

PLAY IT AGAIN SAMANTHA

“And it shall be a sign upon your arm, and an ornament between your eyes, for with a strong hand Hashem removed us from Egypt.” (13:16)

There was once a child prodigy who, at the age of three, could play Rachmaninoff better than the best.

A concert was arranged for her to play in public. Months before, posters and TV advertisements proclaimed that she would perform for one concert and one concert only.

In order that this once in a lifetime event would not be forgotten, special mementos of the concert would be sold: For example a tiny white concert piano on a bracelet, or a tiara with a piano on it.

The morning after the concert, the newspapers fell over themselves trying to find superlatives to describe the performance.

About a month later, a couple of louts who had missed the show turned up at the child's home and demanded a 'command' performance.

“Yeah, we know everyone says she was great. We read the newspapers and all, but we don't believe it. If you bring her down from her bedroom now and get her to perform here in your sitting room on this grand piano, then we'll believe she's as good as everyone says she is; if not we don't believe...”

When Hashem created the world, there was no doubt that it was He who had brought everything into existence, that He knew all that was going on in the world, and that He was involved in the smallest event that happens in this world.

From the time of Enosh, Adam's grandson, people started to make mistakes about G-d. Some people denied that there was a G-d at all.

Others conceded the existence of a Divine Power, but said that He was so removed and exalted that He only had knowledge of the spiritual realm, but didn't know what was going on down in this world.

Yet a third group admitted that G-d knows what is happening in the lower realms, but He isn't interested in what we do. In other words, He created the Universe, and then, as it were, went off to play golf.

G-d decided once and for all to quash these mistakes. He would bring a series of miraculous events that would show, by altering the course of nature, that He creates nature.

Not only this, but He would take a nation out of the midst of another nation and make them His people. This would show that not only is He aware of what transpires in this world, but He cares and interacts with Mankind.

G-d would do this only once, because by performing these miracles, He would remove the ability of man to have freedom of choice to believe in Him or not, and the purpose of Creation was the existence of a being, Man, who has free will to believe or not.

This is the story of the Exodus. G-d took the Jewish People out of Egypt to prove that He is alive and well and the world is living in Him!

In order that we should not forget this once-and-once-only re-orchestration of nature, He gave us souvenirs of the 'concert' — a mezuzah to put on our doors, tefillin to bind on our arms. Someone who has these reminders will go through his life as though he had a string tied around his pinkie — he will never forget.

Not only that, G-d made it incumbent on every generation to *pass-over* — to re-create the events of this great 'concert of nature' in every generation at a *Seder* so that each generation would know that it had actually happened. Parents don't lie to their children about things of importance.

For this reason, G-d will not perform at the whim of every boor who comes along and claims that he doesn't believe there was a concert at all. There are millions of fans who still have their tiny white concert pianos carefully handed down from generation to generation to prove the others wrong.

(Based on the Ramban)

Haftorah: Yirmiyahu 46:13-28

GOOD-LUCK CHARM

In last week's Haftorah, the prophet Yechezkel depicted the downfall of Egypt at the hands of the Babylonian king Nevuchadnetzar. This week, it is the prophet Yirmiyahu who speaks of the judgment that will be executed on the Egyptians by the Babylonians.

The Haftorah also deals with the world-historic exile of the Jewish People, and inspires Israel with courage.

The prophet directs Israel to the only 'good-luck charm' that will work in all times and all places. The name of that talisman is 'eved Hashem' — 'servant of G-d.'

In spite of great suffering, the only sure protection against the storms of history will be to be a *servant of G-d*. For no-one can be closer to the Master than he who is His servant at all times and in all places, unconditionally.

(Based on Rabbi Hirsch)

RETURN FROM AFAR

“But you, be not afraid, My servant Yaakov, and be not frightened, Yisrael, for I will save you from afar!” (46:27)

When Yisrael does *teshuvah* (returns in repentance to Hashem), the final redemption is hastened and comes before the appointed time. If they do not do *teshuvah*, the redemption will come anyway at the predestined hour.

Therefore Hashem tells Yisrael through His prophet not to fear, for **“I will save you from afar!”** Even if you are far away from Judaism, and *teshuvah* is a word unknown to you, He will surely redeem you when the time for the redemption arrives.

(Mayana shel Torah)

INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIRO
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.



BARUCH KEIL ELYON-*ihkg ke I urc*
“BLESSED IS G-D...”

Remember the Sabbath Day to Sanctify It *uasek `avouh `rufz* *Zachor es yom HaShabbos l'kasho*

These words, drawn directly from the opening of the Fourth Commandment, have a special meaning against the background of the Midrash (*Tehillim* 92) which describes the judgment of Adam for the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

When it seemed that Adam would be condemned to death at the very end of the sixth day of creation, the Sabbath came before Hashem with the plea:

“Sovereign of the universe, no man has yet been killed. Shall death begin on my day?”

The plea was accepted, and when Adam realized the power of the Sabbath he composed a “psalm which is a song of the Sabbath.”

“Remember the Sabbath,” we are commanded, because it was this day which preserved Adam and all his descendants, and which preserved all of Israel.

“Sanctify it” in the same manner as anyone honors the day on which a lifesaving miracle occurred, and even more so because the Sabbath itself was that savior.

Parshas Bo

For the week ending 10 Shevat 5757, 17 & 18 January 1997

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Parshas Bo

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Overview

Hashem tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the Plague of locust and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aaron to remove the locusts, and he admits that he has sinned. Hashem ends the plague, but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Children of Israel. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe, and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, and to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that Hashem is going to bring one more plague, the death of the first born, and then the Children of Israel will leave Egypt. Hashem again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again he will be put to death. Hashem tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the first month in the calendar year. The Children of Israel are commanded to take a sheep on the tenth of the month, and guard it until the fourteenth. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach sacrifice, its blood to be put on their doorposts, and its roasted meat to be eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign to Hashem to pass-over their homes when He strikes the first born of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays Hashem's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. Hashem sends the final plague, killing the first born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. Hashem tells Moshe and Aaron the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (the redemption of the first born son), and tefillin.

Insights

RETURN OF THE PAGANS

***"And you shall tell you son on that day, saying Because of this, Hashem acted on my behalf."* (13:8)**

A true story. Los Angeles. An orthodox Jew was having a business meeting in a restaurant. His companions were intrigued as to why he would not drink their wine. They pressed him for an answer.

After demurring for a while, he finally explained that the Sages had decreed that a Jew must drink only Kosher wine because wine libations had been used by pagans to worship their gods.

His business colleagues were both bemused and amused by this. They found it hard to believe that in 1997, so many years after idol worship had ceased, there should still be such a decree.

As they were raising their glasses to their lips and about to wish each other "Cheers!" the wine waiter piped up:

"I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. You know, I'm a neo-pagan, and before I serve the wine, *I always pour out a little wine in the kitchen to my gods...*"

The drinkers froze with their glasses in mid-air.

In the Pesach Hagadah, the wicked son says to his father "*What is this avodah (service) to you?*" meaning: "I grant you that when there was idol worship in the world, it was relevant to bring a lamb, the symbol of Egyptian idol worship, as a sacrifice. But nowadays, who worships idols? What is this service *to you?*"

The answer is "*Because of this.*" History is not a cause, it is an effect. Events happen so we may do the *mitzvos*, not the reverse.

Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world. The *mitzvos* pre-date the world. They come *before* the world both chronologically and in importance.

The reason that we have a mitzvah to honor our parents is not because we have parents and so we have to be nice to them. Mankind could have been a single-cell self-replicating organism.

The reason we have parents is so that we can fulfill the mitzvah of honoring them.

Similarly the reason for the Pesach sacrifice is not to remember a historical event. Rather, the historical event is the method by which we are able to fulfill the mitzvah.

(Based on the Beis Halevi)

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