A SEGULAH FROM ELIYAHU TO PROTECT FROM EVIL THOUGHTS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Tzav

A Segulah From Eliyahu To Protect From Evil Thoughts

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Weekly Portion Torah Tapes: Tape # 675, Going Away for Pesach and Bedikas Chometz. Good Shabbos!

I saw the following thought in the Sefer Tiferes Torah from Rav Shimshon Dovid Pinkus, of Blessed Memory, who was tragically killed in a car accident on the 11th of Nissan. I share this thought in honor of his Yahrtzeit.

The Shalo"h Hakodosh (Shaar haOsiyos 30) writes in the name of Rav Moshe Cordevero (1522-1570) that he once heard from an elderly Jew that an effective method (segulah) for removing forbidden thoughts from one's mind is to repeat the following pasuk [verse] over and over: "The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it, it shall not be extinguished." [Vayikra 6:6]. The Shalo"h comments that he is sure that the "elderly Jew" who Rav Moshe Cordevero heard this from was the prophet, Eliyahu [Elijah]. However, due to Rav Cordevero's great modesty, he did not want to reveal the true source, since that would have revealed that he was worthy of conversing with Eliyahu.

However, what does this pasuk have to do with forbidden thoughts?

Rav Pinkus addresses this question by reference to a comment of Rabbeinu Bechayeh on this week's parsha. Rabbeinu Bechayeh cites the pasuk in Proverbs: "Let your feet be scarce in your fellow's house, lest he be satiated with you and come to hate you." [Mishlei 25:17] This is a poetic way of expressing the often heard idea that it is unwise to wear out one's welcome in his friend's home. Too much of a good thing is not good. Even the best of friends can get tired of each other if they are always in each other's houses. The Rabbeinu Bechayeh then quotes a Gemara [Chagiga 7a] which says that this pasuk refers to the Beis HaMikdash. The intent is that one should make himself scarce in the Beis HaMikdash, meaning that he should not have a frequent need to bring Sin Offerings and Guilt Offerings (which may only be brought in the Beis HaMikdash). However, the Gemara says, that it is permissible to bring Olah offerings as often as a person wants - citing the pasuk in Tehillim: "I will enter Your House with burnt offerings; I will fulfill to You my vows." [Tehillim 66:13]

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains the difference between a Sin Offering and an Olah offering. The sin offering (korban chatas) comes from [unintentional] violation of prohibited actions. A korban olah, on the other hand, atones for improper thoughts. Improper thoughts, Rabbeinu Bechaye explains, is something that a person can never totally escape from. Unfortunately, they are very prevalent and they are more prevalent at night than during the daytime. It is for this reason that the Olah offerings are to burn the entire night. Night time is the time when people especially need atonement from improper thoughts. About this it is written: "Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the law of the burnt-offering: It is the burnt-offering that stays on the flame, on the altar, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Altar should be kept aflame on it." [Vayikra 6:2]

Now we know what Eliyahu meant when he told Rav Moshe Cordevero that the segulah for ridding oneself of evil thoughts is recitation of the pasuk at the end of the chapter on burnt offerings: "The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it, it shall not be extinguished." [Vayikra 6:6]

Just as we say that one who recites the pasukim associated with the sacrifices is credited (nowadays) as if he brought that offering, so too if one recites this pasuk from the section of the Korban Olah (burnt offering), it is as if he brought a burnt offering and he thereby receives the segulah associated with the Korban Olah - namely protection from evil thoughts.

Matzah: The Bread of Affiction and the Bread of Redemption

The reasons given for eating matzah on the night of the seder are somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand matzah is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate when they were slaves in Egypt (i.e. - the poor slaves did not even have time to let their dough rise due to the oppression of their cruel taskmasters.) On the other hand, we eat matzah because their deliverance came upon them so suddenly that their dough did not even have time to rise before they had to hurry out of Egypt.

The Ramban in his Torah Commentary [Devorim 16:3] points out this dual nature of matzah's symbolism. It is the bread which symbolizes the enslavement and it is the bread which symbolizes the redemption.

This is rather strange. Imagine, for 200+ years the slaves were thinking "Oh, what would I give for a piece of soft bread!" For centuries they were salivating over the luscious white bread the Egyptian taskmasters were eating. Bread would have been the appropriate thing to symbolize the redemption! Such was apparently not the Divine Plan. The Almighty said "The same matzah that you ate as a slave, now you eat as a free person."

The message in this is that in order to be a free person, we do not need anything. If a person specifically needs "bread" as opposed to matzah to consider himself free, then he is not a free person. A person who NEEDS the physical pleasure of bread to give him his sense of freedom is not really free. Rather, he is a slave to his physical needs.

The Master of the Universe emphasizes that freedom has nothing to do with externals. It is entirely a phenomenon of one's internal awareness. I can eat the same piece of matzah that I ate as a slave and also eat it now as a free person. This is true freedom.

A friend of mine in the rabbinate once posed the following question to a group of teenagers: What would you prefer - to be poor and happy or rich and unhappy? The unanimous response was to be rich and unhappy. They, unfortunately, did not even understand the question. They could not comprehend why they might be unhappy if they were rich.

The truth of the matter is that the less encumbered one is, the less one needs, the more happy he can be. That is why the bread of redemption could not be rye bread or white bread. It had to be the same matzah they ate as slaves.

This idea is not only taught at the time of Pesach, it is characteristic of Succos as well. Succos, of all the Festivals, is called "The Time of Our Joy" (Zman Simchaseinu). On Succos, we leave the comforts of our home and move into a flimsy little hut. Furthermore, the libation one brings on Succos is not wine (as is the case with all other libations) but is water.

To be happy, a person should not need to retire to a flimsy Succah. To be happy, a person should go out and have wine libations as we do the entire year. The answer is the same. In order to achieve Simcha [joy], the Torah is demonstrating that a person can go out into the flimsy Succah. He does not need the comforts of his home. True happiness does not need externals. It does not even need wine - water will do just fine!

In the prayer after the Priestly Blessing that we say on the holidays, we say "May it be Your Will... that You give me and all the souls of my household our food and sustenance generously and not sparsely ...from beneath Your generous Hand, just as you gave a portion of bread to eat and clothing to wear to our father Jacob...". There seems to be something wrong with this prayer. We are asking for generous sustenance ... like that provided to Yaakov who was given bread to eat and the shirt on his back to wear? Why don't we ask for sustenance like that given to Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon]?

The answer is that indeed, what Yaakov had was generous sustenance. Yaakov was 100 percent satisfied with the material blessings he was given. This is all he ever asked for [Bereishis 28:20] and he was happy with it. Generous sustenance (parnasa b'revach) is never related to the amount. It is based on what satisfies the person. This is what we pray for - that we should be as free as Yaakov Avinu was free, namely by being happy with a piece of bread to eat and a single item of clothing to wear.

May we all have a Happy and Kosher Pesach.

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