

The book of GENESIS described the beginning of Creation, Adam and Eve and their exile from the Garden of Eden and the Presence of God, the following generations, through that of Noah, and from Abraham and Sarah related predominantly the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs. It records His dealings with individuals and a family. Now, in EXODUS, a larger shift takes place and we read about God's dealings with a people, a nation.

The book begins with the description of the slavery of the people of Israel - the family of Jacob has multiplied exceedingly during their exile in Egypt and have grown to be a people. We realize that this, in fact, is the reason they were enslaved. A new Pharaoh, who had not known Joseph and Jacob, pronounced, "Behold, the people of Israel are too numerous and strong for us!" (1:9) He feared their growth and strength and the oppression and subjugation began. The account then proceeds with God's intervention in effecting their salvation from the bitter bondage through His mighty outstretched arm and great miracles.

The one who now steps into the spotlight of this great biblical narrative is Moses; whom God calls to lead His people out of Egypt.

We may pause and ask, "What is the ultimate purpose of the Exodus?" Is it simply to set the slaves free to go their own way and do as they please? No, we are told in

4:22 - Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me."

4: 31 - And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

6:6-8 7 "I wills" completion and perfection!

Say therefore to the people of Israel, "I am the Lord, and **I will bring you out** from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and **I will deliver you from slavery** to them, and **I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. **I will take you to be My people**, and **I will be your God**, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. **I will bring you into the land** that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. **I will give it to you for a possession**. I am the Lord."

The purpose is **Relationship** - between a King-Redeemer and His people and between a Loving Father and His children.

The slaves, who only knew a Ruler as a cruel tyrant, now needed to learn the reality of God as a just, faithful King and, further, as a Father and come to know and to experience His love. In His spacious and generous love they would come to find peace, healing, and rest - and the truth that His children do not need to struggle to earn His love, nor fear to lose it, for nothing can separate us from His love. Our hearts were created for love - to receive it and to give it - to respond to His abundant and unconditional love with hearts filled with love, and worship. Worship is simply loving Him back - as totally and completely as we can! It's from hearts of gratitude and love for Him that all true acts of goodness flow.

I love the verse, 19:3, "...I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself."

He doesn't only set us free from whatever bondage we were in, He wants us to soar like eagles - to reach spiritual heights far above the level of the world and not to stay waddling around on the ground like turkeys! That's one of the reasons that He tells us, "Always remember *Yetziat Mitzraim* - the Exodus from Egypt - that once you were slaves and weighed down in bondage but now you are set free to soar like an eagle!"

Back to the story! So, with God's great miracles, the Israelites are redeemed and the journey through the wilderness begins. It is, in a deeper spiritual sense, a search for Truth and the way back from the universal exile to the Garden and God's Presence. The place of intimate relationship

where one can walk and talk with Him again - and learn, and grow into the fulness of who He created each one to be.

There is such a physical contrast between the wilderness and the Garden of Eden.

READ portion from 'A Taste of Torah' page165.

And yet, the wilderness is the place of Revelation where God chooses to give the revelation of Himself and His Kingdom; and there, too, He presents His gift to them of His Word - His Torah, or the teachings of how to live in His Kingdom.

We saw in Genesis how God met with Adam & Eve, a couple, two individuals, in the Garden; then how He met and spoke with individuals - Cain, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Rebecca, Jacob etc. Now, for the first time, He is coming down to meet with a whole people - the people He has chosen to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." It is another new beginning; stemming from the lowest place a person can sink - a slave with no recognized personal identity and no right to speak and act for oneself. The precious gift of "free will", specifically given by God to human beings, has been removed by man!

Now, the Israelites have been set free but we learn that the transition and transformation from an oppressed and enslaved people to a holy, kingdom of priests serving a loving God is not instantaneous, nor is it smooth - there is a lot of murmuring and complaining! But, with God's help, it is sure and progressive!

Let's take a look at the the two major themes of Exodus: REDEMPTION & REVELATION

REDEMPTION

By His great salvation and redemption of the Israelites out of Egypt, God proved that He was the Master of the world and could do anything. The people of Israel were too weak and helpless to stand up and fight for themselves. To stand against the pride and arrogance of Pharaoh, who, like the great Caesars and dictatorial kings throughout history, exalted himself as a god, God chose Moses, who is described by the Sages as "...the most humble man who ever lived."

It was a battle of wills between Pharaoh and God and God demonstrated His power to save through the supernatural miracles of the plagues and the parting of the Reed Sea. However, in the continuing story of the Exodus God wants to convey to His people that true Redemption is not about what He can do! Miracles don't last! Think, as an example, of the manna in the wilderness... what a miracle, bread falling from the sky to feed you every day. As time went on, it was being taken for granted and some people even complained that it was boring!

God offers Salvation as a free and miraculous gift but, as the Israelites needed to learn, full Redemption is not passive, it requires our participation and effort - our working with God in the context of a personal and intimate relationship with Him. And even if the situation is not resolved immediately, you know you are progressing towards it and, with His help, you can keep going! We can apply this on a personal level, and even a national level, but God's Full and Final Redemption will happen on a universal level. The amazing thing to understand is that our loving relationship with Him and our partnering with God are needed for His plan of Redemption to unfold.

He didn't miraculously transport the people of Israel from Egypt to the Land He had promised them - clear it of His enemies and simply plop or plant them there. No! They had to learn of Him, grow in His ways, get rid of their slave mentality and, in faith and faithfulness, press on towards the goal themselves. That's how full Redemption comes. We do our part with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and then He does His part. Even in Egypt, the Israelites had to act in obedience to God's instructions through Moses. They needed to choose a lamb, slaughter it, dab its blood on their

doorposts, and cook and eat it and be prepared to travel on a specific night. They didn't understand why, or know how God was going to do it - but they acted and then He acted too.

The world is in chaos right now. People are being enslaved by terrorism, worldly excess on one and extreme poverty on the other. And we should be crying and interceding. Crying out in prayer to God for Israel and for His purposes and plan of Redemption to go forward. There is no order and balance and harmony unless God's peace and Presence are there and, *Baruch HaShem* - Bless His Name, we still see evidence of it, especially in His Land, Israel. What joy to know that He loves us and strengthens us to keep caring and growing and building and allowing the light of His Truth - of His Word and *Mashiach*, Messiah, to shine and break through into the world!

REVELATION

What God was giving at Sinai was VISION!

A vision of Himself - not as a hard, unforgiving judge but as a faithful, loving Father.

A vision for themselves - not as slaves, bound, helpless, worthless, but as beloved children, holy partners with God in His Kingdom.

A vision of the Land He promised - that, although now distant and difficult to inhabit, would one day become again the Garden of Eden.

When we receive and understand this vision from God as two-fold - that it is for our personal lives and also is a vision for His wider Kingdom and universal purposes - then this vision becomes our spirit's home and we can grow in every way, spiritually and physically, in peace and joy!

Where there is no vision, the people perish:

but he that keeps God's law, happy is he. (Proverbs 29:18)

Without the greater vision of God our spiritual "homes" can become limiting prisons of negative thoughts and frustrated feelings! We end up, as the Israelites often did - losing faith, not trusting God with gratitude, but simply murmuring and complaining!!

We can ask tough questions like: "Why is it so hard?" "Why am I not there yet?" "Why don't I understand God's ways?"

We can find an answer at Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush!

The first thing God says is: FIRST remove your sandals (*na'alaim*) from your feet (*reglaiim*).

The Hebrew words can also be read: First remove the *na'alim* (locks) from your *regalim* (habits).

Unlock yourself from the negative habits that chain you down and limit you! Then you can walk in My ways and worship me more fully.

Our Abba Father says: "You were created to be beautiful, in a beautiful setting, enjoying great beauty!" But, because this is a broken world that needs *tikkun* - repair, we are not seeing the fullness of that yet. Thankfully, by the grace of God, we do get tastes and glimpses of that beauty, but we need to keep that vision alive in our souls and know that it will come to pass at its appointed time - Messiah will return to Jerusalem as *Mashiach ben David* to establish and rule as King over His Father's Kingdom.

We need to have the vision and anticipation of the World to Come - *Olam HaBa* - and to keep the eternal perspective, however, to quote Oswald Chambers, in *My Utmost for His Highest*:

"We look for visions and ...the thunder of God's power, and all the time He is in the commonplace things and people around us!"

That's our hands on job on this earth, to participate in *tikkun olam* - healing of the world, in every little thing that He puts into our hands to do. The whole world is in exile from the Garden of God and our constant aim and effort must be working with Him towards the Full and Final Redemption and the way to do that is in the everyday little things done in love for His glory!