

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LIVELIHOOD AND REDEMPTION

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 443 - Aveilus Issues. Good Shabbos!

The Connection between Livelihood and Redemption

There is a well known pasuk [verse] in this week's parsha beginning with the words: "The Angel who redeemed me from all evil will bless the children" [Bereshis 48:16]. The Medrash comments on this pasuk, and compares salvation with making a living. "Just as redemption is a wondrous phenomenon, so too earning a living (parnassah) is a wondrous phenomenon. Just as earning a living is a daily occurrence, so too, redemption (geulah) is a daily occurrence."

This second statement of the Medrash should give us pause. We know of certain historical periods that we associate with redemption (geulah). But what is the meaning of the statement of the Medrash that geulah comes every day and is necessary every day?

The Medrash is teaching that, in fact, every day, unbeknownst to us most of the time, there are salvations that occur to us and for us daily. We say in our prayers "concerning your miracles that are with us on a daily basis."

There was an incident a number of years ago where there was a bombing in front of a Jewish school in France. A terrorist planted a car bomb to go off exactly at the moment when the school was scheduled to be emptying out of children at the end of the school day. For some unknown reason the clock that controlled the school bell system was several minutes late, causing the dismissal bell to ring a few minutes after it was supposed to. The bomb went off as scheduled and there was nobody there in front of the school building. This was a miracle. "And He brings redemption to the children of their children" [Liturgy]. Just as parnassah is a daily occurrence, so too, geulah is a daily occurrence.

We typically don't even think about it, but when we are performing ordinary activities such as driving

on the road, there are so many close calls that we survive -- "near misses". Just as parnassah is a daily occurrence, so too geulah is a daily occurrence. These are just some examples of things about which we are somewhat aware. But the Medrash is pointing out that we need redemption and salvation every single day of the week and the salvation does in fact occur -- we are just not cognizant of it.

The Uniqueness of Ephraim and Menasheh

In another well known pasuk from Yaakov's blessing to his grandchildren, the Torah records "So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you shall Israel bless saying, 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Menasheh" - and he put Ephraim before Menasheh." [Bereshis 48:20]. This is the source of the custom in many communities for parents to bless their children on Friday night with these very words.

Out of all the outstanding personalities in Jewish history, our blessing to our offspring is that they should be like Ephraim and Menasheh. We have discussed many times over the years why these two sons of Yosef became the paradigm of what we want our children to become.

This year, I would like to offer two additional interpretations of this question. The first I heard from Rav Mayer Bergman. There is a concept known as "yeridas hadoros" [the spiritual deterioration of the generations, beginning at Sinai and moving on through our own time]. Yehoshua was not Moshe Rabbeinu and the Elders who followed Yehoshua were not on par with Yehoshua. There has been a steady decline in Torah knowledge. The further we travel away from Mt. Sinai, the less we can expect of the leaders of a generation. We sometimes complain that we miss "the gedolim of the previous generations." This is part of the inevitable "yeridas hadoros."

When a person gives a blessing to his children that "the L-rd should make them like Ephraim and Menasheh," it is because Ephraim and Menasheh are the exception to this rule. Even though they were the generation after Yosef, they took the rightful place of their father amidst the other Tribes. Yaakov equated their generation with the generation of his own children. There was no "yeridas hadoros" when it came to Manasseh and Ephraim.

I heard the second interpretation from Rav Chaim Shapiro, Z'L, the author of "Go My Son". Rav Chaim Shapiro once told me that at the Novardok Yeshiva, they used to interpret this blessing differently. The classic insight taught at that mussar Yeshiva was that Ephraim and Menasheh symbolized excellence in character traits (middos). When Menasheh, the older brother, saw that the younger Ephraim was given precedence and was thus destined to take on the role of first-born in the family,

he did not react with protest or resentment.

Anyone who has children has heard innumerable times the complaint "Hey, I'm older. It's not fair!" Menasheh does not say, "I'm older." He was quiet. Then when Yosef tried to intercede and switch the hands of his elderly father, Ephraim does not pop up and interject "Hey if this is what Zeidei wants to do, let him do it!" Ephraim was ready to forgo the privilege that his grandfather had already bestowed upon him, if that would be what his father preferred. This attitude -- on the parts of both Menasheh and Ephraim -- represent exemplary behavior. It is a lesson in good middos -- in how not to have sibling rivalry.

If there is any blessing that parents want to see in their children it is that G-d make them like Ephraim and Menasheh. They should remain calm and happy if their sibling gets first or more or better. What bigger blessing could there be for parents?

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas VaYechi are provided below:

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