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DAF KESHER

SHAPPELL'S / YESHIVAT DARCHE NOAM | MIDRESHET RACHEL V'CHAYA | PATHWAYS ISRAEL | PATHWAYS PLUS

DVAR TORAH THE SCROLLS OF EGYPTIAN SLAVERY

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l (Emet Le'Yaakov Shemot 5:9) quotes a fascinating Midrash (Shemot Rabbah Shemot, 5:18): In the midst of Egyptian slavery the Children of Israel had **scrolls** they would enjoy reading on Shabbat. These scrolls spoke about the future redemption from Egypt. Rav Yaakov even suggests that *Mizmor Shir Leyom HaShabbat*, Psalm 92, written by Moshe *Rabbeinu* (according to Bava Batra 14a), was actually the contents of one of those scrolls. This explains why a large chunk of that psalm (verses 7 through 16) deals with how evil people seem to prosper and closes with a line about ultimate Divine justice. Shabbat thus became for the Jews a day devoted to trust in G-d – to *emunah* and *bitachon*.

Rav Yaakov thus answers a question many commentators ask on the Tur's explanation (Orach Chaim 430) of why we call the Shabbat before Pesach *Shabbat Hagadol*, the Great Shabbat. He explains that it was because of the great miracle that happened on the Shabbat that fell out four days before the Exodus from Egypt. On that tenth of Nissan the Jews took sheep – the Egyptian god – to slaughter for their Pesach sacrifices and miraculously the Egyptians did not harm them.

But, later commentators ask: Why don't we commemorate that miracle on the tenth of Nissan? Isn't it just incidental that the 10th fell out on Shabbat that year?

Rav Yaakov (*Derashah 3*, Emet Le'Yaakov) observes: That miracle was able to take place only because the Jewish people had enough trust in G-d to take those sheep and ignore the potential violent Egyptian reaction. But, he asks, where did the Jewish slaves attain that level of *bitachon*?

The answer is – from those Shabbat scrolls. That Shabbat before the Jews left Egypt was the culmination of the many Shabbatot of their slavery when they cultivated their trust in G-d. Israel drew on reserves of trust in G-d they had developed for years, and acted with heroism to take the Egyptians' god right in front of their noses, just as G-d had.

We therefore refer to the Shabbat before Pesach as the Great Shabbat, for it was Shabbat that led to that great miracle. And Shabbat is for us also the day to nurture *bitachon*, trust that the G-d who created the Universe will eventually bring it to its final state of redemption, speedily in our days.



Shapell's/Darche Noam in the news: from the March 27th Jerusalem Post

A CLOSER LOOK AT PARSHAT ACHAREI MOT

Throughout the Chumash are verses that seem to just tell us, in a general way - "Keep all mitzvot of the Torah." Commentators take on the challenge of revealing the specific content these verses convey. In his Meshech Chochmah, Rabbi Meir Simchah of Dvinsk, zt"l (1843–1926, also known for his Or Sameach on the Rambam's Mishneh Torah), addresses two such verses that appear in our Parshah. We'll focus on the second verse, note its difficulties, and then follow his presentation step-by-step.

ספר ויקרא פרק יח

ד - אֶת מִשְׁפָּטֵי תַעֲשׂוּ וְאֶת חֻקֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ לְלַכֵּת בְּהֵם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם :
ה - וְיִשְׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת חֻקֵי וְאֶת מִשְׁפָּטֵי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם הָאָדָם וְחֵי בְהֵם אֲנִי ה' :

4. You shall do My laws and protect My decrees, to follow them. I am Hashem, your God.

5. You shall protect My decrees and My laws, which a person shall do and live by them. I am Hashem.

Note some of the difficulties these verses raise:

1. Why do these verses immediately precede the list of forbidden intimate relations?
2. Why the distinction between "do My laws" and "protect My decrees"?
3. Why do *mishpatim* precede *chukim* in verse 4, but the order is reversed in verse 5?
4. Why is there a shift from plural to singular voice at the end of verse 5?

LEARN A MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Mesech Chochmah on Vayikra 18:4

The explanation is as follows: The goal of the nation as a collective is to act based on the ways of the Torah and that Hashem will be their G-d. For G-d does not connect His Name with the particular, for if the particular does not join up with the collective it cannot attain these goals.

It is easier for the nation as a whole to be careful about decrees, religious laws, than to be careful about ethical and civil laws and ordinances, [even though they are rooted in logic] guiding proper behavior. The proof is Jerusalem's downfall, where G-d said to them, (Yishayah 1:12), "Who asked you to trample in my sanctuary ... Now you are murderers, your silver is full of dross ..." You see that they were careful about Divine decrees, the religious rules, but had failed to keep an ethical society.

It is easier for a society to stay religious than to stay ethical, but, continues the Meshech Chochmah, an individual can easily come to ethical laws like "Do not do to others what is hateful to you" (see Shabbat 31a) and honoring parents (see Yerushalmi Kiddushin 1:7) through common sense.

However, it is more difficult to create protective fences for ethical laws than it is in the religious realm. In religious matters the Torah can say, "Refrain not only from biblically prohibited intimate relations, but also from rabbinic ones," or "Refrain not only from biblically prohibited Shabbat work but also from rabbinic extensions." But in monetary matters (and the bulk of civil law revolves around them) blanket rabbinic stringencies are limited, because the question is usually which of two litigants wins, and a stringency on one means a leniency on the other. But the individual can be told to go beyond the letter of the law (see Bava Metzia 83a) or to forgo money coming to him (Bava Batra 15b).

משך חכמה ויקרא יח:

הביאור כן, דהאומה בכללה תכליתה שיתנהגו על פי דרכי התורה וה' יהיה אלקיהם, כי אין השי"ת מיחד שמו על הפרטי, כי הפרטי בלא צירוף הכללי אינו תכליתי כלל.

והנה האומה בכללה נקל אצלה להיות נזהר בחקים, המה דברים הדתיים, מלהיות נזהר במשפטים, המה הנמוסיים והמשטר, חקות הקבועים בשכל ובהנהגה הנכונה, וכשלושה של ירושלים יוכיח, שהוכיחן הנביא (ישעיה א, יב) מי בקש זאת מידכם רמוס חצרי כו' ועתה מרצחים, כספך היה לסגים כו', הרי בחקים היו נזהרים ומקיימים כל מצות הדתיות, רק במשפטים היו סוררים.

Now these verses can shine. The Torah first speaks about the nation as a whole, so it begins with the *mishpatim*, ethical and civil laws (for the society needs special warning about its weak point) and follows with protecting *chukim* (for here it is possible to create protective fences). Verse 4, addressing the collective, closes with following the Torah and thereby making Hashem our G-d, connecting His Name with the people of Israel. The next verse addresses the individual, where *chukim* must come first (for that is most difficult to understand), and the Torah can speak about protective fences in both realms. Verse 5 closes with "live by them," referring to attaining eternal life in the World to Come, for the contentment of the World to Come is greater than of this worldly life (Avot 4:17). But, as the early sages have spoken about at length, the nation as a collective whole has its goal in this world.

Think about the following:

- How does his explanation solve the difficulties we mentioned above?
- What, in this piece, are the contrasts between the individual and the collective?

For further learning:

- See the Meshech Chochmah's preceding comments, and the ones that follow.
- How do other commentators deal with the same difficulties? See, for instance, Rashi, the Or Hachaim, the Haamek Davar, and the Malbim.

ובזה הכתובים מאירים, שמתחלה מדבר על כלליות האומה, ולכן אמר את משפטי תעשו - שזה צריך להזהיר קודם אצל הכלל, שבוזה יפרצו תחלה - ואת חקתי תשמרו - שבוזה יעשו סיגים וגדרים - ללכת בהם, להתקיים בהם אני ה' אלקיכם, ואח"כ הזהיר הפרטי, ושמרתם את חקתי - שזה נגד השכל, וצריך להזהירו קודם - ואת משפטי, שבשניהם יעשה סיגים, אשר יעשה אותם האדם וחי בהם, שיקנה חיי עלמא, שיפה קורת רוח בעולם הבא יותר מכל חיי העוה"ז (אבות ד-יז), משא"כ בהכלל, התכלית באומה בעוה"ז, כאשר האריכו הקדמונים ודרו"ק.



Rav Meir Simchah, ztl, of Dvinsk, the Meshech Chochmah

TORAH FROM OUR FACULTY

THE PATH TO PERSONAL REDEMPTION, BY RABBI ANTHONY MANNING

One of the most difficult mitzvot of the Seder is to see one's self – even in generations far removed physically and sociologically from the slavery of Egypt – as having personally left Egypt. It is not enough to tell stories of the past redemptions of others. Pesach must be an individual and personal journey.

Chazal recognized the enormous difficulty of making this mental leap from 'history' to 'my story' and gave us tools at the Seder to help.

First, the account of leaving Egypt is taken from Devarim chapter 26, the farmer's recital of 'mikra bikurim' (a declaration of thanksgiving he made along with his offering of first fruits), rather than the more obvious choice, the story of the Exodus itself in Shemot. One reason for this is that we want to recite a first-person account: Hashem took us out of Egypt and not them.

Another key experiential aid provided by Chazal is the mitzvah of drinking 4 cups of wine. Chazal connect each of these to one of the expressions of geulah (redemption) in Shemot 5:6. We are to see each cup as a step in the process of our national and, by extension, personal geulah. The Netziv explains that the halachic preference for these cups to be of alcoholic wine, rather than grape juice, stems from this same intention – to help us relax: to escape from our usual inhibitions and to allow our souls to fly more freely to a redemptive state.

The Megaleh Amukot shows how each of the cups comes to free us from a basic character flaw and so aid our growth to geulah. He equates each of the cups to the sin of a generation prior to our slavery in Egypt and shows that each of these sins was present and amplified in Egypt itself. It was our departure from these sins that comprised our spiritual redemption from Egypt.

The first cup represents freedom from the sin of the generation of Enosh – one which turned to paganism and away from a true understanding of Hashem. We are not pagans today but we do often develop simplistic understandings of the Divine. We are content with unsophisticated and often childish approaches to many ideas and issues in our Jewish lives that really deserve more analysis. Our first *geulah* is from these intellectual errors.

The second cup represents freedom from the sin of the generation of the Flood. They tolerated social corruption, persecution of the weak and exploitation of the defenseless. They would, for instance, rationalize that theft of small amounts of money (less than a “*prutah*”) was permissible. We may not see ourselves as thieves but we let things pass which should be corrected. How often do people rationalize non-payment of money that they owe (especially government taxes!), park without putting money in the meter (“just for a moment”), or settle for shady business practices on the basis that ‘this is how things work in real life’? Our second *geulah* is from social and financial corruption.

The third cup represents freedom from the sin of the generation of the Tower of Babel. This group worshiped the collective human enterprise as a secular substitute for God. They built a tower of technology to challenge religious faith. We may consider ourselves religious believers, but how often are our verbal expressions of such belief

(‘*be’ezrat Hashem*’ or ‘*baruch Hashem*’) simply lip service to conform to a social mould. Do we really see our lives as driven by God, or is our faith really placed in the physical world around us? Our third *geulah* is from empty religiosity.



Rabbi Anthony Manning

The fourth cup represents freedom from the sin of the generation of Sedom. Their society was based on egoism, racism and exclusion of strangers. Chesed was not for ‘outsiders’. We may consider ourselves chesed-oriented but how often is this restricted to ‘our own’. Do we look out to the ‘different’ Jews with whom we don’t directly associate and see them as brothers, or as strangers? Do we relate to the non-Jewish world with respect and dignity or with small-minded bigotry and racism? Our fourth *geulah* is from pettiness and egocentricity (personal or societal).

With this in mind, we can see the need for a real *geulah* in so many areas of our lives. Pesach is not only a time for focus on the national redemption we all desire but also the personal redemption which we often try to avoid. The ultimate slavery is one that is so deep-rooted that it cannot even be perceived as such. Through the Haggadah and its four cups of wine we can start a process of self-redemption and truly watch in wonder as we leave the enslavements of our lives behind us.

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