



עֵלֵי חַדָּשׁ

Clilei HaChodesh

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Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

To Leave or Not to Leave?

Elie Farkas

Torah reading this time of year features our exodus from Egypt. Rashi (commenting on Shemot 10:22, from the Mechilta) says that only one fifth of all Jews in Egypt left. We know there were approximately 600,000 men of fighting age at Har Sinai, and we generally estimate the total population, including women and children, at around three million. Based on these estimates, approximately twelve million Israelites never left! When and how did they disappear? According to Rashi, Hashem killed these rebellious Jews during the plague of darkness, so the Egyptians wouldn't scoff at G-d for failing to redeem his nation. But what could so many Jews have possibly done to forfeit being part of the miraculous exodus?

In order to answer this question, we need to think about who *did* leave Egypt. Zohar Chadash on Yitro teaches that the redeemed Jews were wicked. They were on the 49th level of *tumah*, or impurity. Had they gone one step lower, they would have fallen to the depths of depravity and would have been irredeemable. They were guilty of the same crimes as the Egyptians; they too engaged in idolatry, adultery and other terrible transgressions. It seems as though G-d was willing to forgive everything and take them out – yet *something* prevented those four fifths from escaping. Which transgression was so insurmountable?

In Parshat Va'era (6:13), G-d sends Moshe and Aharon with a command to Pharaoh *and to Bnei Yisrael* to free Bnei Yisrael from Egypt. Obviously, Moshe had to tell this to Pharaoh, but why should he have to command the Jews to free themselves? Shouldn't they want to leave of their own accord?

Previously (6:7), G-d had told Moshe that He would take Bnei Yisrael out from under *sivlot Mitzrayim*, translated by Artscroll as "the burdens of Egypt." An alternative translation of *sivlot*, however, relates to *savlanut* – patience, or tolerance. Moshe had to command the Jews to leave Egypt because slavery in Egypt had become their norm. It had become acceptable to them – and that is what made them irredeemable.

The reality is that sometimes we accept the status quo, even when it is unacceptable. Slavery was never acceptable. It wasn't then, it wasn't 150 years ago, and it isn't now. Yet the Jewish people had become so used to it that they had to be commanded to leave it – and even then, the majority resisted.

As we will read in the coming weeks, even the Jews who left Egypt complained and asked to return several times. But those who left

were willing to experiment with freedom. 80% weren't even willing to try. The Jews who did leave were those who were willing to dream. Ultimately, most of these Jews failed as well, and didn't merit to enter Israel. They would ultimately sin with the golden calf or in the saga of the spies. However, at least they got to take part in the Exodus. 80% did not, because they were too set in their ways.

Times have not changed. The 80% of Jews then represents the majority of the world now. We saw an extreme example in Nazi Germany when most neutral people were swept along with the evil ones because they were not willing to leave from under *sivlot* Germany, to stand up and do what was right. We know of several heroes, like Oscar Schindler and Raoul Wallenberg, who did put their lives at risk to save Jews, but most of that generation were passive bystanders who allowed the atrocities to continue, accepting the status quo. Many even benefited or enjoyed acquiring possessions of the deported or murdered Jews.

Those on the right side of history would have left Egypt, too.

We too live in a world that often espouses ideas and beliefs contrary to ours. We become used to these values and fail to reject them. *Lashon hara* is so commonplace, it's as if we forget it's a sin. Are we more likely to protest, to walk away, to just listen, or to even participate in such conversations? This is but one example of how our comfort with norms prevents us from achieving spiritual greatness. We need to leave from under our own *sivlot* as well.

Humans have a powerful ability to adjust to just about any situation and make the best of it, a quality which is often vital in overcoming the trials and tribulations of life. However, adjustment must be accompanied by dreams of redemption and a yearning to bring those dreams to fruition. When the status quo is unacceptable, we must reject it even as we work within the system to live our lives. This was a balance that most of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt were unable to attain, and it is a challenge we face in a variety of settings every day.

Perhaps this is what the Haggada means when we recite that each individual is obligated to view himself as though he left Egypt. Maybe we ought to explore our own personal *sivlot*. We need to ask ourselves what unacceptable behaviors have become tolerable to us. We need to make sure that had we been there, we too could have given them up for the sake of redemption.

Jerusalem – Destiny or Accident?

Yehoshua and Daniel Kahn

In Deuteronomy 12:5, Moshe instructs the Israelites that once they have settled in the land of Israel, they must bring all offerings “to the place that Hashem will choose from among all your tribes to place His Name there.” We know that Hashem selected Jerusalem to be that place. What was the purpose of keeping the location a secret? Why not refer to it by name?

The Rambam, in his *Guide to the Perplexed* (Part 3, Chapter 45), suggests that if the location were publicized, the other nations would try to capture it, dedicate the area for idol worship, and fortify it – making it difficult for the Israelites to conquer. More importantly, if they had known where the Temple was destined to be, the Israelite tribes may have fought each other for that territory.

The Little Midrash Says quotes another reason in the name of Kli Yakar. He says that if the Israelites had known the future Temple would be located in a different site than that of the Tabernacle, they may not have treated the Tabernacle with appropriate respect. This is especially important considering that the Tabernacle would be in use for over 400 years before the dedication of the Temple.

A third possibility is that Hashem had not yet selected Jerusalem to be the site of the future Temple – just as He had not yet made a final determination as to the future king of Israel.

As the reader may recall, the first king came from the tribe of Binyamin, not Yehuda. Had King Shaul withstood Hashem’s tests, he could have established a lasting dynasty (I Samuel 13:13, 15:23). Yaakov’s blessing to Yehuda, that “the scepter shall not depart from Yehuda” (Genesis 49:10), could have been meant metaphorically, rather than literally as Ramban explains it (ad loc). And even after the crown was transferred to the tribe of Yehuda, Hashem orchestrated a break in the kingship of Rechavam (King Shlomo’s son, from the tribe of Yehuda) with the installment of Yeravam ben Nevat (from the tribe of Ephraim) as

king of the newly-established Northern Kingdom (I Kings 11:38 – note the stated potential for this to become a permanent separate kingdom).

If the choice of royal tribe was not always set in stone, perhaps the location of the Temple wasn’t either; rather, both choices developed based on historical events.

Though there is no explicit link between the king’s tribe and the location of the future Temple, it is curious that the Temple straddles both Yehuda’s and Binyamin’s territories. And because the Temple could only be built once the tribes were unified under one anointed king, perhaps the *location* of the Temple also depended on the selection of that king. Had Shaul remained in power, he might have built the Temple elsewhere.

In a sense, Hashem ultimately forced the final selection of the Temple location: David was “induced” by Hashem to count the people, leading to a plague, and the plague stopped spreading at the site of the future Temple. David was even given a vision of an angel with a sword standing on the very spot (I Chronicles Chapter 21; II Samuel Chapter 24). It is possible, however, that other locations were also candidates – such as the many places where Avraham offered *korbanot* earlier in Genesis, or perhaps Shechem, the primary city of the Northern Kingdom (*Clilei Torah* vol. 3 p. 8). If the choice of the future Temple Mount depended on the unfolding of historical events, we can understand why Hashem would not specify Jerusalem in the Torah.

When we study Tanach without assumptions, we might question whether the choice of Jerusalem was indeed predetermined by Hashem or whether it resulted from a particular chain of events. It is clear, however, that once the Temple was placed on Mount Moriah, the location became permanent, all other altars had to be removed, the sacrificial service was centralized in the Temple, and the Temple site could never change.

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