

LESSON IN A BOX



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ToraH Cafe

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LESSON 5 // SERIES 3

PESACH EDITION 5778



It was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled... *Exodus 14:5*

“And Pharaoh arose at night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great outcry in Egypt, for there was no house in which no one was dead. So he called for Moses and Aaron at night and he said, Get up and get out, both you, as well as the Children of Israel, and go, worship the Lord as you have spoken.”
Exodus 12:30-31

To understand this seeming contradiction that the Jews had fled, when they were actually told to go, we need clarification. This is the sequence of events: Moses visits Pharaoh and requests a three day journey into the desert “to sacrifice to our G-d.” In fact after having the permission, after the three day holiday, Pharaoh was informed by his officers on the fourth day that they had not returned and that they fled. Why did Moses feel compelled to manipulate Pharaoh to “steal away” from Egypt, when Pharaoh, subdued at this point, would have agreed?

This captures the core of the Pesach experience. The Biblical story of the Egyptian exile and Exodus, Like all Biblical stories is more than historical or political. It is psychological and spiritual, about the inner dynamics of slavery and freedom as a metaphor for emancipation in the heart of every human being. In fact the name Mitzrayim (Egypt) means barriers, constraints and obstructions.

The Mishnah states: In every generation and every day, a person is obliged to regard his/herself as if s/he had that day come out of Egypt. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Tanya Chapter 47: “This refers to the release of the Divine soul from the confinement of the body.” Pharaoh, the king of Egypt symbolizes “the king of obstructions”—that inner voice or power, ensuring that we continue to cling to enslaving patterns, habits and inclinations and we do not leave our inner Egypt. In Contrast, the Biblical story of Exodus embodies the human potential to liberate itself from physical, mental and spiritual slavery by transcending barriers with courage. Yet how much inner harmony must you achieve in order to obtain psychological freedom before abandoning one’s battle to get there?

Herein lies the secret to another aspect that appears to be like “stealing”, the Afikoman, the matzah of liberation. There will always be a voice telling you that true happiness and freedom simply does not belong to you. You will never be anxiety free. At that juncture you must “grab the matza” that seems like stealing. You must flee for freedom. Tanya ch. 31: The release of the soul from her exile in the body is in the nature of “Exodus from Egypt”, in connection with which it is written, “The people had fled.” The aim and desire of the Jewish people was to free their Divine souls from the defilement of Egypt, exile of evil and cleave to G-d. [In the time to come, when G-d will remove the spirit of impurity from the earth, it is written: You shall not go out in haste nor go by flight, for G-d will go before you. Isaiah 52:12.]

In the here and now, Judaism teaches, redemption necessitates disassociation from dark thoughts that trap you, like the path of addiction, promiscuity, selfishness and emptiness, even demonic thoughts.

To suppress evil and flee from it, as a bandit in the night, is a legitimate form of service, an appropriate way to start the path towards personal healing and emancipation. On Pesach, all of us are given that power. We are empowered to break the locks that don't allow us to enter into our deepest recesses, into the core where there is so much sweetness, joy, and serenity. On this night and from this time forward we are no longer subject to our inner Pharaoh. A free person, one connected with a free unlimited G-d, places no impositions on his or her potential to integrate heaven and earth and live redemption every moment of life. On this night we snatch the Afikomen. We steal a piece of our own freedom and flee. Waiting for all the voices inside to be silenced forever, may take forever. At this moment we must say, from another's perspective (convincing Pharaoh) it looks like thievery but in essence this is me, my essence, my core that is Afikomen (Tzafun-hidden) that remained hidden all of the years under many layers. But, now I am free.

STORY OF THE BAAL SHEM TOV (BESHT)

A young widow came crying to the Besht. She lost her husband and now her only child is gravely ill. The Besht tried every possibility of opening "the gates of heaven" through prayers of the righteous, but to no avail. He then asked his assistant to go to the market place and gather all of the notorious thieves of the community to come to him, and together they prayed to G-d to bring healing to this child. The child miraculously recovered. His students asked him how this was possible. He said, "Simple. I saw that all "the gates in heaven" were locked. And I needed someone to break in. I needed people who know how to get into locked rooms." The lesson being, if utilized in the right way the thief can change the world for good, if he would only know how he has the capacity to storm "the gates of heaven".

This lesson was gleaned from JLI classes taught at Aleph Learning Institute throughout the year.

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ATT: Mrs. Rochel Kaplan, Director