Ramban as being the ultimate rejection of idol worship. The lamb was an Egyptian deity and therefore, slaughtering the lamb signified Bnei Yisroel's proclamation of their loyalty to Hashem.[8] Consequently, these two mitzvos are designed to counteract the process which landed Bnei Yisroel at the forty-ninth level of impurity.

1. Yechezkel 16:6
2. Ibid 16:7
3. Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 129
4. Bereishis 3:11
5. Sanhedrin 62b
6. Gittin 13a
7. Moreh Chelek 3
8. Parshas Bo

Showing Your True Colors

Rashi explains that the word "Pesach" is derived from the verse which describes the way Hashem "passed over" the Jewish homes with doorposts stained by blood from the Pascal lamb; the verb "pasach" is interpreted as "passed over" or "had mercy upon".[1] The implication of the requirement to place the blood of the Pascal lamb on the doorposts is that if a Jewish house did not bear this sign of protection, the firstborn residing within would be susceptible to the vengeance of Hashem which was wrought upon the Egyptians.

When the Torah lists the casualties of the tenth plague, it records everyone from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of the alien captive who was in an Egyptian jail. Rashi is perturbed as to why a foreigner in an Egyptian jail would be affected by a plague directed at the Egyptians. He suggests that if the foreign prisoners had remained unaffected by the plague, they would have credited their gods with the punishment brought upon the Egyptians. Therefore, they had to be punished as well.[2] However, this creates the following difficulty: According to Rashi's explanation, a foreigner was affected by the plague only because he would have attributed it to his gods if he were not. Why, then, would the Jews require a sign to protect themselves from the punishment? If the punishment was directed only at the Egyptians, the Jews should have been automatically precluded since they could not attribute the plague to other gods.

When Alexander Macedonia conquered the Middle East, he formed a tribunal that adjudicated claims brought by the different nations for injustices perpetrated against them by other nations. One such claim was made by Egypt against Bnei Yisroel. They demanded that the money and valuables

Bnei Yisroel left Egypt with be returned to them. A Rabbi by the name of Gaviha ben Pessisa spearheaded the defense for Bnei Yisroel. He counterclaimed, mathematically computing the work hours that the Jews had toiled when they were in Egypt, that the Egyptians still owed Bnei Yisroel money; the Egyptian claim was dropped.[3] It is difficult to understand Gaviha ben Pessisa's position. Since when does a slave have a right to demand compensation from a master?

The Rambam teaches us that a king has the authority to enlist any of his subjects for his personal service. However, the king has an obligation to compensate that individual.[4] Therefore, Gaviha ben Pessisa was making the argument that the Jews were Egyptian subjects that had been enlisted into Pharaoh's service, and as such, had the right to demand compensation. What emerges is that prior to the Exodus, Bnei Yisroel were not foreign nationals subjected to slavery, rather Egyptian subjects enlisted by their king. This notion is driven home by the fact that only twenty percent of Bnei Yisroel left Egypt. The remaining eighty percent refused to leave their homeland and died during the plague of darkness to prevent the Egyptians from witnessing their death.[5]

The Korban Pesach was the manner by which the identity of the Jewish people was forged. Consequently, the placing of the blood on the doorpost signified that those who lived within the dwelling identified themselves as Jews, not Egyptians. The sign not being found was a statement that those living within the dwelling defined themselves as Egyptian citizens and were subject to the death of the firstborn.

- 1.Shemos 12:23
- 2.Shemos 11:5
- 3.Sanhedrin 91a
- 4.Yad Hilchos Melachim 4:2,3
- 5.Shemos 10:22, 13:18