

PARSHAS BO

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

The geulah from Egypt is the fountain of all the redemptions, from the four exiles- Bavel, Paras, Yavan and Edom- but also the redemption of the Nefesh from all of the forces that prevent or disturb people from serving G-d. Vehotzeiti is redemption from Bavel, which is the confusion between good and evil; 'There G-d bilbeil' (Bereishit, 11). The Zohar tells us that Nebuchadnezzar placed a golden cap on himself and recited the first two Commandments. Vehitzalti, is the redemption from Paras, who were prepared to kill and destroy. Vegealti is redemption from Yavan. Israel at that time was living on its own land and required only redemption from the yoke of Yavan. This is similar to the geulah of houses by the original owner from the person who had acquired the property. Velakacti refers to Edom that is the marah shechorah, despair, depression and without hope. The redemption for this is the Torah and here we read, 'I will take you to Me as a nation and you will be to Me as My People'.

Because of the centrality of the Exile in Egypt and the redemption from there, it is important to understand what the relationship is between that exile and that country and why the exile had specifically to be there. The brit bein habetarim does not specify the country of exile, only that it would be for 400 hundred years and what its nature would be. Even if we realize that it was the sale of Yosef that led to Israel's going down to Egypt, this still does not explain why that country was the destined place and what message there is in that choice.

'For the land to which you come it is not like the land of Egypt that you left, where you would plant your seed and water it with your foot [by pumping the water from the canals of the Nile], from the rains of Heaven shall you drink water (Devarim, 11:10-11). Eretz Yisrael lives from rain. There, the whole human existence, the society that will grow there and the development of the people depend on rainfall. Every form of communal and national sin and evil is punished by drought, and obedience to G-d's word is rewarded by plenty of rain in its season (Parshat Bechukotai, Parshat Ki Tavo and the 2nd paragraph of Kriat Shema). In Egypt there is no rain. All the wealth of the country, the welfare of its people and the power of its kings, comes from the rising of the waters of the Nile. Where there is rain, men lift up their eyes to Heaven and pray for rain. There is a link between Mankind and G-d. All know that they depend on Him to provide and behave accordingly. 'The eyes of the Lord are on Eretz Yisrael from the beginning of the year till the end'. However, where there is no rain, but only the rising of the waters of the Nile, people walk with their eyes on the ground to seek their livelihood. Here there is no connection between Mankind and G-d, nor one between Earth and Heaven. It was necessary for Israel's exile to be in this country where there is no link between Heaven and Earth,

where Mankind is without a visible relationship with G-d.

This is like the way the Admor Menachem Mendel of Kotsk explained the punishment given to the Snake, 'From the dust of the Earth will be your sustenance'. It would seem that this is no punishment since dust is plentiful and the wealth and the basis for life are assured. Yet G-d is demonstrating that while He provides continuously for the whole of Creation, the Snake's sustenance is given in one act; there will never be a relationship between him and G-d.

Now we can understand why there had to be Ten Plagues; neither more nor less. There were 10 generations between Adam and Noah and each generation destroyed through its sins one tenth of the world created by Ten Utterances. Then that world had to be destroyed by the Flood and a new one replaced it. Ten Generations between Noah and Avraham. Now all the evil that could destroy that world created with the Ten Utterances, was drawn down to Egypt, which was the essence of all sin. It required the 10 plaques to cleanse the world of the evil that was Egypt.

Then the world needed to be rebuilt. For each plague that came down on Egypt, Israel received one Commandment at Sinai.

There is therefore a cycle of Ten. There are Ten Utterances that create the World, there are Ten Generations that twice destroy that World, Ten Plagues that come to punish that destruction and Ten Commandments that come to save that World.

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