

Our Birthday

"Happy birthday Eli."

"Thank you Hillel, but today is not my birthday."

"Today is our birthday Eli."

"I thought today was Pesach."

"It is. That's what I mean. Pesach is the birthday of the Jewish people."

"In what way, Hillel?"

"Hashem did something today that was never done before or since in history. He brought a nation out from within another nation using great miracles. The Jewish people were totally trapped in Mitzraim. Escape was impossible. He brought the plagues on the Mitzrim, and after the last one, Paroh himself declared that the Jews were no longer his slaves."

"I see. Now you have explained how we became free. But how did we become a nation of our own?"

"The Meshech Chochma zt"l explains the verse, "And you shall celebrate it (Pesach) as a festival for Hashem" (Shemos 12:14). We are celebrating that Hashem identified us as His nation. He goes on to explain that the mitzvah of *Korbon Pesach* (Pesach offering) brought national unity. It was eaten together in a group, which brought people together. In the times of the Beis HaMikdash, they all went to the courtyard of the Temple and *shechted* (ritually slaughtered) their *korbonos* at the same time. There is even an opinion in the Gemora (Kiddushin 42a) that one *Korbon Pesach* would suffice for everyone."

"Fascinating. Now that you mention it, I see that *Yitzias Mitzraim* (the exodus from Mitzraim) occupies a central spot in our prayers."

"Right. We mention it twice a day at the end of Krias Shema, and in the blessing after Krias Shema. It is a part of the Kiddush on Shabbos and Yom Tov, and the *Bircas HaMazone* after a bread meal. There are also many mitzvos associated with *Yitzias Mitzraim*."

"Let's see. The mitzvos of Pesach include eating matzah, not eating chometz, and reciting the Haggadah."

"Correct. The Rambam mentions eight mitzvos for Pesach. There are also sixteen mitzvos concerning the *Korbon Pesach* alone."

"Amazing."

"Eli, all of these mitzvos bind us to Hashem as His nation. A Jew who has rejected Hashem may not eat from the *Korbon Pesach*."

"Why?"

"The Sefer HaChinuch explains that the *Korbon Pesach* is a sign and a

remembrance that Hashem covered us with the wings of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) and brought us into the covenant of the Torah and *Emunah* (Faith). One who denies this cannot eat from this *Korbon*."

"Pesach is truly the birth of our nation."

"As I said in the beginning, Eli, happy birthday."

Kinderlach . . .

On Pesach, we celebrate our birth as a nation. Hashem did a tremendous tovah (good thing) for us. He took us out of Mitzraim. If not for Him, we would still be there today. He then did something even better. He made us His chosen nation. That is a privilege and a responsibility. He wants us to remember this when we mention Yitzias Mitzraim in our prayers. Don't just pass quickly over these words. Try to imagine life as a slave in Mitzraim. Then think of all of the miracles and wonders that took place then. Then think of the beauty of the Torah and the mitzvos that He gave us. Then you will realize how thankful we must be to Hashem for all of the good that He has done for us.

I See

"Come to Paroh for I have hardened his heart" (Shemos 10:1). This verse is a bit puzzling. A person with a hard heart is usually not sympathetic to the needs and requests of others. Moshe Rabbeinu was being sent to Paroh to seek the freedom of the Jewish people. If Paroh's heart was hardened, what was the point of asking? He will only refuse. Furthermore, we know that people have the free will to choose between right and wrong. By hardening Paroh's heart, did Hashem take away his free will? Was he doomed to suffer the plagues without any hope of doing *tshuva* (repentance) on his sins?

Rav Leib Chasman zt"l in his sefer *Ohr Yohel* shares a deep insight into human nature. There are two types of sight. The eyes are made of flesh and blood, and they see the physical appearance of objects. The heart, on the other hand, "sees" the spiritual world. Knowledge is contained in the brain. The true understanding is in the heart. When his wisdom enters his heart, a person can say, "I see". As the verse states, "You shall know this day and take to your heart" (Devarim 4:39). Some people are blind because

they have no eyes. Others do not see because their eyes are covered. Both cannot see, but for vastly different reasons. The same is true with spiritual "sight". Some cannot understand the truth because they have no heart. They are totally cut off from reality. There is no hope for them, because their heart (ability to understand) has been removed. They are like the person with no eyes. Others have a heart. It is just covered and locked up. They can remove the lock, but it may take some work. They are like the person whose eyes are covered.

Paroh's heart was blocked. This impaired his spiritual vision. However, he was capable of removing the blockage. He could "see" again, if he did *tshuva*. Therefore, it was worthwhile for Moshe to go to him. Perhaps he would soften his heart, and see the truth that Hashem is the King of Kings. Then he would let the Jewish people go.

Kinderlach . . .

Hashem did not give up on Paroh. He and his nation had suffered seven makkos (plagues) and he still did not recognize Hashem. We might think that he was hopeless. Hashem did not. He sent Moshe Rabbeinu to him again, in the hope that he would do tshuva. What about us? Do you ever feel that you want to give up on your self? "I'll never change." "I'm beyond hope." These words are false. You are surely no worse than the evil Paroh. You are much better than he was. And he was able to change. You can too. Try again. And again. And again. Your heart will soften. The truth will enter. "I see, I see," you will say. With the voice of true understanding.

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