

The Unfortunate Lamb: a Historical Perspective on *Chad Gadya*

The following d'var torah is based on a shiur given by my rebbe, Rabbi Ezra Wiener.

The פסח של פסח, an organized work which leads us through the תורה as we recount the story of יציאת מצרים, ends on a very unusual note- with the seemingly whimsical story of a chain of events that started with a father buying his son a goat. However, if we take a closer look at this poetic work, a pattern forms- one which corresponds with many parts of both ancient and modern Jewish history, reminding us of some scarier parts of our past as well as giving us *chizuk* for the future. Let us examine each line of the liturgical story and see what it could mean:

**חַד גְּדִיָּא, חַד גְּדִיָּא דְּזָבִין אַבָּא בְּתַרֵּי זֻזִי
*One little goat, one little goat; which father bought for
2 zuzim***

The first question that hits us is one of repetition- why is חַד גְּדִיָּא repeated twice? Could there have been two goat? No, we know that sometimes words are repeated in Judaism to emphasize a point, so what is trying to be emphasized with the goat? Something bad- "woe to the goat." This is a prelude to a song which as we'll see tells the unfortunate story of a poor goat stuck in an endless cycle of pain.

Moving on, זָבִין can either mean to buy (עורך השלחון) and אַבָּא means someone of stature. In פרשת מקץ, when יוסף is appointed viceroy over Egypt, the תורה says: "ויקראו לפניו אברך," which אנקלוס interprets as אַבָּא דְּמַלְכָא, a person of stature to the king. So, this first line could read: "important people sold Abba (Yosef) for a profit of 2 zuzim (for each brother). How could they get away with it? The answer is in the next line:

**וְאַתָּא שׁוֹנְרָא, וְאַכְלָהּ לְגְדִיָּא
*And the cat came and ate the goat***

The גמרא (ברכות פרק ט') says; A person who sees a cat in a dream (שׁוֹנְרָא) could mean: 1) שִׁירָה נָא - good song, or 2) שִׁינוּי רַע - bad sign. We see that with the sale of Yosef, יעקב's family went from שִׁירָה נָא to שִׁינוּי רַע, being affected by the famine and needing to go down to Egypt. The brothers were the שׁוֹנְרָא who came to eat the goat and made the שִׁירָה נָא into שִׁינוּי רַע.

But, the brothers are due for their just desserts:

**וְנִשְׁךְ לְשׁוֹנְרָא... וְאַתָּא חוּטְרָא, וְהִכָּה לְכַלְבָּא
*And then came a dog who bit the cat...
then a stick that beat the dog***

The מדרש רבה on שמות learns from G-d telling אהרון to take his מטה that Hashem only punishes the wicked with a staff- Why? Because רשעים are like dogs. The same way that dogs are punished with a stick, so to the Egyptians were punished by G-d.

When the brothers come down to Egypt, they initially stay separate in their cities. But, unfortunately, their descendants began to integrate into Egyptian culture much as the cat is swallowed by the dog. Then, after a lengthy enslavement, G-d, through Moshe, strikes the Egyptians with plagues, as the stick hits dog, and the Jewish People are released and saved from the כלב. Then, the sad history of the Jewish People takes a more tragic turn:

וְאֶתָּא נֹרָא, וְשָׂרְף לְחוּטָרָא - *Then the fire came and burned the stick*

After its miraculous release from Egypt and entry into ארץ ישראל, the Jewish Nation, unfortunately, forgets G-d, as seen in the pattern of ספר שופטים where the Jewish People do עבודה זרה, get into trouble, do תשובה, are saved, then forget G-d and the cycle repeats. The גמרא (יומא ס"ט) teaches that the יצר הרע for עבודה זרה used to be so great that the Jewish People could not resist it, so the חכמים begged to have that תאוה destroyed. After 3 days of fasting, G-d relented and the יצר הרע for עבודה זרה left the קדש קדשים in the form of a lion on fire, and the people killed it. The nature of the יצר הרע is to burn a person in his desire until he gives in and does wrong. fallings בני ישראל with עבודה זרה are therefore symbolized in our song as a fire burning the stick (משה רבינו) which freed them from the dog.

וְאֶתָּא מֵיָא, וְכָבֵה לְנוֹרָא... וְאֶתָּא תּוֹרָא, וְשָׁתָה לְמֵיָא - *Then the water came and extinguished the fire... and the ox came and drank the water*

A person cannot live a single day without drinking water. חז"ל teach us that so too, a person cannot live a single day without learning תורה, and תורה is likened in many places to water. When we were given the תורה, it filled the void which had been filled by our ancestors' sins and עבודה זרה. But, unfortunately, there were times when the Jewish People were not willing to learn Torah and only a minority of people would consistently learn. The מדרש בראשית writes that in the time of the miracle of חנוכה, Antiochus said that the Jews should write on parchment חלקי ישראל באלקי ישראל. This parchment as made from ox, something which Hellenism worshipped as a type of עבודה זרה. In this light, we see that the line reads: the water (תורה) came and extinguished the fire (of עבודה זרה), then the ox (Greeks and Hellenism) came

and drank (got rid) of the water (תורה). But, like all of the Jews' enemies, this triumph is only temporary, and:

וְשַׁחַט לְתוֹרָא וְאַתָּא הַשּׁוֹחֵט, *then the slaughterer came and killed the ox*

The Greeks, killed through their own violent methods by the Romans, met their fate, and this continued to happen to all the subsequent enemies of the Jewish People, whether Babylonian, Roman, Spanish, or German. Getting back to more ancient history, after being exiled to Babylon, the Jews return and build the בית שני, but this is only temporary as:

וְשַׁחַט לְשׁוֹחֵט וְאַתָּא מְלַאךְ הַמּוֹת, *and then the Angel of Death came and killed the slaughterer*

Due to their own sins, the Jewish People are sent into another, much longer exile, represented by the Angel of Death. This is the point in the story of חַד גְּדִיָּא that we are currently at. As of yet, it is a very sad song, one of a chain of tragedies that started with one unfortunate goat being sold. However, despite the somber nature of this final part of the הגדה, there is a happy ending:

וְאַתָּא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְשַׁחַט לְמְלַאךְ הַמּוֹת *and then the Holy One Blessed be He came and killed the Angel of Death*

Eventually in the times of משיח, we will be saved from our גלות by G-d Himself and His anointed one. This final גאולה, one that we should be zoche to see very soon, will be the end of the tragic story of the Jewish People, being pushed from place to place, as we finally return, this time for good, to the place that Yosef was originally sold at the beginning of our story. This ending, which also concludes the הגדה של פסח, demonstrates the open-ended nature of סיפור יציאת מצרים - that the story we will be telling on פסח night is not over yet. With Hashem's help, we will see a happy ending to חַד גְּדִיָּא and the story of יציאת מצרים with the coming of our final גאולה, the happy ending to a tragic song, very speedily.

A חג כשר ושמח to everyone.