EXPANDING UPON A THOUGHT FROM THE KLI YAKAR

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Tzav

Expanding Upon A Thought From The Kli Yakar

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #851 Proper Attire for Davening. Good Shabbos!

At the beginning of Parshas Tzav, the Torah teaches the law of the flour offering: "This is the law of the flour offering, it should be offered by the sons of Aharon before Hashem on the altar..." [Vayikra 6:7-11] The Torah describes how to bring a Korban Mincha and then the Torah writes "You should ensure that the flour offering does not become leavened (Chametz)...it is Holy of Holies (Kodesh Kodoshim) like the Chatas and the Asham." In other words, when the Torah wants to inform us what is considered the "gold standard" of "Kodesh Kodoshim," the prime examples given are two kinds of sin offerings -- the Chatas and Asham.

The Kli Yakar asks why the Chatas and Asham (rather than, for example the Korban Olah - the burnt offering) are used as the paradigms of ultimate holiness. The Kli Yakar answers that sin offerings are brought when a person did something wrong and is now doing Teshuvah. They serve as atonement for the person who sinned. In his words "A completely righteous person is holy to G-d, but a person who sinned and sincerely repents is holy of holies!" This is in line with the principle that "in a place where a Baal Teshuva stands, even completely righteous people cannot stand." [Brochos 34b] The Kli Yaka further quotes the Rabbinic teaching that a person who repents out of love of G-d has his intentional sins turned into merits. [Yoma 86b]

I would like expand the Kli Yakar's explanation based on a thought I once heard from Rabbi Yochanan Zweig, relating to the Hagaddah. Rabbi Zweig asks 3 questions. The first is a question that many people speak about and is in fact something we have spoken about in past years:

Why is it that Matzah serves both as a symbol for redemption and salvation as well as a symbol for affliction and exile? Are the two motifs not contradictory? We eat Matzah at the Seder because when we were taken out of Egypt, the dough did not have a chance to rise. This is the symbol of

redemption. On the other hand, it is in fact true that this was also the bread the Jews ate in Egypt throughout their period of enslavement. We begin the Hagaddah by saying "This is the bread of poverty that our fathers ate in Egypt..." Is it not strange that the Torah uses the very same symbol to represent both redemption and freedom and also slavery and affliction?

The second observation of Rabbi Zweig is as follows: The Asseres Hadibros [Ten 'Commandments'] begin with the pasuk "Anochi Hashem Elokecha" [I am the L-rd your G-d]. The Medrash Tanchuma states that the word Anochi is of Egyptian origin. The pasuk should really begin with the more common Hebrew word, "Ani". So again we have an irony that the Asseres Hadibros, which is the apex of the story of the deliverance from Egypt, start with a word which is reminiscent of the Egyptian exile.

Finally, Rabbi Zweig notes, the Talmud [Pessachim 116a] emphasizes that the story of the Exodus from Egypt needs to be told in the sequence: "beginning with that which is unseemly and ending in that which is praiseworthy" (maschil b'gnus u'mesayem b'shvach). When someone wants to relate his life history - especially when he has reached a high point in his life - he always begins the story with "I come from very humble beginnings".

For example, (this is dating me) when Henry Kissenger became Nixon's Secretary of State, he got up and mentioned how noteworthy it was that he was a refugee from Nazi Germany whose parents had to flee the Nazis because of their Jewishness and now he was the American Secretary of State! This is a classic example of "maschil b'gnus u'mesayem b'shvach". This is the natural way to tell such a story. So why must Chazal insist that we need to tell the story in this fashion, would we not tell it that way on our own, naturally?

Rabbi Zweig answered these three questions based on an interesting Rambam at the beginning of Hilchos Avodas Kochavim [Laws of Idolatry Chapter 1]. The Rambam describes how the theological error of idolatrous worship was introduced into society. He writes that initially no one attributed independent power to the sun or moon. They assumed these heavenly bodies were agents of the Master of the Universe. The belief system deteriorated until people started believing the heavenly bodies had independent power. Ultimately, things deteriorated further until people worshipped stone and wooden representations of these mistaken "heavenly powers". This is how the entire world -- including Terach's son Avram, used to believe and act. However, this young Avram began to analyze and question how it could be that such inanimate objects had power.

In other words, according to the Rambam, Avram himself was a Baal Teshuvah - an idolater who later repented and ultimately recognized his Creator, at the age of 40! When Avram became convinced of the errors of society, he actively promoted his own recognition of a Master of the Universe, and revolutionized religious belief in the society in which he was living.

The Rava"d asks two questions on the Rambam's scenario. First, he quotes what appears to be an opposing teaching of the Rabbis that Avram recognized his Creator at age 3. [This is derived from the

numeric value of the word "Ekev" (172) in the expression "Ekev asher shama Avraham b'Koli" [Bereishis 26:5] [Since Avraham listened to My Voice]. Chazal say that Avraham was faithful to the Word of G-d for 172 out of his 175 years (meaning since he was 3 years old). Second, the Rava"d says that the Rambam's description seems to ignore the presence of Shem and Ever, who were older than Avraham and who according to Rabbinic tradition never abandoned belief in the True G-d. Why, he asks, according to Rambam, was only Avraham successful in changing the world's theological outlook?

Rav Yochanan Zweig explains as follows. If I am not a smoker and I try to convince a smoker that he should give up smoking, he will ignore me. I can provide the most eloquent and graphic arguments why he should stop smoking but because I do not know the "pleasure" of inhaling a cigarette, I will be very unsuccessful in convincing someone who has experienced that pleasure to give it up because of my protestations.

A person who was a smoker and smoked all his life and then became a "Baal Teshuva," and broke his addiction to nicotine, will be far more successful persuading a current smoker that it is worth the effort to "kick the habit". Just like a former smoker is more effective in getting another smoker to give up smoking, so too a former idol-worshipper (like Avraham, according to the Rambam) will be much more effective than someone like Shem and Ever, who never worshipped idols, at creating a new religion and getting other idolaters to abandon their erroneous beliefs and accept the idea of monotheism.

A Baal Teshuva can oftentimes be more successful in getting another person to see the "Light" than a person who was "Frum From Birth". To someone who is "FFB," the free spirit asks "What do you know? You have never experienced the pleasures of eating shell fish! You have never experienced the pleasures that life has to offer! What do you know about a life style that brings one satisfaction and happiness?" Someone who has "been there; done that" and can say with conviction "This is a much better life" is someone to whom the free spirited person will be willing to listen. Shem and Ever were FFBs. Avraham Avinu was himself a Baal Teshuvah.

Avraham Avinu was able to take those first 40 years of his life of theological error and idol worship and turn them into a positive experience such that he could now relate to other people and enable them to "see the Light".

This answers the other question of the Rava"d as well. It is true that Avraham only recognized his Creator at age 40, but since he transposed his whole life experience to have a spiritually positive impact on others, it can truthfully be said that for "Ekev" years of his life he "hearkened to the words of his Creator". Retroactively from age 40, he turned all of his life's experiences from the time he first gained intelligence (age 3) into a spiritually positive experience.

This is what the Pessach Seder is about. In other religions, l'havdil, there is a concept of "Born Again". This means whatever came before now is wiped off the map and this "born again" person is a

completely new individual. We do not speak in those terms for a Baal Teshuvah. A person is obligated to take every aspect of his past life and try to turn it around and use it positively.

This is why the symbol of freedom can also be the symbol of slavery. One can take the experience of what it means to be a slave to Pharaoh and reshape it to gain insight into what it means to be a servant to the Master of the Universe. This is why Matzah can be both the symbol of slavery and the symbol of freedom! Likewise, the Egyptian word Anochi can itself be used to teach a new lesson - that of Anochi Hashem Elokecha [I am the L-rd, your G-d]. Finally, the "Gnus" - the unseemly beginning must always remain part of the story. The "Shvach" that occurs later can retroactively give new meaning and new nuance to all the experiences of "Gnus" that took place initially. Even the experience of "Chatas" and "Asham" (offerings caused by sin) can generate a status of Kodesh Kodoshim - Holy of Holies.

We neither ignore nor bury our unseemly past -- we utilize it to motivate and enhance the experience of our new spiritual direction.

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 Tzav are provided below:

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