

PROTECTIVE SHIELD

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"I have carried you on the wings of eagle and brought you to me" Shemot 19:4

The imagery of an eagle carrying its young was chosen by Hashem to highlight an important lesson to Jews in all generations. Seforno explains that an eagle carries its young on its wings not in its claws, as do other birds. Since an eagle soars above all others there is no need to clutch its young in its claws in order to protect its young from other birds of prey. The eagle has the unique position of flying at an altitude above all other birds allowing it to place its offspring safely on its shoulders. Similarly, Hashem led the Children of Israel into the barren desert away from the influence of the decadent and immoral society of Egypt. This, G-d knew, was the best way to cleanse the people from their former environs and to prepare them for their new role as the chosen people.

When one considers the yearlong exposure to the miraculous demonstration of Hashem's power during the year of the plagues one might wonder why it was necessary to isolate the Jewish people from the rest of society. One would be led to believe that they would be impervious to the pernicious influences of the gentile neighbors and to prepare them for the acceptance of G-d's book at Sinai.

The lesson of the plagues and the crossing of the sea were obviously not enough to protect our forefathers from negative impact. Physical isolation in a barren environment, however, was the right prescription for a healthy spirit. This complete seclusion prepared our ancestors for the covenant at Sinai.

Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz sums up this thought with words written by the Rambam about 1,000 years ago. "If one lives in times when all the countries of the world are evil, such as in our time...one should seclude himself." If this is not feasible, continues the Rambam one must leave civilization and live in the desert.... The Chazon Ish (1871-1953) suggests that we can find refuge from our environment by frequenting the bet hamidrash and learning Torah. Besides being literally a sanctuary from the onslaught of contemporary society, the bet hamidrash is a place to reinforce us and strengthen our resistance to the spiritual ailments so rampant in our environment. This has been the secret of Jewish survival throughout the ages and is as applicable now as it was then"

CONSIDER THIS FOR A MINUTEK

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