

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Shemos 5769

When you take the people out of Egypt, they will serve G-d upon this mountain. (3:12)

The Hagadah says, “The Torah speaks of four sons: one righteous, one wicked, one simple and one who does not know how to ask. The wicked son says, ‘Why do you need this service?’ The reply he is given is, ‘If you had been there, you would not have been redeemed.’” Why is it necessary to tell this to the wicked son?

Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum said that although the Hagadah abridges the story, from the reply to the wicked son we can infer what his argument must have been. He must have argued that he could accomplish the redemption without all these mitzvos. “What do you need them for?” he sneers. “All one has to do to be a Jew is love the Land of Israel and speak Hebrew. With that alone we could have been redeemed from Egypt.” We reply to him, “The entire purpose of the Exodus was to “serve G-d upon this mountain” i.e. to receive the mitzvos of the Torah. If you had been there and refused to do mitzvos, you would not have been redeemed. Your Land and your Hebrew would not have helped you!”

On Pesach night we eat matzo and then maror. The Gerrer Rebbe asked that seemingly, the order should have been reversed. The slavery in Egypt came before the redemption, so the maror, symbolizing slavery, should be before the matzo, which symbolizes redemption. He answers that on the day of the Exodus, G-d lifted up the Jews to a very high spiritual level to show them how high it was possible to go, and then He let them down again so that they could work on themselves in the 49 days preceding the Giving of the Torah at Sinai. The Jews felt their spiritual lack, and realized for the first time that they had been in a spiritual exile as well as a physical one. Now they were at last free from the physical exile, and they were able to begin working on their spiritual deficiencies. This is why maror – the bitterness of that spiritual exile – comes only after matzo – the physical redemption.

The final freedom came only when the Jews received the Torah on Mount Sinai. Chazal therefore say that “there is no free man like the man who learns Torah” (Pirkei Avos 6:2). But the wicked son, who has no interest in this sort of freedom, would not have been redeemed.

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