

Parashah Fifty-Five

Exodus 13:1-20; Isaiah 46:3-13; Colossians 1:15-23

notes by Tim Hegg

Remembering our Redemption

In the final Pesach our Messiah celebrated upon the earth, He added to the established order of the meal a section which had, for thousands of years previously, not been uttered. By stating that the matzah represented His flesh, and that the third cup (cup of redemption) His blood, He forever interpreted the story of redemption set in the historical exodus of Israel from Egypt as ultimately speaking of His work of redemption, i.e., His own death and resurrection by which He would redeem all who would come to the Father by Him. In a ceremony entirely slated to be a זִכְרוֹן, *zikaron*, a memory or memorial, Yeshua commanded His talmidim to remember His work of redemption each time they celebrated the Lord's festival of Pesach.

Why are we so prone to forgetfulness? Is it really possible that Israel could have forgotten this most momentous event in her history? Is it possible that, apart from the commandment to celebrate this remembrance, we would have forgotten all together our coming out of Egypt? In one sense, I would suggest the answer is “no,” while in another, a resounding “yes!” I don't think we would have forgotten the event, in fact, we would have (and in some senses we actually may have) made the ceremony of Pesach with all of the trimmings of the seder and Haggadah an end in itself. We would have remembered the event and forgotten its true importance. We would have considered ourselves righteous for remembering our sacred history while at the same time heaping pride upon ourselves in that very act of remembering. Indeed, we would have, in the end, forgotten why we remember.

As an aside, we may consider the Christian Church's institution of “communion” derived from the Pesach seder, and the admonition to “remember.” Here again, in our own sacred history as part of the Christian church, we find a “remembering” that has all but become a “forgetting.” In making the Table a separate institution apart from the yearly celebration of Pesach, it became exactly opposite of what Pesach was to be. It became an end itself, and for a majority of the church, a means of saving oneself, when it should have been a remembrance that redemption is something entirely of God's grace afforded entirely by the substitutionary death of the innocent Lamb.

So significant and central is the remembering of the Pesach that it becomes connected with the donning of Tefillin. “It shall be a sign (אוֹת) for you upon your arm, and a reminder between your eyes” (vv. 9, 16). In the בְּתֵימִים (boxes) of the tefillin are contained not only the two passages from the Shema (Deut 6:4ff; 11:13ff) that speak of “binding them upon the hand ...” but also these two passages from our *parashah*. In the passages of the Shema, it is the mitzvot which are to be bound upon the arm and the forehead: “Bind them (i.e., the commandments) as a sign upon your arm and let them be ornaments (טוֹטְפוֹת, *totaphot*) between your eyes.” Thus, in the tefillin are contained two sets of texts: those which require the binding of the commandments upon arm and head, and those which require binding the remembrance of Pesach upon both. Is not the significance clear? Keeping the commandments and redemption go hand in hand. And this leads me to the main point: the keeping of the commandments, yea, the celebration of the festivals, is to be a means of knowing and loving God, not an end in itself. The “remembering” is not merely a recollection of the event itself, or a comprehension of the detailed mitzvot connected with the ceremony, as im-

portant as these are. No—the remembering is an understanding and appreciation of our God Who accomplished our redemption in the first place.

John Piper, a well known author and speaker in our times, has championed a most profound statement in many of his teachings: “God is most pleased with us when we are most satisfied with Him!” While listening to a sermon of his recently, I was reminded that our single duty in life is to know God better than we know anything, and to enjoy God more than we enjoy anything. Here is the essence of “remembering”—that we should be taken above (not away from) all of the secondary though vitally important things to the supremely important aspect of knowing and loving God. Here is the destination of our journey, the reward of our efforts, the goal of our being His creation.

Now this does not mean that the multitude of things and relationships in this life are unimportant or somehow to be avoided, like the monastic philosophies of the middle ages which attempted to rid oneself of all things and to live “outside” of this world. No, this is clearly wrong-headed. But it is to understand that all of these things which are good and which God created for our use and pleasure are nonetheless given to us as a means to know God and to embrace Him with the full energy of our heart.

How this changes the perspective of life! Everything in it becomes a divinely ordained means for knowing the Creator and having my every longing and expectation filled by His presence. With such a perspective my “ministry,” my “service,” becomes a means, not an end. It allows me to hold my ministry with a loose grip knowing that it is but a means to a much more noble end. “How,” I might ask, “How can Paul, at the end of his life and facing execution, be able to say in calmness of spirit “according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Messiah shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Messiah, and to die is gain.” How does he gain this most lofty perspective? Because he had come to know God in a full and accurate way through the revelation of the Tanach, and he had come to such a maturity so as to rejoice in HaShem more than he rejoiced in anything else.

So clear is the message of Pesach. For every generation following the one which first came out of Egypt, the first born of every womb, whether of animal or man, was to be consecrated to the Lord. Why? Because it was to be a constant reminder that redemption cost HaShem His firstborn. Let us never forget that, with all of the multiple words of the Sages as to why the firstborn was to be consecrated to HaShem, there is one overarching reality, that is, that this slaughter of the firstborn, and the obvious substitution of the Pesach lamb for the firstborn of the Israelites, is a clear and precise foreshadowing of the Messiah who would die to obtain the redemption of His people. While the firstborn son of an Israelite family was spared by the substitution of the lamb, the Son of God was not spared, but bore our sins in His own body upon the execution stake. But even here we must see the whole picture: Yeshua’s death is not the end in itself. It is the means by which we may know God and rejoice in Him. Even the supreme work of Yeshua in His death and resurrection is a means to an end, not an end in itself. He died so that we might know God better than we know anything else. He died so that we might rejoice in God more than we rejoice in anything else. And therefore, when we make even the celebration of Yeshua’s death and resurrection an end in itself, we deny the very purpose for which He underwent such cruel and hideous punishment! What is more, when we make our doing—our ministry—our keeping of the mitzvot, an end in itself; when we rejoice in these things more than we rejoice in God Himself, then we have made all of these

things primary and God Himself secondary, and we have entered into the most subtle form of idolatry. The first verse of Alfred B. Smith's hymn, "My Goal is God Himself," goes like this:

My goal is God Himself
Not joy, reward, or even blessing
But Himself, my God
'Tis His to bring me there,
Not mine, but His.
By any path dear Lord,
By any road.

This is remembering—when all of the events of life, all of the keeping of the *mitzvot*, every Shabbat and Festival, every donning of the tallit, or laying of the tefillin, every b'rachah—when all of these things bring me to the ultimate goal of knowing God and rejoicing in Him more than I know or rejoice in anything else—here then is true shalom, where nothing can separate me from His love, demonstrated in Yeshua; where therefore I remain with Him and He with me and nothing can take me away from this realm of joy, for He is all my joy; where nothing can take me from the realm of truth, for He is all truth, and I know Him as He truly is. Here is stability and strength; here is preparation for an eternity where the Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's Land.

We must ever have this in mind as we live out the days God has given each one of us. Our goal must constantly be to know Him, not primarily through the words and experience of others, but through the inspired words of Scripture as the Ruach enlivens them to our own soul, and through our own, personal walk with God through the experiences of our daily routines. As Paul confessed:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Messiah. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil 3:7–11)