

As we read *Parshat Bo* this week, we learn about the last three plagues and the end of slavery in Egypt.

We have been instructed, from generation to generation, to retell the story, “*ve-higadeta levinkha* – and you should tell your child.” This is the basis of our Passover celebration, when year after year after year, we read and re-read the *Haggadah* in order to tell and to turn the story into a live story.

Through this narrative and this celebration, we highlight God’s role as the Redeemer. We are grateful for God’s intervention in history by prompting our redemption from slavery.

Another, more poetic and more intimate option, is to see the beginning of our relationship with God taking place before the exodus from Egypt, while we were still slaves. This will then bring the origin of our covenantal relationship between us (Israel) and God, or as Rabbi Aviva Richman puts it, ‘the story of how we fell in love,’ to an earlier stage.

This means that the relationship between God and Israel did not start with the Song of the Sea (next week’s Torah portion), but rather while Israel was still enslaved. There is *midrashic* text (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 2:1) which will support this possibility: “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. I am she, and beloved I am; I am she who was beloved in the shadow of Egypt...”

Therefore, based on this *midrashic* material, the genesis of this God/Israel love relationship is found while Israel is still in Egypt, overwhelmed with uncertainties, praying for freedom, still in slavery, hopeful nonetheless.

In a somehow magical way, the *midrash* doesn’t focus on the depth of suffering any longer, but focuses on the depth of our redemptive relationship with God.

Said Rabbi Aha: The Assembly of Israel said, “At the time your eyes gaze deeply at me, I bloomed with good deeds like a lily and said the song.” This is why it is written “A song of ascents from the depths I call you God – *Shir lama’alot. Mima’amakim k’ratikha Adonai.*” (Psalms 130:1)

In a fascinating way, the traditional interpretation of the Psalm is turned upside down. Usually, *amakim* is interpreted as a place of deep suffering. The *midrash* turns this upside down and interprets it as “at the time your eyes gaze deeply at me.” Out of Your profound love, God, I bloomed!

We have a captivatingly attractive and powerful lesson here!

We know how easily we can fall in love when things go well; when we are young and strong and healthy. What happens when we run into the natural obstacles that life will inevitably set before us?

The challenge is to maintain the intensity and the quality of that love when things do not go as planned.

Our relationship with God is a good paradigm. According to the *midrash*, the uniqueness of the loving relationship between God and Israel is that even while enslaved, the Israelites were touched by God's love. Israel was inspired by God's love even in the midst of suffering, and that was sufficient for Israel to be redeemed. This becomes a very powerful message at times like ours. We don't need to go to Egypt to experience the harshness of the plagues. At this time, we are living through our own plague: the pandemic. In the midst of this pandemic, we might feel lonely, isolated, reaching our limits.

Still, the relationships that we have built, and are constantly building, the love we feel, the support we receive from others, is what inspires us to maintain our optimism and to know that we shall prevail. The love that we give and the love that we receive, with God's help, will become the source of our strength.

Shabbat Shalom!

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