

Parshat Bo – The Awakening of the Mitzvah

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In Likutey Moharan, lesson 24, Rebbe Nachman elucidates a verse from this week's Parasha, specifically focusing on the eighth plague, the plague of locusts (Arbeh). The quoted verse is Moshe Rabbeinu's response to Pharaoh when questioned about the intention to offer sacrifices in the desert. Pharaoh asks, "You want to go and offer sacrifice in the desert? Fine. Who's

going?" Moshe Rabbeinu replies, "In our young and in our old, we will go. With our sons and daughters, with our sheep and our cattle, we will go." And why all of this? "Because it is a festival of Hashem for us."

The term "festival," as explained in the commentary, denotes the desire to enjoy oneself. Typically, people find joy in having their family together, including children, and there's often the presence of meat, a customary offering on joyous occasions. However, in the context of Egypt, meat is problematic as it involves consuming the idols of Egypt, considered abominable. Therefore, Moshe emphasizes the need to celebrate this festivity elsewhere.

Rebbe Nachman highlights in this verse that when a Jew performs a mitzvah, especially with joy, the mitzvah gains momentum, a sense of motion or walking mobility. The concept is that the mitzvah begins to walk, and this movement triggers an arousal throughout the entire creation.

The verse states, "In our young and in our old, we will go." In Kabbalistic terms, young and old represent the high levels of existence—the youthful and the elder. The lower levels include children, sheep and cattle. Meaning, that when a person successfully performs a mitzvah joyfully, extracting its holiness from the impurity it was previously bound to, the mitzvah, now unshackled, can fully exert its capacity and capability. A mitzvah's purpose is twofold: it is a commandment (tzivuy), and it also signifies a connection, our link to Hashem, the Creator. The essence of a mitzvah lies in reconnecting the entire world and everything within it to Hashem through these commandments. This reconnection to God is the ultimate goal and purpose of performing a mitzvah.

Now, when a Jew joyfully performs a mitzvah and liberates the holiness entwined with it—formerly bound by the shackles of impurity—Rebbe Nachman asserts that the joy itself annihilates the kelipot (impure forces). By infusing joy into the mitzvah,

one can extract its holiness. Consequently, the mitzvah gains momentum, stirring the entire creation to return to Hashem. This concept is alluded to in the verse “in our old and our young we will go”, suggesting movement in the upper levels due to the simultaneous movement in the lower levels (sons and daughters, cattle, sheep).

Therefore, through the performance of a mitzvah with joy, one can extract the holy sparks associated with the mitzvah, symbolized by cattle and sheep, representing the animal level of creation. By engaging in the mitzvah joyfully, an upward movement ensues, and all levels of creation gain upward momentum.

Rebbe Nachman draws a crucial lesson from the plague of locusts: the power of a mitzvah performed with joy can awaken the entire universe

Now, although Rebbe Nachman draws upon a specific statement from the plague of Arbeh, which pertains to the joy associated with the mitzvah of the korban Pesach (Passover sacrifice), he contends that this principle extends to all mitzvot of the Torah. Despite referencing the korban Pesach, the Rebbe asserts the broader relevance of this teaching to encompass the entirety of Torah Mitzvot.

Firstly, the plague of locusts (Arbeh) follows the plague of hail (Barad). Arbeh completes the devastation by consuming what food stock remained after the hailstorm. In the previous portion, Parshat Va'eira, it is mentioned that the hail destroyed everything in the fields, including seora (oats) and pishtan (flax), with the exception of chita (wheat) and kusemet (spelt), which were left untouched. This spared some food for destruction in the subsequent plague, Arbeh. The commentaries explain this sparing of crops was intentional to allow room for the continuation of the locust infestation.

Arbeh, derived from the word “harbeh,” meaning a lot or

excess, reflects the swarm-like nature of locusts. There is an analogy between the swarm of locusts and a person's potential descent into depression, leading to the indulgence of lusts. Common daily challenges often revolve around desires related to food. When a person faces sadness or depression, Rebbe Nachman explains, there is a tendency to seek solace in excess, overindulging as a coping mechanism. He supports this idea with a verse from Mishlei (Proverbs): "Bechol etzev yiyeh motar," meaning "Whenever there's sadness, there will be excess."

Arbeh, the plague of locusts, specifically targets the leftover food, symbolizing how challenges in life can lead to excesses, especially in the realm of food consumption. Rebbe Nachman discusses the psychological impact of challenges, emphasizing that when a person faces a trial and succumbs to it, there is a subsequent, intensified sense of demoralization. The negative forces try to compound the distress by making the individual feel not only the initial loss but also a further descent, creating a cycle of suffering and demoralization.

This concept is illustrated by the sequence of plagues. First, the hailstorm (Barad) struck, affecting the initial state. Subsequently, a second wave, represented by the locusts (Arbeh), targeted what little was left. The Yetzer Hara (evil inclination) operates similarly, launching an initial assault and then, when the person attempts to recover, delivering another blow. It's a relentless cycle. Hashem counteracted this by sending Pharaoh and Egypt, symbolic of exile and sadness, creating a double challenge. After the hailstorm hit their food, the locusts arrived to devastate even the remaining wheat and spelt. This was a measure for measure response to the excessive oppression inflicted on the Jewish people.

Secondly, Rebbe Nachman draws a crucial lesson from the plague of locusts: the power of a mitzvah performed with joy can

awaken the entire universe. He specifically highlights this lesson using the example of the locust plague to emphasize that, even in overwhelming circumstances, the way out is through joyful mitzvah observance. In times of feeling stripped of everything, one's connection to Hashem through mitzvot becomes paramount. Rebbe Nachman asserts that choosing to perform mitzvot with happiness, even a minimal amount, can elevate the mitzvah and, as a byproduct, bring the world back to its Creator.

Despite the challenges and pressure, successfully performing a mitzvah with joy imparts momentum to the mitzvah, signifying its power to impact the world. This momentum can counteract the prevailing chaos and ideologies against the Jewish people.

Rebbe Nachman underscores the need to strengthen mitzvah performance, emphasizing that the joy with which they are carried out can serve as a catalyst to awaken the world from its slumber and counteract irrational ideologies.

Shabbat Shalom
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