



Home Sweet Home

CORONA LESSONS AT THE TIME OF MATAN TORAH

Nothing that happens in this world is random. The sudden onset of the deadly Corona-virus reached the shores of Israel on Purim, the holiday that commemorates the miraculous rescue of the Jewish people from total annihilation. At the time, Haman proclaimed the Jews were *עם אֶחָד מְפֹזָר וּמְפֹרָד*, a people scattered abroad and dispersed among the nations.

A few short weeks later, on Pesach, we commemorate our physical redemption by G-d's Mighty Hand, freeing us from hundreds of years of Egyptian slavery, and we begin a seven-week period of spiritual preparation to receive His ultimate gift, the Torah.

Observing the *mitzvah* of *Sefira*, counting the *Omer*, we count 49 days, each day specifying how many days and weeks have elapsed. But do we consider the content of the days that have passed? What have we done with the time? Have we made the time count? Have we stopped and asked ourselves what is the purpose of this isolation (*bidud* in Hebrew)? What seems to be the purpose of this global lockdown caused by a tiny virus invisible to the naked eye?

It is no coincidence that the gematria of *bidud* (בידוד) is 26, the numerical equivalent of the Name of the Almighty, Y-K-V-K. It would seem that to reestablish our eternal bond with G-d, we needed a total and complete disconnect from our "normal routines" with all the distractions

and mundane and fleeting worldly pleasures. This is an opportunity to regenerate and reactivate our commitment and fervor to elevate our physical world and make it a place worthy of housing G-d's presence and glory.

We have put people on the moon, genetically reengineered DNA, created technologies that transcend time and space, and have assumed that not only is the sky no longer the limit but that mankind can achieve anything it puts its mind to. We have all but forgotten the existence of the Creator of the World! Man has come to feel, *כְּחַי וְעָצָם יְדֵי עֲשָׂה לִי אֶת הַחֵיִל הַזֶּה* "Through my power and endeavor all that I have was created." The prescription of the Talmud to avoid this dismal scenario is *עֲשֵׂה תוֹרָתְךָ קִבְעֵה וּמְלַאכְתְּךָ עֲרִאֵי* – "Make Torah study your primary occupation and earning a living, secondary."

The primary obligation of Jewish parents is *וְשִׁנְנָתָם לְבָנֵיהֶם*, teach your children, ensuring the preservation and continuity of Jewish education throughout the generations. Over time, the necessity to earn a living turned into a quest for wealth, self-esteem, recognition and power. An occupation intended to be merely a means to an end, a way to finance life's necessities in order to live a Torah-centered life, became an end unto itself with career becoming the top priority and defining attribute.

For centuries, women have encouraged their husbands to maintain a

proper balance between work and Torah learning, but today many women feel they aren't valued if they don't have a high profile career outside the home. Clearly, there are circumstances that compel both husband and wife to earn a living, but the focus should be: are we earning a living to serve G-d or to serve inflated wants and desires? Women should never forget they are the *עֹקֶרֶת הַבַּיִת*, the pivotal person in the home. It is in their power to foster the Torah way of life by transforming the mundane into the holy, thereby creating a *בַּיִת מְקֻדָּשׁ מְעֻט*, a place of spiritual importance within the walls of the home.

In this period of Corona, when we are home-bound against our will, there is time to reflect on and internalize our core values. As we choose to re-accept the Torah on this extraordinary Shavuot, we should be mindful of the powerful message embedded in the first word of the Torah, *בְּרֵאשִׁית*, (*Bereishit*) which contains the words *רֵאשׁ בַּיִת* (*Rosh Bayit*), meaning the home comes first. Bringing our soul's deepest priorities into practice is how we should fill our days and weeks. Perhaps this is the lesson of Corona as we celebrate Shavuot and *Matan Torah*.

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