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THE MIND, HEART, AND SOUL: MAN'S ESSENTIAL ACQUISITIONS

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)

It is written, "And He said to Abram, 'Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own – and they will serve them, and they will oppress them – four hundred years ... and afterwards they will leave with great wealth'" (Genesis 15:13,14).

We know that at the Brit Bein Habetarim (Covenant Between the Parts), G-d announced to Abraham the decree that his children would go into exile. At the same time, however, G-d promised him that they would leave from there with great wealth. We see, in fact, that this is what happened when they departed from Egypt. At that time, G-d commanded Moses, "Please [Hebrew: na] speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels" (Exodus 11:2). The school of Rabbi Yanai teaches that the word na indicates a supplication. G-d said to Moses: "Please, ask the Egyptians for silver and gold utensils lest the righteous one [Abraham] say that the foretold servitude occurred but not the foretold departure with wealth." The Children of Israel replied to Moses: Only if we ourselves leave (Berachot 9a; Rashi ad loc.).

That which is not said is far more than that which is. As such, we will try to clarify the situation by answering the following three questions.

1. Why was it so important to tell Abraham that the Children of Israel would leave with great wealth, so much so that G-d accomplished what He had promised to Abraham and beseeched the people to ask the Egyptians to give them their silver and gold? In any case, the spoils of the Red Sea were much more important than the spoils of Egypt. Therefore why did G-d not tell Abraham that the Children of Israel would receive all their wealth from the spoils of the Red Sea?

2. Rabbi Shimon Akavitz cites one question from Machazeh Avraham: Since we know that one who borrows an object is required to return it to its owner (see Exodus 22:13; Rambam Halachot She'elah 1:5), why did G-d command Moses to tell the people that everyone should ask their neighbor to "borrow" their things? We do not see that the Children of Israel returned that which they borrowed from the Egyptians, and there is no reason to say that the possessions of the Egyptians were a compensation for the slavery that they inflicted on the Children of Israel (see Kli

Yakar, Shemot 11:2). If such were the case, it would have been sufficient for G-d to command them to appropriate the riches and possessions of the Egyptians, and it would not have been necessary to beg them to take these things under the pretext of borrowing.

3. The Maharsha, in the name of Ein Yaakov, asks another question: "One should ask oneself what is the sense of the expression 'Please speak,' given that Israel benefited in obeying the request which followed. Why was it necessary to present the request in the form of an entreaty?" (Berachot 9a).

In response to these questions, at the time of the Covenant Between the Parts, it was not material riches that worried Abraham when he first heard the decree of his children's exile, but rather their spiritual future – that which would become of them after so many years of exile in a foreign land.

We know that the Children of Israel were exiled to Egypt in order to correct the 288 sparks of holiness that were held inside, as Ohr HaHaim explains concerning the verse that states, "And darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Genesis 1:2). How would this correction take place? Solely by the suffering of the Children of Israel in Egypt. In his writings, the Arizal explains that what we say in the Passover Haggadah ("this bread of affliction [matzah]") points to the sparks of holiness that were captive in Egypt, and the expression "that our ancestors ate in Egypt" indicates that our ancestors corrected them.

Only the children of Abraham were capable of correcting these 288 sparks of holiness, this being in order to bring Creation back to its initial state of perfection. Thus the Divine Presence would once again find its place in the world of Asiyah (action) and G-d would give the Torah to the Children of Israel. As long as the 288 sparks of holiness had not been corrected, G-d would not have given His Torah to any people, not even to our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, although they already observed all the commandments, including even rabbinic ordinances. The Torah was not given to the Patriarchs, but to the entire people, publicly on Mount Sinai, after the 288 sparks of holiness had been corrected.

and yet Abraham, in hearing the decree and the promise,

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was not only unhappy, but his world was darkened, as it is written at the time of the Covenant Between the Parts: "And behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him" (Genesis 15:12). He feared that the terror and suffering that would be the Children of Israel's lot in Egypt would not only prevent them from correcting that which they were supposed to correct, but also cause, in and of itself, even more harm. In such a case, they would never escape from the grip of the people that they served. In addition, Abraham feared that even if they would correct the 288 sparks of holiness by their suffering and servitude, they would be in danger of being harmed in their heart and soul, and they risked falling to the fiftieth degree of impurity. If such were to have been the case, they would no longer have merited being saved and would no longer have been protected.

G-d knew Abraham's thoughts and fears. This is why He told and promised him that after their sufferings and enslavement, his children would leave their exile with great wealth. It is as if G-d had told him, "You have no reason to worry that your children will debase themselves and not leave Egypt. On the contrary, not only will they leave because of their sufferings, but also 'they will leave with great wealth,' meaning that they will take in their bags these same sparks of holiness that constitute great wealth." In addition, G-d promised Abraham that his children would not reach the fiftieth degree of impurity because their heart and soul would not be harmed, which in itself is a precious thing. In effect, when the Children of Israel reached the forty-ninth degree of impurity, they were immediately saved (Zohar Yitro 39a), and G-d did not let them reach the fiftieth degree.

The verse itself alludes to this. The first and last letters of the words "and afterwards they will leave with great wealth" have the same numerical value as the entirety of the expression, "the heart and soul". This means that G-d promised Abraham that his children would not sink to the fiftieth degree of impurity and their heart and soul would not be affected, and also that they would leave Egypt before ever reaching that stage. This is what in fact happened. They left with their hearts and souls intact, a fact that without doubt constitutes a great treasure for man, since these elements are essential for serving G-d throughout one's life.

In the same way, besides great spiritual riches, G-d promised Abraham that after his children's enslavement in a foreign land, they would leave with great material riches. The gold and silver that they left with were not a compensation for their servitude, but rather a loan, in order not to give the Accuser the possibility of asking why they received great wealth since "they [the Egyptians] were idolaters and these [the Children of Israel] were idolaters" (Zohar II:170b). What right would they have to be compensated? If they repaired these forty-nine degrees of impurity (before receiving the Torah) and elevated themselves to the fiftieth degree of holiness, then this wealth would effectively become theirs, without any question.

There are some who would say that this wealth was given in compensation for their servitude, not that it was a loan. It is proper to make them recall what Gevia ben Psesia told the nations: "If it had been a payment, the

Children of Israel had been enslaved for 210 years, and a simple calculation shows that they should have received an incalculably greater amount of silver and gold" (Sanhedrin 91a).

It is written, "and afterwards they will leave with great wealth." It is precisely that "they will leave with great wealth," and not that "they will take great wealth." The latter would have indicated that they took it as compensation for their servitude, whereas the former indicates that it consisted of a loan that would be returned. Nevertheless, when they corrected the forty-nine degrees of impurity that they had fallen into while in Egypt, the silver and gold that had at first been borrowed had now become a seizure proper, without chance of return. Also, since the expression "and afterwards they will leave with great wealth" has exactly the same numerical value as the expression, "the loan will completely belong to the Jews," the verse alludes to the fact that the possessions taken by them would remain theirs.

G-d's promise to Abraham consisted of two stages. The first stage dealt with the time when they left Egypt, when they took silver and gold from their neighbors under the pretext of borrowing in order to avoid any dispute. The second stage dealt with the time when they would make it to the fiftieth degree of holiness. At that point, those riches would belong to them without question. It is certain that the Children of Israel would no longer be the object of any accusations, since G-d would retort to Egypt's ministering angel that the Children of Israel had every right to take this wealth. Even if they were idolaters in Egypt, they had all purified themselves, abandoned all idolatry, and elevated themselves in holiness. However there still remains one question: At what moment did the second stage begin? The answer is that it began with the spoils of the Red Sea, as the Sages say: The spoils of the Red Sea far surpassed the spoils of Egypt, as it is written, 'we will make for you circlets of gold and points of silver' [Song of Songs 1:11]" (Bamidbar Rabba 13:19). If the Children of Israel had not asked for or borrowed from the Egyptians, the latter would have brought all their silver and gold to the Red Sea and the Children of Israel would have received everything there. Consequently, at the Red Sea, even that which they had borrowed became theirs. An allusion to this is found in the letters of the word zahav (gold), which make up the first letters of the Hebrew expression for "it was their possession." Thus they did not have to return it.

At the time of the departure from Egypt, G-d said to Moses, "Please speak in the ears of the people..." (Exodus 11:2). He did not wait until they arrived at the Red Sea to give them all the wealth due to them. "It is proper that I fulfill My promise to the letter in order that they leave with great wealth, as much spiritual as material, as I promised them." And as we know, all Divine promises are fulfilled.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI HIZKIYAHU MEDINI (AUTOR OF SDEI HEMED)

Rabbi Hizkiyahu Medini's books provide an abundance of principles concerning Halachah, both in general and in detail, and reference a great many authors from different eras. He was great in Torah and deeds, and the great authorities of our time cannot make do without his works. We will cite one story that he himself recounted as to the origin of his wisdom.

Rabbi Hizkiyahu once told a friend that in his youth he did not have any particular talents. The sources of wisdom had only opened for him when he was older because of a certain incident.

"When I was a young avrech," began the Sdei Hemed, "I studied in a kollel financed by a wealthy man, and which was located in his own home. At that time I was not among the most brilliant minds in the kollel, however I learned with great diligence and steadily progressed in my studies. One of the students of this group became jealous and set a trap for me. Every morning a cleaning lady came to work in the Beit Midrash. He bribed her to publicly accuse me of trying to seduce her when she arrived in the Beit Midrash to do her work in the early morning. One day, as soon as this woman arrived in the Beit Midrash, she began to scream and accuse me of disgraceful behavior. Everyone immediately gathered about, and I was accused of hypocrisy and insulted over and over again. It was a tremendous desecration of G-d's Name. Unable to tolerate such shame, I was forced to flee. The Rosh Kollel did not believe the cleaning lady, and he fired her.

"After a certain time, when the cleaning lady had exhausted all the money that she had made with her accusations, she came to beg my forgiveness for the tremendous wrong that she had done. She promised me that she

would publicly recount the truth and state that it was all a plot, that one of the avrechim had given her money to accuse me.

"Given that she had no longer any livelihood, she implored me to do all that I could, once she had cleared my name, to help her get her job back.

"At that moment," said the Sdei Hemed, "I was confronted with a tremendous dilemma. On one side, I was happy with this unexpected opportunity to see my name cleared of this terrible accusation and to have everything put back in order. I almost agreed to her request, yet at the same time the complete opposite thought came to me. A terrible desecration of G-d's Name had already occurred, and if the actual story were to become known, there would be yet another one due to the shameful conduct of the avrech. Not only that, but he himself would suffer a terrible fate. Consequently, it was preferable that I continue to bear my shame in silence than to provoke a new scandal. The decision was very hard to make, and my thoughts were jostling against one another in my head as I changed my mind from one minute to the next. Finally, I decided to tell the cleaning lady that I would push myself to speak in her favor, but I absolutely forbid her to tell anybody about the bribe.

"At the time that I took this difficult decision, one that risked endangering my entire future in the world of Torah," concluded the Sdei Hemed, "I felt the sources of wisdom opening before me. Instead of the damage that my choice should have caused me, I had merited great Heavenly assistance, one that has led me until my present situation."

Rabbi Hizkiyahu Medini's Hilloula is on Kislev 24.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

(by the Maggid of Dubno)

It is written, "Fear not, Abram, I am a shield for you" (Genesis 15:1).

The Midrash states: "Abraham was afraid, for he said to himself, 'I was thrown into the fiery furnace and was saved. I went to war with kings and I conquered them. Perhaps I have already received all my reward in this world.' The Holy One, blessed be He, told him, 'Do not Fear. I will protect you. All that I have done for you, I have done freely. Your future reward is intact.'"

This text apparently contradicts the teaching that we should guard ourselves from thinking that we may rely on Hashem showing us unlimited mercy. Let us illustrate the difference between these concepts by a parable.

A man left for a foreign city in the hopes of finding some work. He presented himself to a distinguished, wealthy, and influential man and asked him for a job.

"I can't promise you anything," replied the rich man, "since we don't know one another yet. It's impossible for me to evaluate your abilities now, and you as well don't know if my place would be right for you."

However, the other man insisted so much that the rich man finished by agreeing.

"Since you feel this way," the rich man said, "stay with me for a little while. You'll share my table with me, see how I work, and if the occasion arises, you'll intervene and act as you see fit. In this way I'll be able to evaluate your work, and after that we'll talk."

Thus it was done. After a certain time, since they were satisfied with one another, the rich man hired him, fixed his wages, and wrote up an employment contract specifying the duties of the servant and the commitments of the master of the house.

Before as well as after, this man served the master of the house, who for his part saw to all the man's needs. However, the difference is that beforehand they had no fixed obligations to one another, nor was there any fixed connection between what the servant did and what he received. Sometimes he worked well beyond what he received, and sometimes it was the reverse, since from both sides these favors were free. In addition, the master of the house did not have any reason to get angry if the servant's work was not adequate, for the servant was not yet under any obligation, and vice-versa. After the contract was signed in front of witnesses, however, each had the right to become upset with the other for having been remiss in an obligation, since such was their agreement.

Through the power of contemplation, Abraham had perceived by himself the existence of his Creator, and in the purity of his heart he spontaneously put himself at His service. However he did not yet merit any reward, for G-d had not ordered him to do anything. Nevertheless this did not prevent G-d from watching over His faithful servant, as for example when he was thrown into the fiery furnace or during his war against several kings. He came to his help on several occasions, however it was completely for free. There was no cause and effect relationship between Abraham's worship of Hashem and that which Abraham received from Him. He

served Him without any compensation, as witnessed by the verse that states, "You found his heart faithful before You" (Nehemiah 9:8). And on His part, the Holy One, blessed be He, sometimes helped him without compensation. This is the idea that is advanced by the Midrash: "Abraham was afraid, for he said to himself, 'I was thrown into the fiery furnace and was saved. I went to war with kings and I conquered them. Perhaps I have already received all my reward in this world.' The Holy One, blessed be He, told him, 'Do not Fear. I will protect you. All that I have done for you, I have done freely. Your future reward is intact.'"

All the help that I have given you was not in compensation for your devotion, for I had not yet placed you in My service. It was you, inspired by your faithful heart, that chose to serve Me, and consequently I too can save you, without compensation, when you need it.

In addition, given that it was from his own initiative that Abraham approached Hashem and rendered Him homage, there was no reason to criticize him for a possible lack of mitzvot, since he had not yet received any commandments. However afterwards, when he reached old age, the Holy One, blessed be He, observed that nothing was missing in the perfection of his service. Thus G-d wanted to bring Abraham closer and conclude a covenant with him in order to make him a servant of the house of G-d, and so He assigned him a fitting salary. From that moment on, Abraham was obligated to scrupulously perform all that was he was commanded to do, and Hashem for His part committed Himself to no longer change anything, and to give Abraham a reward commensurate with his actions.

This is the meaning of the verse that states, "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the L-RD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am G-d Alm-ghty'" (Genesis 17:1). This was a little like how a master of the house wants to make himself known to a potential employee, as in "It is I who takes the decisions that I please." The statement, "I am G-d Alm-ghty. Walk before Me" (ibid.) has the same sense, namely: Henceforth I take you into My service, therefore "be perfect" (in other words: On your side, your duties remain the same). What follows next in the passage is "I will set My covenant between Me and you" (v.2), and this covenant will determine our reciprocal responsibilities. Beginning from that moment, "I will increase you most exceedingly" (ibid.). Henceforth, My mercy toward you can no longer be free. In repayment for your work, which will be great, your compensation will also be great.

All this explains the thought of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai: "From the day that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, no one before Abraham had called Him L-rd" (Berachot 7b). Daniel himself was only answered when he said, "And now, pay heed, our G-d, to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and let Your countenance shine upon Your desolate Sanctuary, for the sake of the L-rd" (Daniel 9: 17). It is not written, "for Your sake", but rather "for the sake of [Abraham who called You] the L-rd."