

Yitro 5779

BS"D Parashat Yitro 5779

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Joyfully Bringing The Shechina Home

Shemot 18:9):

וְיַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה לְךָ כָּל-אָתָה אֲשֶׁר-יָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל – וְיַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִצְחָה בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל

"Yitro was overwhelmed with gladness when hearing of all the good that HaShem had done for Israel; by rescuing him from the hand of the Egyptians."

Use of the word "him" in the singular would appear to be inappropriate when referring to the nation of "Israel" as a whole. The pasuk should read "... all the good HaShem had done for Israel, by rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians.

We find a similar apparent misuse in the Book of Yirmiyahu (chapter 31:15)

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This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel is weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because he is not

here”.

Use of the words “he is” in the singular when referring to Rachel’s many children in the galut is apparently incorrect; the pasuk should read “...Rachel is weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are not here”.

We could dismiss these apparent errors with superficial and unsophisticated explanations by saying that the pasuk – “Yitro was overwhelmed with gladness when hearing of all the good that HaShem had done for Israel; by rescuing him from the hand of the Egyptians” – was describing the limitless empathy that Yitro felt for the Jewish nation, as if he himself had been saved by HaShem at the splitting of the Red Sea.

And we can explain the prophet Yirmiyahu’s use of the words “he is” in the pasuk – “... Rachel is weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because he is not here” – as a way of describing Rachel’s limitless love for all the children of Israel. If the time should come when all the Jews in the world will gather in Eretz Yisrael, except for one “Menachem Mendel” who is still out there, Rachel will continue to weep and refuse to be comforted “because he is not here”.

However, I suggest a deeper meaning to the same apparent mistake of using the inappropriate singular term in place of the proper plural term.

In both cases, the singular refers to the one, unitary, almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth, the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov Who chose their descendants – the nation of Israel – as His own.

And the message is the same.

Rabbi Yanai in Midrash Raba (Shemot 2:5) explains that HaShem appeared to Moshe from a burning thorny bush as if to say that when the Jewish people are in dire distress, HaShem is

together with them in their galut and suffering, just as twins feel each other's pain.

The pasuk says, "Yitro was overwhelmed with gladness when hearing of all the good that HaShem had done for Israel; by rescuing him from the hand of the Egyptians."

By freeing the Jewish people from galut, HaShem too was now freed from the tuma of the galut.

The prophet Yirmiyahu is echoing the same idea, that "Rachel is weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because he is not here" – because HaShem has relegated himself to be in galut with His children Yisrael.

Each and every Jew is connected to the holy Shechina from Whom he draws the unique sanctity of his Jewish soul.

A Jew in galut, by necessity, draws that spark of Shechina that is his essence to dwell with him in the tuma of the galut. Coming home to Eretz Yisrael is a physical act, but the spiritual implications overwhelmingly overshadow the physical. You bring home that part of the Shechina which is the life energy of your soul. Not to do so is not only a violation of a rudimentary requirement of being an authentic organ in the body of Am Yisrael, it is a denial of the spiritual, metaphysical aspects of Judaism and your connection to them.

This Shabbat, when we hear the first of the Ten Commandments – "I am the Lord your God who has delivered you from the land of Egypt" – keep in mind that the purposes of the deliverance were to reveal the Torah to the Jewish nation and to have it observed in HaShem's Holy Land.

The commandment does not say: "I am the Lord your God who has delivered you from the land of Egypt, in order that you dwell in other lands of the galut".

Shabbat Shalom,

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