

Shabbos: Ta'am HaChaim

Shemos 5783

Unity in Exile is the Antidote for Redemption

Introduction

This week we commence a new book in the Torah, the Book of Shemos. The Ramban refers to the Book of Shemos as the Book of Geulah, Redemption. In continuing with the theme that we mentioned last week regarding unity, it is noteworthy that the parashah commences with the verse that states (Shemos 1:1) *veileh shemos bnei Yisroel habaa'im mitzraymah es Yaakov ish uveiso bau*, and these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt; with Yaakov, each man and his household came. Despite the fact that the Jewish People are set to descend into exile and slavery, the Torah provides the antidote before the punishment. The Gemara (Yoma 9b) states that the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*, unwarranted hatred amongst Jews. The Egyptian exile was precipitated by the hatred that the brothers had for Yosef. The antidote for this enmity amongst the brothers was unity. We find later in the parashah that Moshe goes out to his brothers. Moshe acted in this manner despite the fact that he grew up in the royal palace and he could have justified himself by remaining inside the palace and not acting on behalf of his downtrodden brethren. Thus, an act of brotherhood and unity was what led to the redemption from Egypt.

The Korban Pesach Reflects Unity

It is fascinating to note that the actual exodus culminated with the offering of the Korban Pesach, regarding which the Maharal writes that the underlying theme of the Korban Pesach is unity. This idea is reflected in the fact that the offering was required to be eaten whole, in one house, a bone could not be broken, and numerous other aspects that reflect unity (see Maharal in *Gevuros HaShem* §60 for further explanation of this concept). Thus, the exile was catalyzed by needless hatred, and the exodus was predicated on unity and culminated in an offering that symbolizes unity.

Individual Repentance, No Slander, and Circumcision Also Reflect Unity

The Medrash (Targum attributed to Yonasan ben Uziel Shemos 2:24) states that the Jewish People were redeemed when they all repented without anyone being aware of each other's repentance. The conventional form of repentance is where the Jewish People assemble and pray and fast in unison. Yet, the Jewish People in Egypt were required to distance themselves from idolatry and become one with HaShem. This form of repentance necessitated that each Jew reflect on his actions in private and repent from his sins. Additionally, while the Jewish People were enslaved to the Egyptians, aside from one or two individuals, there was no slander amongst the people [The Medrash (Shemos Rabbah 1:30) states that Moshe claimed that the Jewish People were not deserving of redemption because there were slanderers

amongst them. However, Reb Tzadok in Ohr Zarua Latzaddik §7 explains that Moshe hid the Egyptian that he killed in the sand, and the Medrash (Ibid 1:29) states that this alludes to the idea that the Jewish People would not reveal the secret that the Egyptian had been killed.] This was a sign of unity. Furthermore, the Jewish People were required to be circumcised before being redeemed, and the Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:49) writes that circumcision is a sign of brotherhood. Thus, circumcision reflects unity, and in the merit of this display of unity the Jewish People were deemed deserving of redemption.

The Shabbos Connection

In a similar vein, Shabbos is the culmination of the week. Whereas the week has potential for strife and discord, the Holy Shabbos reflects unity, where we are one with HaShem with HaShem, His Torah, and His people. When we observe the Shabbos properly, we will merit the Ultimate Redemption, regarding which it is said (Micah 7:15) kimei tzeischso mimitzrayim arenu niflaos, as in the days when you left Egypt I will show it wonders.

Shabbos in the Zemiros

Tzama Lecho Nafshi

This zemer was composed by the great medieval commentator and poet Avraham Ibn Ezra whose name is found in the acrostic of the verses

רָם עַל כָּל כְּבוֹדוֹ. כָּל פֶּה יִתְנֶה הוֹדוֹ. בְּרוּךְ אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ.
נִפְּשׁ כָּל הָי, exalted above all is His glory, let

every mouth express His majesty, blessed is He in Whose hand is the soul of all the living. HaShem is above us and beyond our comprehension. Nonetheless, the Gemara (Megillah 31a) states that where one finds HaShem's strength, that is where one finds His humility. Here we declare that HaShem is exalted above all, but we praise Him for being in control of all living souls.

Shabbos in Halacha

מוליך – Creating a new Entity

One prohibition that the Sages instituted, as it resembles a melacha, is molid, which means creating a new entity. Under this prohibition, one is prohibited from transforming an item from a solid form to a liquid form, or vice versa, as by doing so one produces a new object. Freezing and defrosting liquids on Shabbos are subject to this prohibition.

Shabbos Stories

Ready for Shabbos

In the house of Reb Yechezkel Abramsky, the Shabbos table was always set early Friday morning. Reb Yechezkel once related, “my wife’s grandfather (author of the Ridvaz commentary on the Talmud Yerushalmi) was seriously ill. Sitting at his bedside, I heard him say, ‘Master of the universe! What is it that I must pledge to merit a speedy recovery? I wrote a commentary on the Talmud Yerushalmi. Do You wish that I also write a commentary on Talmud Bavli?’ The Ridvaz then feel silent, as if he were asleep. When he awoke, he

called to his wife and said, ‘from now on, when I return from shul on Friday morning, we must set the table for Shabbos. It was revealed to me that by pledging this, my life will be extended. Soon afterward, the Ridvaz’s condition improved dramatically.

The Nazi and his Jewish Grandchildren

My father took a leading role in the slaughter of Jews. Was our family tainted with evil?

by Dr. James David Weiss

Reprinted with permission from "Vintage Wein" - the collected wit and wisdom of Rabbi Berel Wein, published by Shaar Press, written by Dr. James David Weiss.



In a trip to visit Israel, Rabbi Berel Wein attended morning services in a synagogue in Jerusalem. He relates that, unlike his own synagogue, which has benches facing the front of the synagogue, this synagogue had tables and benches, so he was forced to look at those praying opposite him. A tall, blue-eyed, blond-haired man and three blond small boys walked in and sat down opposite him. Rabbi Wein is used to the racial diversity of the citizens in Israel so little surprises him, but this was different; this particular family was definitely Aryan.

More noteworthy than their racial features was the seriousness and intensity of their praying. The children were especially well-behaved and followed the service dutifully without once wavering in their concentration. For Rabbi Wein, accustomed to the more freewheeling American child, it was an unusual experience.

Afterward, the rabbi remarked to a friend that they looked like fine people. His friend said that the man was a microbiologist at Hebrew University who happened to have an extraordinary story to tell. "Would you like to hear it?" he asked, and without waiting for an answer, called to his fellow congregant, "Avraham, this is Rabbi Berel Wein. I'm sure he would like to hear your story."

The two shook hands and agreed to walk home together. As they went, the rabbi listened to him tell the following story:

"I was born and brought up in Germany. My father was an officer in the elite SS killing squad, the Totenkopf (Deathhead Squad). He served throughout the war and after it was over successfully eluded apprehension. But his crimes were so heinous that years later the West German Republic continued to pursue him. Finally, he was caught and imprisoned for ten years. Later, because he was so old, they reduced his sentence and let him out after four and a half years.

It was a bewildering experience to find out that my father led such a monstrous life.

"My father never talked about his past, and when he was caught, I read about his crimes

in the newspaper. It was a bewildering experience to find out that my father led such a monstrous life.

"The family was shaken by the news. I was a teenager and became very confused by all the notoriety. When we went to visit him in prison, I couldn't go in to see him. I felt as if he betrayed me. However, one useful thing came out of this -- I developed an interest in the War and found out as much as I could about the Totenkopf and its role in the Holocaust.

"All this occurred around that time the Eichmann trial was taking place, and Holocaust material began to be published. I read all I could find and was able to get a general picture of what happened to the Jews. What I found out horrified me and the thought that my father took a role -- a leading role in the slaughter -- made me feel that perhaps our family was tainted with evil. If the conditions were the same, I asked myself, could I too become a killer?

"I took a trip, getting as far away from Germany as possible. It was as if I was haunted by Germany and all things German... On the way, I decided to visit Israel to get some perspective on the victims of the Nazis and find out what was so special about this nation that so consumed Hitler. I needed to come to terms with what was churning inside of me, and I toured the country, working periodically here and there on agricultural settlements.

"While in a kibbutz, I saw a poster advertising a summer's program at Hebrew University in desert zoology, and I enrolled. I did very well and in the fall was able to

register for a graduate program at the university. While I was engaged in graduate work, I also became interested in Judaism.

"I loved Israel so much I just stayed on and applied for citizenship. Also, after about two years of learning about Judaism I decided to study to become a Jew. A few years later I earned my Ph.D. in microbiology and became a Jew. I married and settled in Jerusalem. My wife was a German Lutheran, but she, too, converted. A psychologist might interpret my conversion as sublimating my guilty feelings, but I prefer to think about it as fulfilling my Jewish destiny. Don't ask me how or why, but here we are -- an observant Jewish family. And we are very happy living as Jews.

"About a year ago we learned that my father was not feeling well. My wife thought it would be a mitzvah to visit him and show him his grandchildren. At first I was apprehensive about going back to Germany, a country I now feared. But in the end, I took a sabbatical and we went back to Darmstadt to visit with my father.

When he first saw us, my father was overwhelmed, and initially, couldn't bring himself to embrace anyone.

"It was quite a scene. My boys wore their yarmulkas and had their tzitzis (fringes) showing. Their payos (sidecurls) were tucked back behind their ears and, of course, they spoke Hebrew.

"When he first saw us, my father was overwhelmed, and initially, couldn't bring himself to embrace anyone. Later we got to

talk and he seemed to be pleased by the way things were turning out for us.

"My father is very old now, over ninety, and I wanted to know what he did to merit such a long life with such grandchildren, so I asked him point blank what he had done to earn his good fortune.

"I explained to him that we Jews believe that there are consequences to what we do, and the reward system in life is measured very carefully. He looked at me and pondered the question.

"He answered, 'I can't think of anything outstanding, but once, in Frankfurt,' he said, 'when we were rounding up the Jews, I had the chance to save the lives of three Jewish boys who were hiding in a Catholic orphanage. For some reason they aroused my sympathy. I was touched by their plight; they were so lost and forlorn I felt pity for them, so I let them flee. I don't know what happened to them. But I didn't kill them.'

"I thought his answer over and told him that according to our tradition his answer made sense. 'You know, papa, if you had let four boys go, you would have had four grandchildren.'"

Excerpt from "Vintage Wein" - the collected wit and wisdom of Rabbi Berel Wein, by Dr. James David Weiss. Visit Rabbi Wein's website at: www.rabbiwein.com (www.aish.com)

Shabbos Ta'am HaChaim: Shemos 5783

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