

Rabbi's Article

"But Why, G-d?!"

It has been close to 2,000 years that our Holy Temple has been set ablaze, in the year 70, and that we were taken into exile. When we take into consideration of how much persecution we have endured in this exile, from the Spanish Inquisition to the Shoah, and everything in between, then add on what we have been enduring post Shoah, in the Land of Israel and throughout the Diaspora, the question begs to be asked, "But why, G-d?!" The sages tell us of an interesting conversation that G-d had with Isaac, our Forefather, precisely about what should be done when Isaac's offspring (you and I) will sin bringing about the destruction of the Holy Temple (-Shabbat 89b):

"He (G-d) said to Isaac, 'Your children have sinned against Me.' (Isaac) said before Him, 'Master of the Universe, (are they) my children and not Your children? At (Sinai), when they accorded precedence to 'We will do' over 'We will listen' before You, (didn't You) call them (-Exodus 4:22), 'My son, My firstborn son Israel? Now (that they have sinned, are they) my children and not Your children?'"

"And furthermore, how much did they sin? How long is a person's life? Seventy years. Subtract (the first) twenty years (of his life). (One) is not punished for (sins committed then, as in heavenly matters, a person is only punished from age twenty). Fifty (years) remain for them (-Psalms 90:10, "The days of our years because of them are seventy years"). Subtract twenty-five (years) of nights, (and) twenty-five (years) remain for them. Subtract twelve and a half (years during which) one prays and eats and (uses) the bathroom, (and) twelve and a half (years) remain for them. If You can endure them all (and forgive the sins committed during those years), excellent. And if not, half (of the sins are) upon me (to bear) and half upon You. And if You say (that) all of them (the sins of all twelve and a half years that remain, are) upon me, I sacrificed my soul before You (when bound upon the altar by his father Abraham, and You should forgive them due to my merit). (The Jewish people) began to say (to Isaac), 'You are our father.' (Only Isaac defended the Jewish people as a father would and displayed compassion toward his children.) Isaac said to them: Before you praise me, praise the Holy One, Blessed be He. And Isaac points to the Holy One, Blessed be He, before their eyes. Immediately they lifted their eyes to the heavens and say (-Isaiah 63:16), 'You, L-rd, are our Father, our Redeemer, everlasting is Your name.'"

How then can 2,000 years of exile and persecution be because of the sins committed only from after the 70 years of exile (in between the first and second Holy Temples) for the sins in the times of the first Holy Temple?! Thus, while we say in our holiday prayers, "Because of sins were we exiled from our land, and were driven far away from our soil," however, the 2,000 years must have some other purpose as well, for truly, our sins do not justify such retribution!

Let us look at the first exile Israel experienced, which is the *mother* to all subsequential exiles. G-d told Abraham (-Genesis 15:13-16), "You shall surely know that your seed will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and oppress them, for four hundred years..." G-d says nothing of this exile being, "Because of our sins." Rather, the only insight G-d is offering to Abraham for this exile and slavery is, "and afterwards they will go forth with great possessions." But why does Israel need to go through 'Four hundred years of oppression,' in order to receive, "Great possessions"?! For this our sages give two explanations:

- In order for the egocentric human being to be able to receive G-d's Torah, and to become a conduit for G-d's Will and Wisdom, the human must shatter the very core DNA with which he was created, programmed to eat, don't be eaten, and procreate, and instead, to become selfless and transparent to G-d (-Ethics 2:4), "Make that His will should be your will... Nullify your will before His will." Hence, the verse (-Deuteronomy 4:20) refers to our slavery in Egypt as, "But the L-rd took you and brought you out of the iron crucible, out of Egypt," being in a Smelting Pot, in which gold is refined from foreign objects and impurities, in order, "to be a people of His possession, as of this day."
- The sages teach (-Brochos 9b), "(-Exodus 11:2), 'And they emptied Egypt,' Rabbi Ami said, 'This indicates that they made Egypt like a trap in which there is no grain.' Reish Lakish said, 'They made (Egypt) like an abyss in the sea without fish.'" Meaning, that Kabbala teaches us that there was a shattering of the Seven Lower Emanations, of the World of Tohu, from which 248 Sparks fell into our world, and manifested themselves within its physicality. When a Jew serves G-d in using his strength received from the food he ate to study Torah, and uses his body, Animalistic Soul, and worldly possessions to observe mitzvot, he is elevating the G-dly Sparks hidden within our world. The Jews within the 400 years of servitude to Egypt, while maintaining their Jewish identity, and the Levites maintaining the teachings of the Torah, left Egypt with no 'Grain,' not, 'Fish,' for they elevated 202 of the 248 Fallen Sparks.

So too, in our present exile, (a) we are being refined to receive the unprecedented dimensions of Torah that will be taught to us by Moshiach, and (b) we must refine and elevate the remaining 86 Fallen Sparks. Thus, our sages teach us (-Pesachim 87b), "And Rabbi Elazar said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, exiled Israel among the nations only so that converts would join them, as it is stated (-Hosea 2:25), "And I will sow her to Me in the land.' A person does not sow a se'a (measurement; -Link) (of grain) but for to bring in several kor (measurement; -Link). (So too, the exile is to enable converts from the nations to join the Jewish people.)" --Rabbi Isaac Luria, the Arizal (-Link), explains that this refers to both, human converts, and the conversion of the Fallen Sparks. However, the question begs to be asked, if in 400 years of exile we were able to achieve the refinement we needed to receive from G-d, the entire Torah, and the elevation of 202 Sparks, why is it taking 2,000 years to refine ourselves for dimensions of the Torah, to be taught by Moshiach, and the elevation of 86 Sparks?! The answer is that in Egypt we were being asked to take ourselves and the Sparks "out of exile," while now, we are being asked not just to leave our 'inner-exile', but to bring G-d into Exile, thus, transforming exile itself into redemption¹: Golah [גולה] into Geulah [גאולה]. **The important message here is that we are not being punished by a never-ending vengeful G-d, G-d forbid, but rather, we are being trusted by a loving G-d to run His business for Him in this world!**

1. Hence, the double language of our haftarah (-Link; Isaiah 40:1), "Console (they will leave exile), Console (they will transform exile) My people!"
 2. The letter aleph which when brought into golah turns it into geulah, refers to G-d, the Champion of the World - גאולתו של עולם.