**Are You Really Sick with Galus?**

**A Joke to Begin With…**

A mentally unstable individual decided one fine spring day that he was…deathly ill! He started to cough very loudly, groan excessively, and cry out from imaginary pains. One community member, a doctor by profession, decided to “handle” this special case. He invited him to undergo a thorough medical examination at his private clinic.

After completing a series of routine tests, the doctor turned to his “patient” with a sad expression on his face and said, “I’m sorry to tell you this, but in my professional opinion, the time has come for you to start praying!”

This man, who now realized that his “condition” was far worse than he had imagined, began to weep bitterly. “Doctor,” he asked in a voice filled with anguish, “how much time do I have left to live?

“Live? I don’t know,” the doctor replied. “But you have to pray because only G-d can help a crazy like you…”

The galus (exile) we are presently experiencing is most definitely a severe and sad illness. However, there is the well-known wise saying, “Knowing the illness – is half the cure.” When we know the reason for the disease of galus, we can (more quickly) provide the necessary treatment!

In this week’s Torah portion, **Parshas** **Eikev**, Moshe Rabbeinu continues his description of the events endured by the Jewish People during their forty years in the wilderness. The sin of the Golden Calf, the breaking of the Tablets of the Covenant, G-d’s anger, and Moshe’s prayer constitute only a small portion of the “mussar lecture” delivered by Moshe Rabbeinu to the Jewish people in this parsha. During his speech, Moshe also described the desert where the Jewish People were staying at that time.

*“Who led you through that great and awesome desert, [in which were] snakes, vipers and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water…” (Devarim 8:15)*

The physical desert represents a barren place, devoid of human existence. From a spiritual standpoint, the desert symbolizes the desolation and lack of G-dly revelation existing during the time of exile – “A land where no man had passed and where no man had dwelt” (Yirmiyahu 2:6) – a place (and time) where “Supernal Man” – Hashem, the G-d of Israel, seemingly neither dwells nor reigns in the world, leaving it like a barren and desolate desert.

The Torah’s description of the desert – representing the time of the exile – comes to teach us about the spiritual causes that allow the ailment of the exile to continue. The Torah wants us to learn about how this spiritual and mental infirmity breeds and develops, so that we, on our initiative, will understand and realize what must be done to heal it.

The ailment begins when a person feels that the “desert” (the mundane existence of the nations of the world and worldly matters) is a “great desert,” far more powerful than he is. “After all,” we can easily reason, “there are far more Gentiles than Jews living in the world, and even among Jews, those observing Torah and mitzvos currently account for only a fraction of the nation!”

“Besides, even I, an observant Jew, spend most of my day involved with eating, drinking, sleeping, and business affairs. Only a small portion of my day is devoted to matters of Torah and Avodas Hashem.”

The feelings of inferiority and helplessness in the face of the majority position starts creeping into his psyche, and the virus begins to breed.

The sickness develops, and the Jew feels that **“the great desert”** has become **“awesome”** – terrifying and threatening… The world controls and determines his actions. The Jew is engulfed by fear of the “world,” which thinks very differently than he should, and his means of measuring everything becomes based on “How will the world react? What will everyone say?”

A weak, helpless, and desperate person becomes a target for “**snakes and vipers**.”

The snake, bearing a “warm” venom, symbolizes the passion of physical desires, when man reveals greater interest and enthusiasm specifically for those matters represented by the “desert” — materialistic desires and urges. This “heat” weakens the warmth, light, and beauty he felt for matters of Torah and mitzvos. He gets so excited by what the world has to offer that the *“saraf”* (the viper) takes him over.

The *“saraf”*(Hebrew for viper) means burned. His material indulgences burn, consume and destroy all emotions he previously had towards Hashem, His Torah, and His mitzvos. He loses all the pleasure he had for mitzvah observance and davening until he becomes… ***a scorpion!***

A *scorpion* has a cold venom. A person becomes cold and utterly apathetic to Hashem. Yiddishkeit doesn’t “speak to him” any longer; it’s not his thing… Even when he continues to observe certain mitzvos, he does it by rote, merely because he had been taught to do so. It’s devoid of any content and meaningfulness for him.

The sickness of the exile reaches its zenith during “**drought, where there was no water**.” The G-dly soul awakens and feels a thirst for something loftier than the empty mundane life it lives, yet it fails to quench this thirst with the waters of Yiddishkeit, Torah study and mitzvah observance.

Sadly, his spiritual arousal brings him to search for spirituality everywhere else besides his “own backyard” — his Jewish heritage.

Now that we know the illness and its cause, we can find the cure. It’s right in the same verse:

***“He who led you through* that great and awesome desert.”**

Even during the exile, in the very depths of it, in the darkest possible situation, G-d is together with every Jew, leading and guiding him to wake up and do teshuva.

***“Who brought water out for you from a solid rock”*** – even in the dry and arid desert, when it appears that there isn’t a drop of moisture. When a Jew’s heart seems as dull as a stone, G-d comes to rouse him from his spiritual slumber and extract living waters from him – the True and Complete Redemption.

The message for us is clear and unequivocal:

To be saved from this contagious affliction, to be healed and to redeem ourselves (and the whole world) from exile, we must treat the cause of this illness. Everything starts with the nonsensical submission and capitulation to the world around us. It’s because we feel helpless over our current situation, that we are!

So, let’s not be like that mentally unstable fellow who started believing his own bluff. Deep down, we are not sick!

The opposite is true:

There has never existed a power with control over a Jew regarding matters of Torah and mitzvos! As the Rebbe Rayatz famously said before departing for his eventually-brief exile to Kostroma on Gimmel Tammuz 5687: “All the peoples of the earth should know that only our bodies were delivered into exile and servitude, not our souls.” We must openly declare that concerning our religion, Torah, mitzvos, and Jewish customs, no one can tell us what to do, and no coercion is allowed.”

To Conclude with a Story

We will conclude with a story the Rebbe related (on 18 Nissan 5743) about his father, “Reb Levik,” whose 75th yartzeit was just marked:

“My father was Rav in a city in the south of Russia, surrounded by wheat fields which supplied the entire country. He was a highly respected Rav, and the grinding of flour for matzos had been under his supervision (with his own *mashgichim*, etc.) for many years.

The government then seized control of all businesses, including the mills for grinding flour for Pesach, the matzah bakeries, etc. Knowing that everyone relied on my father’s supervision, the government realized that without it, they would be unable to sell the flour.

They therefore summoned my father and informed him that this year he would also give his approval to the flour and warned him that he is not allowed to invalidate any flour. Should he do so, they explained, it would be impossible to sell that flour. This would cause the government a financial loss, and he would be treated as one who is “waging war against the government”!

My father answered, “If I have a free hand in supervising the flour — having my own *mashgichim*, etc. — and can guarantee that it is fit according to the Torah, then I can give my approval to the flour again this year. If not, not only will I not give my approval, but I will *publicly declare* all over the land that the flour is not under my supervision!”

The government representatives repeated their demand that he give blanket approval to all of the flour. However, my father remained firm, and again answered that he will not do anything against the Torah.

They continued their threats, but after seeing that they were getting nowhere, they left and related the conversation to their superiors (or the head of state). They were told to cooperate fully with my father, and to follow his directions completely. The result was that the flour was again under my father’s supervision, it was made without compromises or *heterim*, and all the government’s matzah bakeries used this flour!

When a Jew stands firm and declares that he cannot do anything against Hashem’s will, he will ultimately be successful, even against a powerful nation which opposes him. As we see from this story, through my father’s show of strength, the government not only didn’t interfere, but they themselves approved his flour and used it in all of their bakeries!” ■

**Good Shabbos!**

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