

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Parshas Shemos - Straw, Esav, Strength, the Simple Unity of Hashem and Geulah - a Spiritual Pathway

Who can forget 9/11?

Rabbi Frand gave a shiur on that terrible tragedy where he explained the golus of Edom, specifically that we are in the Ishmael portion of this long golus of Edom. Edom is equivalent to Esav.

Ten years later, I continue to try to comprehend what the Ishmael portion of the golus of Esav means.

Today we read Parshas Shemos. It is the story of the journey of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt thousands of years ago. It is the story that we will read on Passover, that we read every year. But it is not just a tale. It is a description of the spiritual steps that had to take place to bring the Jews from the 49th level of defilement to Mount Sinai, the 50th level of spiritual height.

Toward the end of the Parshas Shemos, the word "straw" comes into the story. Ovadia tells us the symbolism of straw:

"And the House of Yaakov shall be an ember,
and the House of Yoseph a flame,
And the House of Esav straw,
And they shall kindle in them,
and devour them;
And there shall not be any remaining of the House of Esav".
[Ovadia 1:18]

"An ember without a flame does not reach far. So it was that when Yoseph was born, Yaakov felt certain that G-d was with him".
[Rashi, citing a Midrash]

Let's look for a moment at where this word "straw" appears and its context.

Parshas Shemos 5:5 through 9 :

Pharaoh said, "See! The peasants have become numerous. Now you want to make them take a vacation from their task." On that day, Pharaoh gave instructions to the administrators who were over the people and their foremen, saying, "Do not continue to give the people straw to form the bricks as before. Let them go and gather their own straw. But maintain their quota of bricks, just as before. Do not reduce it. They are lazy, and therefore protest 'Let us go and sacrifice to our Gd.' Make the work heavier for the men, and make sure they do it. They will then stop paying attention to false words."

The Me'am Loez explains Pharaoh's statement about the straw:

"The mud bricks that they make require straw to hold them together and prevent them from

cracking. Until now, I have given each group a fixed measure of straw, and have expected them to produce an appropriate number of bricks. Now I am going to stop giving them straw, but make sure that they maintain the same quota of bricks."

Shemos 5:10

The Administrators and foremen in charge of the people went out and said to the people, "This is what Pharaoh has said: 'I am no longer giving you straw. You must go and procure your own straw wherever you can find it. However, you may not reduce the amount of work you are doing. The people spread out all over the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw."

The Me'Am Loez explains:

"The people had to send work forces to the farthest reaches of Egypt to find straw. Just as Pharaoh had told his administrators not to supply the Israelites with straw, so had he posted declarations that no Egyptian should allow the Israelites to gather straw in his field. The Israelites therefore had to travel long distances to the uninhabited border regions, where straw grasses grew wild. The Israelites went deep into the wilderness where the tall wild grasses grew. Their bare feet were torn by the sharp stubble, and they bled profusely."

Hashem explains why He did this to Moshe:

Me'Am Loez says regarding 6:1:

"The darkest part of the night comes just before the beginning of the dawn. A sick person's symptoms become much worse just before he begins to recover. The coldest days of winter come just before the" spring. Before any change takes place, the two forces are in strong opposition, and the adverse effects might seem all the harsher. But in the end, the improvement indeed takes place."

Rabbi Rietti has a 34 CD class on Derech Hashem. Here are some notes from a section on Divine Providence of the World:

"Maimonides explains that all the elements within creation have their own mind. There is a conscience, there is a part of every physical element that recognizes Gd as its creation...it is so obvious to it that it is impossible to do anything else but Gd's dictation. A human is the only being who can deny Gd's existence, with an apparent cause and effect, a cover up of Who is the cause. Animals have a program that is instinctively survival, no free will of good versus evil."

Maimonides in Perek Gimel Halacha 9 in Law of fundamentals of Judaism:

All the constellations ...are all masters of soul, they have a seichel and a mind. They recognize the higher world, Who spoke and made the world. The concept is that Gd speaks and the world exists. This alludes to the power of the Hebrew alphabet. Each element according to its own greatness, its elevation, extol Hashem, like the angels. "

...the elements... all have a mind of their own but they have no choice but to respond to Gd's will and with that to praise Gd constantly. Just like they recognize Gd's existence, and they are aware of their own existence, of the angel's existence ...

... the entire physical existence is aware of Gd. Only man is accountable for choosing right and wrong.. Every element in creation knows that Gd created them. Isaiah says "every animal knows its master except the human being." The human can deny or acknowledge him. Talmud in Brachos says – "In all your ways acknowledge Gd's existence". Says Isaiah in Chapter 1 verse 3: The ox knows

its master and the donkey knows its trough that its master gave, but the Jewish people don't know, they don't think about it. WE are supposed to bring Gd into the world.

Remember that straw is a moshul for Esav. It is only after the birth of Esav's nemesis Yoseph, that Yaakov is ready to confront to confront Esav. Does the image of straw, as the symbolic representation of Esav, as the glue of the bricks take on a different dimension? The Jews, the descendants of Yaakov [the ember] had to gather their own straw – where will the glue come from to form strong bricks? The Jews had to go to the wilderness, bloody their feet, their lives were made bitter by Hashem's sending Moshe to Pharaoh to demand that the Jews come serve Hashem for three days.

It was very dark and the Jews were not productive in building bricks, searching and searching for straw. The image that comes to mind is that straw, as a metaphor for Esav- whose blessing was to live by the sword – (To Esav, Yitzchak says, 'You will live by your sword [Bereshit/Genesis 27:40].)

The Jews were told to find their own straw – could it be that the Jews were being asked to introspect on where we were living by the sword? Dathan and Abiram complained to Moshe that he brought this terrible suffering upon the Jews. They saw Moshe as the source for the suffering, but spiritually, we were sent by Hashem on a search for “straw” right before we were being told that we would be taken out to serve Hashem.

Where are we, today, able to see the usefulness of this spiritual pathway? Where are we glued to unhealthy conduct and laziness, where do we seek to move ourselves from slavery to service of Hashem?

We have within us a natural glue – STRAW – our subconscious negative tendencies to survive with the sword, to blame secondary causes rather than see the Primary cause of everything! When we rescue our consciousness from clinging to these negative primal instinctive hurtful solutions based on forgetting the Primary Source of everything, we have a chance to use that consciousness for its ultimate purpose, to see the simple unity of Hashem and use that wisdom for the service of Gd. This was the path of our redemption from Egypt thousands of years ago.

How much more so is it today, when the suffering inflicted by Ishmael – through the emotional turns and twists with which normalcy is abused, that cause the world to question more and more who is representing Hashem to the point where we, Gd forbid, fall victim to the emotional confusion ourselves – befuddle our mind so that we are not on a level in our mind as a simple inanimate rock that praises Hashem and knows its Creator! Instead, we are caught in the straw – seeking to club darkness with emotion and power rather than to transcend with shining the light of the Primary Source of all.

The goal of awakening ourselves to how ridiculous our emotional confusion on this point is and how it triggers a clinging to the sword should awaken us out of the stupor of our emotional confusion because we have seichel. How do we get out of the Ishmael phase of the golus of Esav? Just see it and realize that the entire geshtalt of living in our emotions is what we are here to transcend. We have the natural resource, the glue to do it – a beautiful consciousness that comes from the Primary Source of all. We just need the seichel to ask for the strength to rise above our emotional makeup and then choose to use our free willed choice and serve the simple unity of Gd!

Hence, once again, below is a recommended toolbox:

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Daily Hisbodidus

Thank you Hashem for the flow of thought, emotion, and consciousness to this otherwise inanimate body that houses it, may Your name be praised, and for the ability to perceive, experience and learn, for the gift of free willed choice, and for the capacity to discern and integrate. Please flow through me unlimited will power to direct the recipe of personality, circumstance and emotional flow You send through my heart each day so that through the use of conscious choice which You bestow upon me, I can release the innate natural gift of strong subconscious deep emotional bonding from imperfection (unreality, basic human nature) to perfection (reality of the Divine mind, connection to Divine attributes), with the desiring result being that all of my emotions are directed first to loving and fearing and emulating You,. May Your Will and Attributes as expressed in Torah be fully conscious within me and grant me success in bringing Your Attributes and Will to visibility in my actions, my relationships, my thoughts, and my emotions. May I be strengthened with unlimited conscious free will to approach my day from loving awareness of choosing what is pleasing to You

Occupy Our Emotions Process

"I recognize that I am emotionally bonded to this pattern/thought/experience/programming/ nature and I see that it is unpleasant. Hashem please grant success to the choice I declare to shift my emotional bonding from imperfection to love and fear of You. Please see my determination and give me the will power, to the very depths of this emotion, and help me to match the emotion with will power to calm my subconscious clinging to this self-destructive connection. (I am awaiting the will power), I sincerely want to no longer be emotionally bonded with this thought/experience/memory. [once the emotion is calm and the feeling of will power there, say:]

"Hashem I choose that the consciousness that is bonding the emotions You send through me shift (Please shift consciousness given by You which is subconsciously keeping those emotions above my behira and out of my ability to control). Right now this consciousness is emotionally bonding me to a pattern/thought/experience/programming/ nature that is unpleasant. I recognize that this piece of consciousness and emotional bonding have been above my behira and You have shepherded me and guided me to take accountability for my actions(through suffering consequences of the emotional pain of separation of consciousness from You). Please give direction of this orphaned consciousness into my hand. I beseech You to listen to my free willed choice. I direct this consciousness and emotional bonding affecting my actions to detach from pattern/thought/experience/programming/ nature and re-attach to love and fear and emulation of Hashem alone. Please lead me in the path that I wish to go, for the unification and sanctification of Your name, for now I realize that this has been sent for me to responsibly bring the consciousness You give me back into harmony with Your Will. That is my sincere choice and desire, for there is nothing but Your simple unity in all the world. Please grant success to my free willed choice to direct this consciousness and emotional bonding to love and fear and emulating Hashem and please destroy all negative spiritual entities which I may have created by misuse in the past of this consciousness and emotion. I regret it and ask that this negativity be taken out of the world and that my teshuva be a zechus and benefit for all Klal Yisrael."