

ONE GAINS HOLINESS BY SCHLEPPING FOR ANOTHER JEW

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Bo

One Gains Holiness By Schlepping For Another Jew

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #842 What Should It Be? Hello or Shalom? Good Shabbos!

In the description of the Exodus from Egypt, the Torah says: "And to all the children of Israel a dog did not wag its tongue." [Shemos 11:7] The Mechilta comments on this pasuk "That is why in the case of non-kosher meat, the Torah advises 'You shall throw it to the dogs' - to teach that G-d does not withhold reward from any creature." Since the dogs exercised restraint and did not bark when the Jews left Egypt, forever afterwards the Torah states that when there is an animal which died without being ritually slaughtered, the proper procedure is to throw it to the dogs.

At the end of the parsha, the Torah talks about the mitzvah of redeeming first born animals (pidyon bechor). There is a mitzvah to redeem firstborns of humans and firstborns of Kosher animals. However, the firstborn of non-Kosher animals do not generally have any special holiness. However, there is a special procedure in the case of donkeys: Firstborn donkeys do have kedushas bechor (firstborn sanctity) and they should be redeemed with lambs; if they are not redeemed with lambs they should be decapitated.

Rashi states that here too, the special procedure of Pidyon Peter Chamor was a reward for the donkeys that helped the Jews transport the gold and silver they took out from Egypt at the time of the Exodus. Donkeys are beasts of burden and Rashi says that each Jew left Egypt with several donkeys laden with booty. This can be seen as another instance of the same principle - G-d will not deny the reward of any creature.

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld asked the following question: Why do we not find the concept of "Kedushas Kelev" (Dog holiness), which would trigger a procedure to redeem first born dogs? Why is it that the donkeys were rewarded with sanctity and the dogs were given the scraps of treife meat? Rav Yosef Chaim says that we see from here that one who "schleps" (carries a burden) for someone

else becomes holy. The dogs kept quiet. Fine. They were given a reward for that. But the donkeys "schlepped". That was hard work. That is a higher level of effort and for that they were rewarded with sanctity. One who helps another Jew becomes holy. If a donkey becomes holy for schlepping for a Jew, certainly a Jew will become even more holy for helping schlep for a fellow Jew.

Hidden Miracles

The Ramban's Chumash commentary is a storehouse of fundamental Jewish philosophical beliefs. There is a famous Ramban at the end of Parshas Bo which explains why the Torah contains so many commandments that commemorate the Exodus. To name just a few T'fillin, Mezuzah, Pessach, Succah, and Kiddush are all "zecher l'yetzias Mitzrayim".

The Ramban explains that the Exodus set the record straight and debunked all the myths that were prevalent in the world. Some argued that the Master of the Universe did not exist. Others admitted that there was a Creator, but after Creation, He decided not to have anything to do with the world anymore. Still others believed that G-d Knows what goes on in the world, but does not care about it.

The Exodus contradicted all these theological errors. The miraculous unfolding of the events which led to the departure of the nation of slaves from the hands of the most powerful empire of its day proved that G-d created the world and still takes an active role in its direction, changing "nature" itself if it suits Him. This is why this historical event is so crucial for setting straight the "theological facts of life".

Since G-d does not want to create open miracles on an ongoing basis, it was necessary to provide commandments that remind us of the "open miracles" that occurred in the past. The Ramban explains that from the belief in G-d's ability to create "open miracles" (in the past), a person will come to accept the concept of "hidden miracles" (that happen on a daily basis), which the Ramban calls the foundation of all of Torah. "For a person has no portion in the Torah of Moshe our teacher until he believes that everything that happens to us in all circumstances of life - whether private or public -- are all miracles."

We need to believe that life itself is a miracle. The fact that I can stand here and talk and you can listen or the fact that the sun rises every morning in the eastern sky and sets every evening in the western sky is a miracle -- except that these "miracles" are disguised as "nature". We become used to these things because they have happened throughout all our lives and perhaps throughout all of history, but they are miraculous nonetheless.

I recently received the following letter. After hearing the above Ramban regarding "hidden miracles", I believe we can all have a greater appreciation of this letter and the story it tells:

In the summer of 2004, Andrew and Sharon finally became engaged and asked me, their Rabbi from Bel-Air California, if I would officiate at their wedding. The ceremony was to take place on December 5, 2004.

I told them I would be happy to officiate at their wedding provided they satisfied four basic requirements: (1) They are both Jewish; (2) The bride will go to the mikvah before the marriage; (3) The food at the wedding will be kosher; (4) Neither of them are currently married to another person and if they are currently married they must first obtain a Jewish divorce.

The couple agreed to the conditions, however "to be up front" Sharon told me that she had been married previously "but it was only for 6 hours and it was a mistake and I had the marriage annulled and I don't want to revisit it because it was a terrible mistake on my part."

I told her that in Judaism it does not matter if one is married for 6 hours or 6 years or 60 years -- one remains married until the death of the spouse or one obtains a Jewish divorce.

"But the courts annulled my marriage, Rabbi. Please understand. It was a mistake."

"I am sorry, you need a Get", I told her.

"Rabbi, what if I can't find the 'mistake'? Am I doomed forever?"

I told her "I will be there for you. Let's contact the Jewish courts in Los Angeles, and they will help us get through this dilemma."

It took several weeks. This first husband was finally tracked down. I got in touch with the Beis Din in Los Angeles. They arranged the Get and the Beis Din told Sharon, "Now that you have your Get, you can get married, but not before 92 days from today." [This is based on the law of 'havchana,' which requires a waiting period before remarriage to preclude doubt regarding paternity issues of a child that may be born 7-9 months after the first marriage was terminated.]

The couple was now very distraught because this waiting period would push the wedding date past December 5th. All they could think about was their wedding plans, their honeymoon, their chosen dates. For days, they did not understand why they would have to wait until January 2005 before they could get married. But they finally agreed. After a few days, Andrew and Sharon called me back and told me that they wanted to do the wedding right in G-d's Eyes, so they began re-planning their wedding for January 23, 2005.

Still, in the back of their minds they could not understand why G-d was delaying their wedding. They could not understand that until December 26, 2004. Andrew and Sharon were supposed to be on the last days of their three week honeymoon in a luxury hotel on a romantic island in the Indian Ocean, which was totally swept away by the 12/26/2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which took almost a quarter of a million lives.

As Andrew said, "The best advice the Rabbi ever gave us was to follow the rules of G-d's Torah. He

assured us that it would be a blessing for us in the end."

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 Bo are provided below:

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