



PESACH – “I’M ALRIGHT YANKEL” BY GERSHON HEPNER

Just before Purim, Reb Sholom Segal gave me some notes written by Rabbi Cooper zt”l. Among them, I found a summary of two chapters from the Sefer Daas Chochmoh U’Mussar from Reb Yeruchom Lebovitz of Mir. Here is a précis of that summary!

During the darkest hours of slavery in Egypt, there were some individuals who were barely affected by the appalling conditions. Of those individuals, one in particular, lived what appeared to be a charmed existence. The tribe of Levi were not enslaved by the Egyptians; and one of them - Moshe Rabbeinu - was reared within the royal palace of Paroh.

Very early in the story of Golus Mitzrayim, we learn that Moshe “went out to his brothers, and saw their burdens” (Shemos 2:11). Rashi explains that he focussed his eyes and his heart to be distressed over them. Despite Moshe’s personal privileges, he made it his business to be aware of the sufferings of his brethren.

The Midrash Rabboh (Shemos Rabboh 1:27) fills in some of the narrative for us. Upon witnessing the torment inflicted upon Bnei Yisroel, Moshe burst into tears, and expressed a fervent wish to lay down his own life in order to spare the lives of his brothers. He cast aside his royal constitutional rights, and personally participated in the building projects. Moshe gave the Egyptian authorities the impression of being swept up by feelings of nationalism, while his true intentions were to relieve the pressures from upon his fellow Jews. The Midrash relates that it was Moshe’s empathy for Bnei Yisroel, that earned him the zechus of the revelation at the burning bush.

It was at the beginning of that incident that the Torah records that “Hashem saw that he had turned aside to see” (Shemos 3:4). The simple explanation is that Moshe strayed from the path in order to view the alarming spectacle of the burning bush. The Midrash interprets the possuk differently - Moshe had “turned” by going out of his way to witness the burdens of Bnei Yisroel first hand.

Reb Yeruchom Lebovitz explains that even more important than Moshe physically assisting his brethren in their slave duties, Moshe felt the need to experience their suffering. To identify with their problems, **Moshe wanted to endure what they were enduring**, and helping them was almost a secondary by-product of this experience.

However, even this level of compassion that Moshe displayed towards his people was not sufficient to make him deserving of his eventual position of leadership. The Midrash (Shemos Rabboh 2:2) recounts how one of the goats in Moshe’s care ran off in search of water. When Moshe caught up with the goat, he felt tremendous concern for the animal, particularly as he had previously failed to notice the animal’s thirst. Once he had registered the goat’s exhaustion, he showed it great sympathy, and carried it back upon his shoulders to the rest of the flock. The Midrash explains that this was a test of Moshe’s concern for the seemingly trivial needs of another. That he had exerted himself to assist his enslaved brethren was one madreigoh, but to put himself out to help an inconsequential animal was chessed of a higher magnitude. It was this act that led Hashem to select Moshe as the future leader of Bnei Yisroel.

The term used by Chazal to describe this middoh is “Noseh Be’Ol Im Chaveiro” – “helping to carry the burden of another”. This is the ability to understand the difficulties and misfortunes of other people, and then to react by assisting them. Such a middoh has to be a primary ingredient of a potential leader of Yisroel. The Mishna in Pirkei Ovos (6:6) lists this middah as one of the forty eight ways of acquiring Torah. Moshe could become the future vehicle for Mattan Torah, only by proving himself capable of displaying this total care and devotion to Hashem’s people.

This middoh lies at the heart of the ge’uloh from Mitzrayim. The Gemora in Taanis (11a) states that only he who participates in communal suffering, will deserve to experience the eventual comfort from that suffering. The thought is almost mind boggling - had Moshe not identified with the plight of others, he could never have become Moshe Rabbeinu, and may not have earned his own personal freedom from Egypt!

We see similar sympathy on the part of HaKodosh Boruch Hu, in His reaction to the slavery in Egypt. We are told that “Hashem saw the Bnei Yisroel, and Hashem knew” (Shemos 2:25). Rashi explains the phrase “Hashem knew” to mean that He focussed His heart upon them, and no longer hid His eyes from them. The Ramban expands on this theme, and comments that during the period of slavery, Hashem had indeed hidden His face from Bnei Yisroel. However, now that the time for the redemption was approaching, He empathised with their dire situation, and identified with every minute detail of their suffering.

When Moshe, Aharon, Nodov, Avihu and the seventy zekeinim ascended Har Sinai, they saw underneath the feet of Hashem “Kema’asei Livnas HaSappir” – “something with the form of a sapphire brick” (Shemos 24:10). Rashi explains that this brick served as a constant reminder to Hashem of the sufferings of Bnei Yisroel during the Egyptian slavery, and of their forced construction work. Hashem is of course the ultimate “Noseh Be’Ol Im Chaveiro” – caring for and helping each individual through his problems.