Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

NAALEH נעלה מי יעלה בהר ה'

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Ephraim's Escape: Parshat Bo

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowtiz-Stein

In the Covenant Between the Halves, Hashem told Avraham that his descendants would be enslaved for 400 years. Yet the Torah records that "it was at the end of four hundred and thirty years..." Further, according to Mesoratic calculations, the enslavement lasted 210 years. How can we reconcile this?

Rashi explains that the time from the prophecy to the exodus totaled 430 years. However, the actual onset of the prophecy would begin only with the birth of Yitzchak, through whom the prophecy would be actualized, 30 years later. That term was 400 years. The duration of the sojourn in Egypt was only 210 years.

Due to the confusion in interpreting the prophecy, part of the Tribe of Ephraim believed the 400 years should be calculated from the prophecy itself and they escaped 30 years before the end of the enslavement. The Philistines killed many of them, and their bones lay in the valley. These are the bones Yechezkel famously prophesied grew flesh and were resurrected.

Nevertheless, the simple reading of the text puts Bnei Yisroel in Egypt for 400 years. Why did Hashem redeem them after only 210 years? Our commentators explain that the servitude was so intense that the work normally accomplished in 400 years was completed in 210 years. Pirkei d'Reb Eliezer explains that the servitude was mandated only for the days, but the Egyptians made them also work at nights, thereby almost halving the preordained years of servitude.

The Egyptian exile's purpose was meant to sensitize Bnei Yisroel to the stranger among them. By doubling the pain and the workload, Hashem telescoped the time needed so that He could redeem us after only 210 years, writes Rabbi Mordechai Ezrachi.

The Shvilei Pinchas, based on the Shelah Hakodosh, notes that in fact the countdown of 400 years began with the revelation to Avraham Avinu. Thirty years were added as a punishment for the thirty years Yosef suffered after his brothers sold him to Egypt. The lesson Bnei Yisroel was meant to learn was that we are one united people who do not abandon each other.

Ephraim felt that since they were not involved in the sale of Yosef, they needn't wait the extra 30 years in servitude. But Yosef himself, the father of Ephraim, was partially responsible for the enmity of Mechirat Yosef, having reported negatively on his brothers. Further, the Bnei Ephraim were separating themselves from their brothers' suffering just as the shevatim had not listened to Yosef's cries when they threw him in the pit. Perhaps most egregiously, they did not take the bones of Yosef as he had commanded. Nor did they wait for the code words the Redeemer would use, "I have surely remembered." By abandoning their enslaved brothers, the Bnei Ephraim showed they hadn't learned to feel that all Bnei Yisroel were equal, and they must show kindness to each other. And when they didn't take Yosef's bones with them, they merited not only death, but also the scattering of their bones.

The Shvilei Pinchas suggests a positive take that Bnei Ephraim were following in the footsteps of Yosef and Yehudah and modeling the path of Moshiach ben Yosef. Just as Yosef preceded Bnei Yisroel into Mitzrayim, and sent Yehudah Goshnah, so will Moshiach ben Yosef go ahead of Moshiach ben Yehudah/David, both equaling 358. However, even though their motives were altruistic, they didn't have permission to separate from the rest of the nation.

Hashem wants humility and teshuvah. But the sense of superiority that the sons of Leah had shown to the sons of the maidservants was now evident in Bnei Ephraim and it doomed them. The Gemara says that Moshiach will come in a generation that is either completely righteous or guilty. Rabbi Bik explains that each Jew must look toward himself. When all Bnei Yisroel accept each other as righteous and see themselves as the imperfect ones, we will bring Moshiach, may it be speedily, in our day.

Parshat Bo: Freedom from Slave Mentality

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Zohar writes that Hashem did not give the Torah to the Jews until Pharaoh and the Egyptian people capitulated. This seems perplexing. Why did the Almighty need one king and his civilization to submit to Him? The submission of Egypt did not last long anyway. Soon after they returned to their idolatrous lifestyle.

The Shem Mishmuel poses another question. How could Datan and Aviram, who witnessed so many miracles that Moshe performed in Egypt, continue to deny the truth of Moshe's mission?

He explains that the Jewish people spent more than 200 years in Egypt. The wicked sins and failings of the Egyptians had influenced them to such a degree that changing their mindset was as great a challenge as redeeming them from physical enslavement. Pharaoh arrogantly said, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to his voice?" The Jews were so engulfed in Egyptian culture that they believed Pharaoh when he said he was the creator. Although Moshe performed miracles before their eyes, Datan and Aviram had a way of twisting them, to keep the ideology of Egypt alive.

Why was it important to break Pharaoh so he would concede to the truth? Not because Hashem needed him or the Egyptians, but because He wanted the Jews to spiritually extricate themselves from the clutches of the Egyptian mindset. As Pharaoh began to submit, the Jews reclaimed their belief in Hashem. The first two mitzvot they received in Egypt were brit milah and korban pesach. They required great courage, faith, and self-sacrifice in the face of danger. Soon after, the Jews followed Hashem into the desert in an incredible act of bitachon. They marched into the Red Sea and it split in the merit of their unbending faith. Although in practice they had very little mitzvot, their emunah raised them from the 49 levels of impurity until they were worthy to receive the Torah.

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During the first seven plagues, Pharaoh remained haughty and obstinate. Only after the last three plagues did he begin to submit. At the end of our current exile, our enemies will be brazen and arrogant but Hashem will sublimate them. Before the crack of dawn, the night is darkest. There will be much suffering, but then the geulah will come and we will return to the land of Israel.

Just as Hashem needed to take Egypt out of the Jews, we must extricate the exile from within us. We must free ourselves of the blackness and impurity surrounding us. The key is Torah study. Hashem took us out of Egypt in order to bring us to Sinai. As we prepare for the redemption, we must increase our Torah learning and our performance of mitzvot. We must raise our children with these important values. In this way we will fulfill the promise Moshe proclaimed to Pharaoh, "B'narein uv'zkeinu nelech." With our children and our elders we will go!

Preparing Oneself for G-d Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

There's a discussion in the Kitzur as to what type of tzoah (waste matter) would inhibit one from reciting devarim she'bekedusha (holy words). The presence of human excrement and waste from a cat or rooster would prevent one from reciting devarim she'bekedusha. Other types of animal waste do not affect this halacha, unless they emit an odor.

In Seif yud, the Kitzur discusses the question of someone who prayed shemone esrei and then realized that the nearby baby had an unclean diaper. Is he required to repeat shemone esrei? If the baby was expected to have a dirty diaper and the person forgot to check, he would have to repeat the prayer. If it was unexpected, he does not have to go back. The Kitzur rules that for birchat hamazon one would never have to repeat it. The Mishna Berura disagrees and states that if one was negligent in inspecting the cleanliness of the place prior to bentching, one would have to go back.

The halacha states that a part of the body that is normally covered must be covered when praying or reciting a bracha. The Aruch Hashulchan is lenient and rules that if in a particular society it is normal for people to reveal certain areas, it wouldn't be a problem. The Shulchan Aruch rules stringently. Does closing one's eyes or turning away help? Some say yes and others say no. When necessary, one should ask a competent Rabbi.

In Seif yud zayin, the Kitzur notes that there must be a separation between the upper and lower body when reciting a davar shebekedusha. Normal Western garb usually accomplishes this. However, if a person is wearing a hospital gown, he should place his hands against his waist to create a separation. Wearing a gartel expresses additional respect for prayer.

In Siman vav, seiph aleph, the Kitzur points out that prior to making a bracha a person should be aware of what blessing he will say. One is not permitted to engage in any type of activity while reciting a bracha. When washing for bread, one should not recite the bracha while drying one's hands. One should not say the brachot quickly. Rather one should contemplate the meaning of the words. If one doesn't understand the words, does one fulfill one's obligation? In the majority of cases, yes, but there are exceptions. One must have intentions in the first verse of shema and the first blessing of shemone esrei. If one is not proficient in Hebrew he is allowed to recite a bracha in a different language, although there are exceptions.

The Kitzur quotes the Sefer Chassidim that when a person says a blessing on food or on performing a mitzvah he should not say it by rote, but with specific intent to praise and thank Hashem for His kindness. This can be challenging as human nature is to pay less attention to something we do all the time. If we would stop and contemplate the meaning of the brachot, our whole day would be different. In fact, this is the purpose of the blessings, to pause throughout the day and focus on Hashem and how He constantly provides for us. The brachot are woven into our lives to sensitize and infuse our daily life with meaning.

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