

BY THE HEAT OF THE DAY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #3, The Korban Pessach Today. Good Shabbos!

G-d Speaks to the Jewish Prophets by the "Heat of the Day"

The Medrash on this week's Parsha states as follows: Rav Yehuda says, G-d appears to the nations of the world only at night, at a time when people are separated from one another, as we find "The L-rd appeared to Avimelech in a dream at night...", "And the L-rd came to Bilaam at night..." However, in regard to Jewish prophets we find that He comes during the day, as it is written regarding Avrohom, "And he sat at the gate of the tent, in the heat of the day..."

What significance is there in the fact that G-d only appears to the Gentile prophets at night? The answer is that there is a very basic difference between Judaism and other religions. I do not claim to be an expert in Catholic theology, but it is quite well known that the reason why the Catholic Church insists that its priests and nuns remain celibate is because the Catholic religion has a tremendous problem with the blending of the physical and the spiritual. As a result, they believe that the people who are "truly close to G-d", i.e. -- the priests and the nuns -- cannot be involved or associated with the physical side of life. Therefore, they should not have wives or husbands, because this would take away from their devotion to G-d.

As Jews, we believe that there does not have to be a dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual. The `tachlis' [end-goal], in fact, of a Jew is to sanctify the physical. A person can live a physical life that is permeated with `kedusha' [the spirit of holiness]. A person's eating, his business dealings, and even his marital relations with his wife can be conducted on a holy and spiritual level.

This is what the Medrash is telling us. G-d says that when He appears to the nations of the world, He only appears "at night" -- when people are normally isolated from one another. When can a Gentile have association with spirituality? Only when he is disassociated from the rest of mankind -- at night. But a Jew can have a relationship with G-d "in the heat of the day." This is what Judaism is all about - - living as a human being in all aspects of existence, but doing so in such a way that the physical

becomes holy and all ones actions are for the sake of Heaven.

The Kotzker Rebbe once said that immediately after receiving the Torah, the Jews were given the command "Return to your tents." The Talmud interprets this as a command to return to your marital relations with your wives (which were suspended for 3 days prior to the giving of the Torah). The Kotzker explained this very point. Now that we have received the Torah, that we know what Torah is all about, it is time to return to our tents and to apply the spiritual principles of the Torah to our everyday lives.

Levites Make A Positive Choice to Serve in Beis HaMikdas

The Medrash on the verse "The rest of the meal offering shall belong to Aharon and his sons..." [VaYikra 2:3] connects this pasuk with a verse in Psalms [Tehillim 17:14]. The Medrash interprets the verse in Psalms as follows "There are mighty people, who took their portion from Your hand". The Medrash identifies these mighty people who took their portion from G-d's hand as the Tribe of Levi. This tribe was so strong, the Medrash says, that they declined to take their portion in the Land of Israel, but took their portion instead directly from G-d.

The Ateres Mordechai, by Rav Mordechai Rogov, zt"l, offers a beautiful interpretation of this Medrash, which teaches us a great moral lesson for our time. The Ateres Mordechai says that a person could perhaps think that Leviim, who were historically employed in the Beis HaMikdash and who were the teachers of the children of the Jewish people, were a tribe of `nebechs'. Yaakov Avinu had 12 sons. Thank G-d, eleven of them were successful and talented children; one was a `lemech'. So what does one do with a son who is unfortunately a little `shlmeilish'? He stays in the Beis HaMikdash; he becomes a teacher; he becomes a Rebbe.

There is an expression in the secular world `Those who can, do, those who can't, teach'. This means that one who has any brain in his head and any head on his shoulder will go out and be a doctor or a lawyer or an accountant or computer analyst -- something important! At least work for the government! But, nebech, if you can't do anything else, then, and only then, you teach.

The Medrash tells us that this was far from the case. Do not think for a minute that the Tribe of Levi were a bunch of nebechs. The Tribe of Levi was mighty. They were talented and capable and they could have done anything. They could have had the job of Zevulun or Naftali or any other tribe. But they were mighty. They made a conscious deliberate decision not to take a portion in the Land. They gave up the transitory and temporal world for the sake of a lasting world which is `chai v'kayam'.

What is the proof that they were happy with their decision? A doctor usually wants his son to go into medicine. A businessman wants his son to take over the business. If one is pleased with what he is doing, he wants his son to follow in his footsteps. But one who is not pleased with what he is doing, chas v'sholom, does not want his child to continue in his profession. "I had it rough, I couldn't go to

school. But you? You're going to have something decent in life."

The Medrash is telling us that the Tribe of Levi was not a cop-out. They didn't do what they did because they had no other choice. It was because they made a positive decision and were attracted to the spirituality of the job for themselves and for their children.

This is what the Tribe of Levi chose. They did not chose it because they had nothing else to do. They chose it because they knew which profession had true value.

Elementary School Teachers are the new Tribe of Levi

Today, we have a new generation of Leviim. These are our Rebbeim and Teachers. I particularly refer to the teachers of elementary school years. Teachers in primary grades get very little respect. Here are people that could have become the same lawyer or accountant or computer analyst, but they chose to educate our children. They chose to stay and provide a new spirit to a new generation of children, to stay and spend 6-8 hours a day with little kids. We all know that this in no simple task.

They are the new Tribe of Levi. It is not because they could not do anything else. These are people who voluntarily chose "Not to take a portion in the Land". We all know that it is a crying shame that our educators receive sub-standard wages.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky once said that both the president and the janitor have keys to the bank. The way to tell which one is the president and which one is the janitor is to look at their paychecks. The money lets us know (HaDamim Modi'im). We pay for that which we consider important. If, because of our many sins, we cannot show our appreciation to the educators of the generation through their paychecks, at least we should give recognition and appreciation and show our gratitude without limit to these people who have, on a daily basis, devoted their lives to experience the hardships of elementary school education, thereby passing up the transitory world and acquiring a world that is Chai v'Kayam'.

Glossary

shlmeilish -- (Yiddish) descriptive phrase for someone who is a bit awkward [The Shlmeil is the one who spills the soup on the Shl'mazal; the Noodnik is the one who upon hearing this explanation asks 'What kind of soup was it?'] -- troubles

lemech -- (Yiddish) descriptive phrase for someone who is not too bright

nebech -- (Yiddish) descriptive phrase for someone who is to be pitied; also used for "What a pity"

chai v'kayam -- alive and with continuing existence.

Personalities & Sources:

Kotzker -- Rav Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787-1859).

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky -- (1891-1986) Lithuania, Toronto, New York; Rosh Yeshiva Mesifita Torah Vodaath.

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