

Va'ai'ra 5773

BS"D Parashat Va'ai'ra 5773

The story of the Jewish midwives in parashat Sh'mot is informative and instructive in itself, but I believe that it was recorded as a prologue to a bigger idea.

The Talmud, in several places, records the rabbinic discussion regarding the halachic relationship between a woman and the fetus she is nurturing in her body.

One opinion states that the fetus has the halachic status of an organ of the mother, while the opposing view claims that the fetus has an independent halachic status.

Despite the halachic subtleties, all agree to the enormous emotional connection between mother and her newborn child. To such an extent that the Creator in His infinite wisdom, saw the need to incorporate stages into the mother-child relationship aimed at guaranteeing that a mother's love would not suffocate the child's development into an independent human being.

The first stage is very dramatic. As soon as the child is born, the umbilical cord through which life was provided to the fetus by its mother is severed. As if HaShem is saying, "Thank you mother for your efforts in bringing this new human being into the world. I know that it was not an easy nine months, and that the delivery was not without pain, but the cord is now severed and the relationship is no longer mother-fetus but mother-child".

The next stage toward independence is when the child is able to stand, and mother begins teaching him/her how to walk. She stands at an arm's distance and beckons to the child to come. Because of the nachat (joy) at the progress, mother may not be consciously aware that every step her child takes towards her

will eventually be used to draw away from her.

The next major ingrained stage in HaShem's program for the child's independence from father and mother, comes with the often troubling and unmanageable manifestations of teenage rebellion. This is a blessing in disguise. It is HaShem's way of weaning the maturing son or daughter from parental dependence to a life of personal responsibility to HaShem, to society, to beloved parents, to spouse, and to him/herself.

The growing independence of a child from parents is part of a bigger picture. HaShem disdains slavery in any form – slavery in the sense that one person controls the free will of another. Let it be a parent regarding a child, an employer towards his employee, a master to a slave, a government to its people, and certainly the enslaving of a Jew to a gentile.

In a broader sense, the story of the midwives in parashat Sh'mot is the Torah's way of espousing freedom, whether it be the severing of the umbilical cord between child and mother or the freeing of the Jewish nation from gentile domination.

We can appreciate HaShem's disdain of slavery from the fact that He decreed slavery as a punishment for evildoers. We see it in parashat Noach where HaShem relegates the descendants of Canaan son of Cham to a future of slavery (Beraishiet 9,25)

And (Noach) said, "Cursed be Canaan, a slave to slaves (the lowest of slaves) will he be to his brothers."

And again in parashat Mishpatim, slavery is used as a punishment when a thief is unable to repay the theft.

It is normal and natural for healthy, sane human beings to wish to be free from foreign coercion.

The Jewish nation fought the Phillistines, Amon, Moav, Edom, Aram, Assyria, Babylon, the Greeks and the Romans and more, all in the name of freedom from human oppression.

Pesach is freedom. Chanuka is freedom. Purim is freedom. And so too is Yom Ha'atzma'ut, when the hated British mandate ended and, for the first time in 2000 years, we became a free and independent nation – to the degree that any nation is free.

The freedom for which we Jews in all generations have given our lives is the freedom from gentile oppression. However we are not, and never will be, free from HaShem who has taken us to be His servants.

Twice in the book of Vayikra, HaShem designates the Jewish nation as His “avadim” – His servants.

In chapter 25 verses 42 and 55

Because they (Am Yisrael) are My servants, who I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves

For the Children of Israel are My servants.

They are My servants, who I brought out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Moshe is called by HaShem “avdie” (My servant) in Bamidbar 12,7

Not so My servant Moshe, the most loyal of my home

And again in the book of Yehoshua 1,2 (Joshua):

Moshe My servant is dead. Now, arise and cross the Jordan (River) you and all the nation to the land I give to them—to the Children of Israel

We who merit to live in Eretz Yisrael today have achieved freedom from gentile coercion, allowing us to choose the life we desire bounded only by economic and political

considerations. At the same time, we willingly fulfill the role of servants of HaShem – our Father and Master.

Not so the Jews who voluntarily choose to live in the gentile lands of the galut who are the mirror images of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael.

We in Eretz Yisrael are free of gentile coercive authority, with the decisions being made by a Jewish parliamentary government, whose members include Agudat Yisrael, Degel HaTorah and the religious Zionist party; while concurrently we are the servants of Hashem. Whereas the Jews in the galut are subject to the decisions of gentile authority, and are not the servants of HaShem, as the Gemara states explicitly in Ketuvot 110,b:

Whoever lives in chutz la'aretz (out of Eretz Yisrael) is considered to be worshiping avoda zara (idolatry)

And on that same page the Gemara quotes a B'raitā:

A person shall forever live in Eretz Yisrael even in a city whose majority inhabitants are idolators (gentiles), but not in chutz la'aretz even in a city whose majority are Jews (Shechem vs. Lakewood NJ, for example).

For whoever lives in Eretz Yisrael is considered to have God (in his life and heart) whereas one who lives in chutz la'aretz is considered as not having a God

These are powerful, authoritative, compelling, potent, preeminent, directives made by HaShem our Master through his loyal servants – the rabbinic leaders of our nation as quoted in the Talmud.

And who has the authority to distort and deform that which is so specific?

It is beyond my comprehension, why a sincere observant Jew

would wish to remain subservient to a gentile authority, albeit an enlightened one (so far), when he can live in Eretz Yisrael with his brothers and sisters who are forging out of this 2000-year neglected land a beautiful and holy future?

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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