

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn

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FREEDOM OR WEALTH?

After the plague of darkness, Hashem told Moshe that He would bring one more plague upon the Egyptians, following which the Jewish nation would leave Mitzrayim. Hashem then continued:

"Please speak to the nation, and they should borrow—each person from his neighbor and each woman from her friend—vessels of silver and gold."

Why did Hashem need to implore the Jews to do this ("please")?

The Gemara explains that the Jews weren't that keen about asking their neighbors for gold and silver. "It's enough that we should leave ourselves!" they said. The Gemara illustrates this by way of a parable: A prisoner was once told, "If you stay in prison one more day, you will be given a large sum of money." The prisoner replied: "I am willing to forgo the money, as long as I can leave today!"

Despite this, Hashem begged that the Jews ask the Egyptians for their possessions, so that Avraham Avinu wouldn't come later with complaints, saying: "You fulfilled the verse, 'The [Egyptians] will oppress them,' but you did not fulfill the verse, 'The [Jews] will then leave with great riches!'"

This is difficult to understand. If it would be better for the Jews to leave one day sooner, wouldn't Avraham, too, be willing to forgo this great wealth?!

We must say that the great wealth was not a side benefit, but was part and parcel of Yetzias Mitzrayim.

EXILE AND CONVERTS

To understand this, let us first analyze the purpose of *golus*.

We know that we were sent to exile as a result of our sins. However, *golus* is more than simply a punishment; it is there to accomplish a goal. To quote the Gemara, "The reason why the Jews were exiled among the nations was so that they should be joined by converts."

What does this mean?

The reason a *ger* is motivated to convert is because even before

converting, he possesses a spark of holiness. This spark is so concealed that he has the complete halachic status of a non-Jew. However, the spark pushes him to convert and become a Jew, whereby the spark is redeemed and comes out to the open.

This explains an interesting change of wording in the Gemara. The Gemara often groups three categories of people together: "A slave that was freed, a child that matured, and a *ger*

that converted." To be consistent with the first two, the Gemara seemingly should have stated, "a *non-Jew* that converted." Why call him a *ger* from the outset? This alludes that even before converting, the *ger* possesses a spark of holiness.

AVRAHAM'S DEMAND

The concept of "conversion" applies in a broader sense as well.

Every entity in the world contains a spark of holiness. Through using the object with the proper intent, we "redeem" the spark and elevate it to *kedushah*.

This is the reason we were sent into *golus*, and this is what *golus* is all about: to redeem all of the sparks that are found throughout the lands of exile, bringing them to the realm of holiness. Similarly, the Jews in Mitzrayim were instructed to gather their neighbors' wealth, thereby elevating the sparks found within.

(Elevating the sparks in Mitzrayim actually had a worldwide effect, as seen with Yosef, who amassed money from all the neighboring countries who were affected by the famine.)

Furthermore: Each person has certain sparks that he is entrusted with the task of elevating. (This is true in the other direction as well: each spark must be elevated by a certain person.) If a person does not elevate the sparks in his jurisdiction, it is not just the sparks that suffer; the person himself is incomplete and cannot truly leave exile.

We can now understand why Avraham wanted so strongly that the Jews should request for their neighbors' valuables. He recognized that by doing so, the Jews were elevating the many

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sparks found in these items, and he also knew that without this, the purpose of Golus Mitzrayim would not be accomplished. Although the Jews did not see this, and wanted to forgo the riches in order to leave earlier, Avraham knew that this was an integral part of Yetzias Mitzrayim.

(In fact, this was so vital to Yetzias Mitzrayim that Hashem struck the Egyptians with darkness, so the Jews would be able to scout their houses and locate their precious vessels.)

PERSONAL SPARKS

This serves as a lesson to each one of us.

Our service of Hashem consists of two categories. One category includes Torah study, prayer, and mitzvah performance. But then there is another category: there is the time of day when we deal with physical objects, utilizing them for the sake of Heaven and to know Hashem.

The Gemara states that “no man can touch [the livelihood] that is prepared for his friend.” Just as this applies to actual livelihood, it similarly applies to the sparks of holiness found within the physical entities around us. Each person has certain unique sparks that are up to him to elevate.

Now, the average person does not know where his personal sparks are to be found. Hashem therefore arranges for a person to travel to various locations to seek out his livelihood. He assumes the reason he is traveling to a certain spot is because that is where he will make money; but the truth is that Hashem has guided him there, so he can elevate the sparks in that location by thinking words of Torah.

NEIGHBORS AND RESIDENTS

The same applies to bringing other Jews closer to Yiddishkeit. Each person has certain individuals he is entrusted with to

draw closer to Yiddishkeit. Reaching out to others is not only about *Ahavas Yisroel*, to assist the other for the *other's* sake, but is also important for the person himself, so that he can fulfill his mission and elevate the sparks in his domain. Otherwise, he may study a lot of Torah and do many mitzvos, but he remains in *golus*, as he has not amassed the “great wealth” he needs to properly exit *golus*.

This is the deeper significance of the double expression the Torah uses when instructing the Jews to approach their neighbors: “A woman shall borrow from her neighbor, and from the resident of her house.” A resident is someone you encounter on a constant basis, while a neighbor is someone you meet less frequently. The Torah teaches us that it is up to us to influence both types of people.

We must approach those with whom we are in constant contact, and encourage them to increase in Yiddishkeit. Similarly, we should do whatever we can to influence even non-Jewish acquaintances and impress upon them the idea that there is a Master who runs this world.

Moreover, we must affect even those whom we only meet on occasion. The fact that we come across such people is

surely *behashgachah peratis*, and we must do our best to have a positive impact on them as well.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 3, pp. 823–827

Each person has certain individuals he is entrusted with to draw closer to Yiddishkeit, without which he cannot properly leave *golus*.

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