

Kedoshim 5779

BS"D Parashat Kedoshim 5779

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Free Will vs. The Master of Human Events

Judaism, in general, encourages constructive questioning and debate, but the holiday of Pesach utilizes this mode of education as its main avenue for transmitting to the younger generation the Egyptian slavery experience and its exhilarating feelings of freedom. But however numerous the questions and proposed answers, there is no end to the queries in the multi-faceted relationship between HaShem and his chosen people.

At the seder night I posed the following question:

As much as the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea was, with its suspense-filled beginning and its dramatic finale, it appears to me to have been an overreaction. The Egyptians lost their patience with the Jewish God; so, on the night of the 15 of Nissan, Paro himself went to Moshe and literally threw the Jews out of Egypt. In the morning after, when Paro and his cabinet sobered up and realized the implications of their actions, Paro gathered his world-power army and raced to return the Jews to Egypt. HaShem could have made a very impressive miracle with a massive earthquake to swallow up Paro and his hundreds of thousands of soldiers, which would have been no less impressive than the splitting of the sea's waters. So why the Red Sea extravaganza?

I suggested: HaShem had a specific three-stage agenda that He had set forth for the Jewish nation. Exodus from Egypt;

revelation of His holy Torah to His chosen people at Mount Sinai; all leading and intended for the ultimate goal of liberating Eretz Yisrael, where the Torah would be implemented as the Jewish way of life.

One does not have to possess godly powers to know that had HaShem destroyed the Egyptians on their side of the Red Sea by an earthquake or any other miraculous event, the vast majority of Jews would have decided that since the enemy was no more, they could now return to Egypt and establish – a Jewish state on both sides of the mighty Nile, instead of both sides of the modest Jordan river.

Therefore, HaShem devised the situation whereby the Jews had no choice but to 1) cross over to the other side of the sea, so that 2) when the waters returned to their natural state the Jews could no longer return to the land of their galut.

This answer is based on the philosophical principle that man is free to make his choices in life without godly intervention or interference; and as such is responsible for his or her choices, regardless of their outcome. But while this is transpiring, HaShem works around human frailties and devious choices to create situations where the outcome of man's free choices will always conclude in the manner that HaShem desires.

According to the natural, logical flow of life, the Jews would certainly have chosen to return to Egypt after the demise of the Egyptian army, as evidenced by – whenever the people faced great hardship in the desert, they threatened Moshe with returning to Egypt. So HaShem created the situation whereby the people found themselves on the other side of the Red Sea unable to cross back toward homeland Egypt. The Jews were left with their potential decision to return, but HaShem managed human affairs without coercing the Jews to make the choices that HaShem wanted. Hence the outcome would in any event be that the Jews would have to follow Moshe into the wilderness.

Left to the ideological and religious outlook of the majority of our religious leadership, Medinat Yisrael would never had come about. So, the Creator wove history to pass-by the leaders and brought about the creation of the State through events over which the leadership had no control.

In conclusion: There is no contradiction between our free will and HaShem as the Master of Human events. We make our decisions and are thus responsible for them in accordance to what the Torah demands of a Jew; but HaShem is always present, creating the factors which will bring about events to the conclusion that He wishes. An example of this is one who is in on a train. He can choose in which car he wants to ride, and to sit in any seat, facing forward or backward. He can read, daven or sleep, but he has no control over the train's direction or its speed.

Shabbat Shalom,

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