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Teves-Shvat 5778

In honor of 10 Shvat (January 26) the day the Rebbe accepted the leadership of the Lubavitch Chabad movement in 1951, we present a letter written by the Rebbe.

By the Grace of G-d
3rd of Nissan, 5738
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mr. _____

Birmingham, Mich. 48010

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter in which you write about happenings in the family and ask why such untoward happenings did occur, though you find nothing in your conduct and activities that would justify them.

I surely do not have to point out to you that the question of “why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?” is a very old one, and was already asked by Moshe Rabeinu who received the Torah from the G-d and handed it over to each and every Jew as an everlasting inheritance for all times. As you probably also know, the whole book of Iyov (Job) is devoted to this problem and it has been dealt with ever since.

The point of the answer given by our Sages, as it has often been explained at length, is by way of the example of a small child who does not understand why his father who is such a wise and kind person sometimes acts in a way which causes a child pain and tears. It would not surprise any person that the child is not in a position to understand the ways of his father although, be it noted, only a number of years separate them in age, and also in intelligence. At the same time, the child instinctively feels and knows that his father loves him and surely it is everything for his benefit, and not for the benefit of any other child or for his own benefit, since it would be unthinkable that a father who has a one and only son, cause pain to his child for the benefit of a stranger or for his own benefit.

If this is so in the case of a child and his father, where the distinction between them is only relative, in terms of age and intelligence, as mentioned above, how much more so in the case of a created being and the Creator, where the distinction is absolute and unbridgeable. Indeed, it would have been most surprising if a human being could understand the way of G-d, except to the extent that G-d Himself, in His kindness, has revealed some aspects of His Divine Providence and in a necessarily very limited way. Moreover, our Torah, Toras Chayim and Toras Emes, assures us that when a Jew strengthens his bitochon and trust in G-d, Whose benevolent Divine Providence extends to each

and everyone individually, and Who is the essence of Goodness, and it is the nature of the Good to do good – this in itself opens new insights into a better understanding of G-d’s ways and at the same time speeds G-d’s blessings in the kind of good that is revealed and evident.

And, as mentioned earlier, this fact that Moshe Rabbeinu already pondered this question, did not in the least affect his simple faith in G-d and did not in any way affect his observance of the Torah and mitzvos in his daily life and conduct, and this is also what he bequeathed to each and every Jew in all future generations.

It is surely also unnecessary to point out that this question that might arise under certain circumstances in the life of an individual can just as well be asked in connection with the long-suffering history of our people in exile for the past 1900 years and more. Yet, here too, despite the persecutions, martyrdom and suffering, our people tenaciously clung to the Torah and mitzvos as their only way of life and it has not weakened their belief in and confident hope of the ultimate true and complete geula through our righteous Moshiach, when it will become apparent that the whole long and dark exile was a blessing in disguise.

Much more could be said in this subject, but I hope that the above will suffice to help you regain fully your true Jewish perspective, especially as what has been written above is not intended to answer the question once and for all, but merely to help minimize the doubts and questions which might distract a Jew from his innate simple faith in G-d and in His infinite loving kindness and justice, which is an integral part of every Jew’s heritage.

At this time before Pesach, the Festival of our Liberation, I send you and yours prayerful wishes for a kosher and inspiring Pesach and a fuller measure of liberation from all distractions, so as to be able to serve G-d wholeheartedly and with joy.

With blessing,

P.S. It is customary in a situation where one is bothered by doubts and questions, to have the tefillin checked to make sure they are kosher and to be careful in putting them on every weekday morning, since the mitzvah of tefillin, as put on the arm facing the heart and on the head, the seat of intelligence, is conducive to purifying the heart and the mind and making them more perceptive. It is also customary in such a situation to observe meticulously the laws of kashrus of all foods and beverages consumed.

Jewish Story

By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton

In this week's Torah portion (*Parshat Va'eira Exodus 6:2-9:35*) we read about how Moses began the Exodus from Egypt through the first seven of the Ten Plagues.

The foundation of Judaism is the first of the Ten Commandments; "I am G-d that took you from Egypt."

Namely that G-d exists and He, the Creator of all being, personally took the entire Jewish nation from Egypt and gave them His greatest treasure: His Torah.

And He did it all through Moses. Moses announced the plagues, unified the Jews, gave them direction, led them to freedom and brought them the revelation at Mt. Sinai.

But, at first glance this doesn't make sense. Why did G-d have to put the Jews in Egypt at all?

After all, G-d is the King of the Universe and can do what He wants. Wouldn't it have been more G-dly to just bless the Children of Israel, let them peacefully multiply and then give them His Torah. Then they wouldn't have had to suffer terribly for over 200 years in Egyptian exile and G-d wouldn't have needed to make plagues and miracles?

The question is even greater. The Torah is not only a history book but also the teaching of life. Every idea and word has some lesson to us how about how to put meaning and blessing into everything and every moment.

What could the Torah possibly be teaching us here?

To understand this here is a story. (The power of Ruach HaKodesh by Uri Auerbach pg. 218)

Once, about two hundred years ago in Poland, a poor Talmudic scholar, who we will call Reb Shmuel, needed money. This man was a paradigm of holiness and erudition. His every waking moment was spent learning the Torah and delving into its G-dly wisdom and the last thing on his mind was money. But two things made him change his mind; his daughter and his wife.

His daughter was of marriageable age; and his wife wouldn't let him forget it. It meant he had to provide a dowry, a house, a wedding etc. and she didn't give him a moment's rest until he did something about it.

But the poor fellow had only three unmarketable talents; learning Torah, teaching Torah and ignoring the world. So he asked around and the most practical piece of advice that he got was; go to a Chassidic Rebbe and ask for a blessing.

He wasn't a Chassid, he didn't believe in Rebbes, he didn't want to do anything except sit and learn Torah but his back was against the wall.

So against his will but with no other choice, he went to one of the towns where there was a Chassidic community; the city of Parmishlian, asked where to find a Rebbe and was directed to the home of Rabbi Mair of

Parmishlian.

He entered, was escorted to the Rebbe's study, closed the door behind him and poured out his heart; he needed money to marry his daughter off ... or maybe a rich groom. The Rebbe looked at him with a clever eye, took out a long stemmed smoking pipe and said.

"See this? It's my pipe and I need a pipe cleaner." He pulled out a long thin metal rod and continued. "See? This is my old cleaner and it's about to break, can't use it any more. Do me a favor. Go find a blacksmith, take this and show it to him and ask him to either fix it or make me a new one. Here's money to pay him. Do me a favor, I want to help you but I can't think without my pipe."

Poor Reb Shmuel took the old, dirty rod and the money, shook his head in agreement, tried to smile and without thinking too much set off on his quest for a blacksmith.

"What am I doing this for?!" He thought as he walked down the street away from the Rebbe's house. "This is insane! I'm a Torah scholar! I'm no servant! And this rod smells terrible!"

But he was trapped! He couldn't go home, he couldn't run away ignore the world and learn Torah like always, so he asked the first man that passed where he could find a blacksmith and to his relief he discovered that there were a lot of them to pick from.

But he discovered that it wasn't so easy. True, there were plenty of smiths around but none of them wanted to take the job; too small, too delicate, too old-fashioned.... No one used such pipe utensils nowadays.

Finally, after hours of fruitless wandering from smithy to smithy, he was directed to a dilapidated shack far from the city where he was told might be what he was looking for. When he arrived he found an old gentile who greeted him warmly and joyously agreed to make the pipe cleaner he requested. He was familiar with such things and was willing to begin work immediately but it would take a while.

At first Reb Shmuel was cursing every minute he had to waste in this hovel and miss precious Torah learning. But as he watched the smith work he became more and more curious until each blow of the hammer and each change in shape of the red hot bar interested him.

The smith began talking. He explained how when he was young and strong people would flock to his shack and he was busy all day. But then tragedy struck. A fire burned down his house and consumed his wife and daughter and he really never recovered from the blow.

Then other blacksmiths, younger and stronger than him, opened shops in the town and people stopped coming to him in fact he hadn't had a customer for months, maybe more.

"I knew that money was there." Said the Rebbe "It was just waiting for the right person to take it, HaShem sent you."

Reb Shmuel began to really like this old fellow. In fact, he saw that he was a real human being... maybe even a lot more than he himself. They began talking and the conversation continued until almost evening and finally when the smith gave him the finished product he refused to accept payment.

"I don't need money." The smith said. "What I need is a friend. And you are a friend. Why, I have a lot of money. See?" And with this he stood, grabbed both sides of the anvil before him, took a deep breath, his face became red as a beet and gave a mighty heave. "See? Here's my money! Saved it all from the good days. Don't know what I'll do with it. Got no family. No friends. Except for you. Tell me ... will you come back and we can talk some more tomorrow?"

Reb Shmuel stuck out his hand and said, "I'll do it! I really enjoyed talking to you! G-d willing I'll come back tomorrow."

The smith put the anvil back in place, they shook hands and the Rabbi returned to the town, took a room in a hotel and went to sleep. It was too late to return to the Rebbe ... he'd go tomorrow.

But the next day, after he finished his morning prayers and was on his way to the Rebbe's home he noticed a commotion in the street. People were walking toward the old shack where the smithy lived. He asked someone what happened and discovered that The old smithy had passed away that evening and the undertakers were trying to sell his tools and his shack to pay for the funeral, but no one wanted to buy any of it.

Reb Shmuel was shocked! The smithy, his friend, was dead?! He turned briefly aside as tears filled his eyes then suddenly remembered the money under that anvil! He dried his eyes, blew his nose, asked how much money they needed and, to the amazement of everyone, promptly paid in full and got a receipt.

As calmly as he could, as soon as everyone walked away, he made his way to the smithy's shack, somehow managed to move the anvil enough to take out the money. He stuffed it in his pockets and in his shirt and made his way to Rebbe Mair of Parmishian's home.

"Here is your pipe-cleaner" he said to the Rebbe and was about to say tell him about the miracle that he just experienced but suddenly he saw in the Rebbe's eyes that this was the reason the Rebbe sent him.

"I knew that money was there." Said the Rebbe "It was just waiting for the right person to take it, HaShem sent you."

This answers our questions. Why did G-d put the Jews in Egypt in

the first place.

The goal of Judaism is to reveal the Creator in every detail of His creation. And this can only be done through changing nature. Nature conceals the fact there is a Creator or a plan for creation and the only way this can be revealed is by overcoming this concealment.

Therefore, our souls must be forced leave heaven and be born into this confusing world as the Mishna says "Against our will our we born" (Avot 4:22). The nature of the soul is to be spiritual, but if it followed its nature there would be no need for a world or even for souls to be created at all. So when the soul goes against its nature the result is not just a justification for the world but additional meaning, blessing and joy that spirituality alone cannot provide.

Just as in our story; if Rav Shmuel hadn't been forced to leave his house for money he wouldn't have been inspired by that old smithy, learned how G-d works through details and how the Rebbe put it all together to make him a richer, happier and more mature person.

That is why the Jews had to enter Egypt (and why we are in this confusion called Exile (golut) now): in order to reveal a new type of meaning, happiness and blessing in the world. And that is why they needed Moses: because this can only be done through the direction of someone totally devoted to this goal.

This is perhaps the main lessons of the followers of the Baal Shem Tov... especially the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Moshiach will be the true and ultimate leader of the Jewish people. In the FINAL redemption by Moshiach ALL mankind will go out of 'Egypt' (as the Maimonides quotes from the prophets in the very end of his book (Laws of Kings chap. 11-12).

But then, unlike the Exodus from Egypt the gentiles will not be destroyed. Rather they will all turn to the Creator, the G-d of Israel and realize that He creates, loves and helps them (as we say in the 'Alenu' prayer thrice daily). Then the entire world will be filled with meaning, blessing, peace and happiness and we will realize that this terrible confusion and exile was really for the good.

And it all depends on us, each and every (or ANY) one of us. And it doesn't take much for we are standing on the shoulders and merits of thousands of years of Jewish suffering.

Now even one more good deed, or positive word or even one optimistic thought can tilt the scale of merit and reveal ...

Moshiach NOW!!

Upcoming Dates

15 Shvat—January 31—**New Years for Trees**

13 Adar—February 28—**Fast of Ester.** Fast begins at dawn around 5AM and ends at nightfall around 6:30PM

14 Adar—February 28 and March 1—**Purim.** Holiday begins at nightfall and end the following day at nightfall. Observances include: reading the book of Ester, giving gifts of food, charity, and a meal.

Please make proper arrangements with your Chaplain to observe these days.

Jewish Joke

Peter and Patrick are visiting Brooklyn for the first time when they come across two Jewish men wearing long black coats, wide brimmed hats, with long beards and payess (ear locks). Patrick turns to Peter, who is an educated gentleman, and says, "What are they?"

Peter replies, "Hassidim."

Patrick responds, "I see them, too, but what are they?"

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Middos— Character Development

Continued from last month

The Torah puts great stress on character development — on becoming better people. This is called Tikkun [correcting] Middot [our character]. We must always strive to correct our faults and improve our character. The Torah also lays down a number of moral laws. The following is a shortlist of ways to better ourselves and a number of moral laws.

Halbanat Panim — Insulting or Embarrassing a Fellow Man

If a person embarrasses another in public, the latter's face turns pale with shame. The rabbis regarded this as a terrible act to commit. The rabbis advise: "Better fall into a fiery furnace than embarrass someone in public." One who shames another in public, loses his share in the World to Come.

Lashon Hora and Rechilut — The Evil Tongue and Telling Tales

One should not speak, write or even imply something evil against another, even if it is true. This is called Lashon Hora. Telling tales and gossiping is called Rechilut. King David in Tehillim [Psalms] advises:

"Who is the man who desires life ... guard your tongue from speaking evil."

Nekamah and Netirah

Even if someone has wronged you, you should try to forgive them and certainly not take revenge. The Torah forbids not only revenge, but also bearing a grudge.

For example, A says to B: "Lend me your pencil." B replies: "No."

Next day, B says to A: "Lend me your pencil." A replies: "No, because you didn't lend me yours." That is Nekamah.

If A replies: "OK, I will lend you my pencil, I am not as mean as you are," that is Netirah, bearing a grudge.

A should lend the pencil to B, forgive and forget.

Onaah and Ganayvat Daat

We must not sell anything for more than its value or give a false description of an article. We must not steal the knowledge or belief of another or take advantage of another's ignorance. Another type of "stealing" is being noisy and disturbing a person's sleep. This is called Gezzel Sheena.

Netinat Michshol Lifnei IV'air — Putting a Stumbling Block before the Blind

The Torah warns us, "Do not place a stumbling block before the blind." This verse is interpreted both in its literal meaning and also in a general meaning, i.e. one should not mislead the innocent by deliberately giving bad advice.

Geneivah and Gezeilah

It should be obvious that we must refrain from any action that involves us taking anything that is not ours — either stealthily or deceitfully as a thief [ganav] or openly and brutally as a robber [gazlan].

We must be careful not to use anything without the knowledge and permission of the owner. Respect for other people's property is a basic law of Judaism.

Hashavat Aveidab — Returning Lost Property

If a person finds any property whose owner could possibly be traced, he must not keep it. Otherwise he is guilty of theft. Great effort must be made to find the owner, such as placing an advert in a paper or reporting lost property at a police station.

Bal Tashchit— You Shall Not Destroy

We must not willfully destroy anything just for the pleasure of destruction. Everything is put into this world for a special purpose. Everything has its use. We must not waste what can be put to good use. This does not mean, of course, that we accumulate everything and never throw anything away. It simply means that we must make full use of what we own. For example, one should not throw away good food or good clothes. One should also recycle goods.

Tza'ar L'Ba'alei Chayim— Cruelty to Living Creatures

We are forbidden to inflict needless pain on any creatures. We should even feed our animals before we ourselves sit down to eat.

Kibud Av Va-Eim — Honor your Father and Mother

In which ways should children honor their parents?

-Not contradicting them. -Not speaking before them. -Not embarrassing them. -Not sitting in their place. -Bringing and fetching what their parents need. -Where applicable, feeding and clothing them. -Not waking them up when they are sleeping.

The Torah promises that one who honors his/her parents will merit long life.

Mipnei Seivab Takum — Stand before the Elderly

This is a special mitzvah and mark of respect which the young perform for the old. When an older person enters the room, the young must stand.

To be continued.....