

At the Pesach Seder, in the middle of מגיד, the section of the Hagadah that focuses on the exegesis of the Mchilta related to the exodus, we relate three opinions as to the number of afflictions visited upon the Egyptians in Egypt as well as at the Reed Sea. We always ask why should we care as to the number? At the end of the day, the Jews left Egypt and that is all that should matter. One answer is that Gd promised

(שמות טו כו)

ויאמר אם-שמוע תשמע לקול השם אלקיך והישר בעיניו תעשה והאזנת למצותיו ושמרת כל-חקיו כל-המחלה אשר-שמתי במצרים לא-אשים עליך כי אני השם רפאך

If we adhere to the Torah and observe Gd's commandments, we will be spared all the afflictions suffered by the Egyptians, both in Egypt and at the Reed Sea. Why limit the protection to the afflictions related to the Egyptians? Why shouldn't adherence to the Mitzvot guarantee blanket immunity from all afflictions, regardless of origin?

In the התרים, Gd told Abraham that his children would be enslaved in a foreign unidentified land. Why were the Jews destined to be enslaved in Egypt specifically?

(מהר"ל גבורות השם ה)

אמנם יש לתת טעם אחד לשניהם בשביל זה הם מתחברים ביחד כדי להשלים מכל מקום במה שההפכים, ביחד הם משלימים להכל מכל מקום הדבר והפכו משלים ולפיכך ישראל ומצרים, אף על גב שהם הפכים מצד עצמם להכל להכל, יש להם חבור יחד. ולפיכך ישבו ישראל במצרים

The Jew and the Egyptians were two opposites, or two sides of a coin. Egyptian society at that time was the most advanced, yet they were morally the most bankrupt as well. We have many instances in the Torah where we are warned not to emulate the Egyptian lifestyle. For example

(ויקרא יח ג)

כמעשה ארץ־מצרים אשר ישבתם־בה לא תעשו

In order to teach the proper way to behave, it may become necessary to show someone the opposite behavior so they can learn a lesson from the exposure and conclude how corrosive and dangerous such a lifestyle can be. The Torah teaches us that when it comes to Egyptian society, there is no such thing as thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Synthesis implies a dilution of both thesis and antithesis, forming a new entity that combines aspects of both. The Torah tells us there can be no compromise with or acceptance of any part of the Egyptian way of life. Judaism is the opposite to the Egyptian society. We cannot have both. Adapting any part of Egyptian culture or behavior would be considered an abomination and forbidden.

When Moses informed the people they will be protected if they observe the Torah, he was specific about the connection to the afflictions visited upon the Egyptians. The afflictions visited upon the Egyptians were specific to them. They were punished for the way they treated the Jews as well as for the cruelty and debasement they imbued in their culture and lifestyle. Once the Jews separated from the Egyptians, there can be no going back, no nostalgia for life in Egypt. Egypt and the Jews must be דבר והפוכו, opposite lifestyles and attitudes. Where Egyptians treat others with cruelty, the Jew is commanded to show kindness. Where the Egyptians worshipped a multitude of gods, the Jews were commanded to obey the One, True Gd. Where the Egyptian treated the slave as sub-human, the Jew was obligated to treat him kindly. Where the Egyptians treated the sojourner with disdain, contempt and enslavement, the Jew is commanded to show him love and respect.

That is why Gd expresses anger when the Jews mention their lives in Egypt and spin it positively. They were punished on multiple occasions, for example the aftermath of sending the spies and when they complained about a lack of water, because in each case they looked favorably on life in Egypt. After sufficient time

being exposed to Gd and His Torah and led by Moses, they should have rid themselves of any fondness of or yearning to return to Egypt.

This is an important lesson for us as well. Too often we get caught up in the lifestyle around us, whether in Israel or the diaspora. We look favorably on the fads of the day, which too often are in direct opposition a Torah lifestyle. We need to understand that what may appear to some as the benefits of following the local decadent lifestyle is rather an affliction visited upon them. It does not matter if it is Egypt of antiquity or the western culture and society of today. The Torah tells us that for us to avoid the afflictions, be they physical or spiritual, we must always turn in the opposite direction, דבר והפוכו. The way to remain strong, healthy and vibrant is

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