

order to buy them back. Our Rabbi waited until everyone left. When they discussed their value, our Rabbi removed the coins from his coat pocket. He had kept them there the entire time on account of their importance.

Before a Pidyon Ha-Ben, a student once came to our Rabbi, and he told him that Maran Ha-Rav Kook would use the coins of Ha-Rav Aryeh Levin, the Tzadik of Jerusalem. Our Rabbi was particular not to return the coins immediately in order to emphasize that we are dealing with an actual payment to the Cohain and not a temporary one which is automatically returns.

A student once came to pay the true value of the redemption to our Rabbi. Our Rabbi did not agree, and specified a much smaller amount. Even though the student replied that he had clarified what the correct amount should be, our Rabbi stood firm, stating that in the past a smaller amount was paid to him.

Rav Aviner on...

To Execute Vengeance Upon the Nations

Question: Considering recent incidents and in light of what we learn about the Exodus (that the nations of the world, including Pharaoh and Egypt, Arafat and the Palestinians, are emissaries for making G-d's existence clear to all, and for internalizing the idea of G-dliness on earth in general, and among Israel in particular), then seemingly we have no reason to get angry at their deeds or to demand that the blood of our slain brothers be avenged. It would seem that we should focus instead on ourselves, for, as we said, they are just emissaries. So what purpose would there be in revenge? And what then would be the meaning of a "G-d of vengeance" (Tehillim 94:1)?

Answer: The foundation of the whole Torah is the principle that man has free will (see Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah, Chapter 5). If G-d decreed that certain people would be wicked and then punished them for being so that would be unjust.

Pharaoh's doing evil to us was of his own free will. "G-d did not decree upon Pharaoh to do evil to Israel." Quite the contrary, "He sent Moshe to him with a message, saying, 'Let My people go! Repent!'" (Ibid., 6:3). But Pharaoh did not repent, so he was later punished with the removal of his free will.

Rambam further asks: "Does it not say in advance, 'They will enslave them and oppress them' (Bereshit 15:13)? Surely G-d decreed upon the Egyptians to do evil!" Yet Rambam answers, "Every single one of those who caused trouble and misfortune to the Israelites had the option, if he so chose, not to do them harm. G-d did not decree upon a specific person. He only made known to Avraham that his seed was destined to be enslaved in a land not theirs" (Hilchot Teshuvah 6:5). Therefore, the Egyptians were ultimately punished harshly, and some time afterwards, the kingdom of Egypt was entirely

annihilated by Babylonia. Babylonia, in turn, fell before Persia and Media, and later Persia and Media's turn arrived, as in the parable of "Chad Gadya." The time of each wicked kingdom to disappear arrives when its measure is full.

It is the same with the Arabs who live around us and in our midst. Each of them has free choice regarding whether to be a total evildoer, an evildoer by half, by a third, or by a quarter, or to be one of the righteous gentiles. Each of them will have to give an accounting in the celestial tribunal, and will be held accountable here on earth as well.

It is true that the Master of the Universe is also the Master of history, yet we must distinguish between the Prime Cause and intermediaries. G-d was surely the ultimate, prime cause of our suffering in Egypt, but the Egyptians were intermediaries by their own choice, and they were punished for this. Pharaoh's daughter Bitya chose to save Moses, and she received her reward. Had she not saved him, G-d certainly would have produced someone else who would. Yet it was she who fulfilled the Mitzvah, and she was rewarded. As Mordechai said to Esther, "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance shall arise to the Jews from elsewhere, but you and your father's house shall perish" (Esther 4:14). This is because G-d orchestrates good things to happen through good people and bad things to happen through bad people. Everyone decides by means of his free will whether to be G-d's messenger to increase goodness and blessing in the world, or to be an instrument of destruction and ruin. Our Sages recount: "When Turnianus was about to kill Pappos and his brother Lulianus at Lodkia, Turnianus said to them, 'If you are from the people of Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah, let your G-d come and save you from me the way He saved them!' They responded, 'Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah were reputable, and Nebuchadnezzar was a fair king, and worthy of having a miracle done through him. But you are an evil king and unworthy of having a miracle done through you. We have incurred a death sentence from Heaven, and if you do not kill us, G-d has many other agents of murder, many other agents of harm, many bears, many leopards, many snakes, many serpents, many scorpions who can come and strike us.'" (Semachot, Chapter 8).

Therefore, when the enemies of Israel rise up to annihilate us, we have to destroy them totally so that others will see and be frightened, and sin no more. G-d truly is a "Man of war" (Shemot 15:3), and "a G-d of vengeance," and we are commanded to follow in His path and to take revenge against the wicked. During the course of the exile we were powerless. Now, thanks to G-d's kindness, we have a strong army, and it takes revenge on our behalf against those who seek to annihilate us. This revenge is not a way of venting our aggression. We, after all, are a people of refinement and kindness. It does, however, serve to deter and frighten the evildoers of the earth. It is precisely in this manner that the Torah commanded us to strike back hard at our enemies.

G-d forbid, one must not raise complaints and accusations against the Jewish people.

Quite the contrary, we must come to their defense. In the meantime, we have not yet reached a time when "they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into

pruning hooks” (Yeshayahu 2:4). There are still wars on earth. Our precious Jewish People sacrifice themselves for the Land, both in the army and by taking part in settlement. We have to remember this great merit of theirs. May it ascend heavenward before the Throne of Glory and bring us blessing.

The following is from the book “Pele Yo’etz”: “In a time of forced apostasy, a woman emerged and said, ‘Master of the Universe! You know full well the nation that You chose. Who is like Your people Israel, who are killed for the sanctification of Your Name.’ When the decree regarding apostasy was later nullified, a preacher revealed that this was due to what the woman had said.”

In the same way, Gideon was chosen to save Israel because he defended them. G-d said to him, “Go with this strength of yours, and save Israel” (Shoftim 6:14; Rashi). Gideon was not a righteous man, let alone the righteous son of a righteous father. Yet because he spoke well of Israel, G-d said, to him, “Go with this strength of yours -- your having spoken well of Israel -- and save Israel” (Zohar, Part 1, 254b. Zohar Chadash 58:22).

Ours is a remarkable, holy, exemplary generation, a generation that sacrifices its life for the sake of the people and the Land, a generation that G-d loves and for whom G-d performs miracles.

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